

# The Problem of Anti-Slavery in the Age of Capital, c. 1830-1888

Joseph G. Kelly

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School of Histories, Languages, and Cultures, University of Liverpool

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## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abbreviations.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction: The Problem of Anti-Slavery in the Age of Capital.....	5
Chapter I: Slavery's Products and The Problem of Anti-Slavery.....	41
Chapter II: Manufacturing Outrage: Mobility, Morality and Anti-Slavery.....	80
Chapter III: Ambivalent Commerce: Merchants, Character, and Anti-Slavery.....	120
Chapter IV: 'Drawing the Line': Legitimising British Slave-ownership after Emancipation.....	160
Chapter V: Slavery and Joint-Stock Politics.....	215
Conclusion.....	266
Bibliography.....	281

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## Abbreviations

### Archives

BLUT	Benson Latin American Studies Library, University of Texas, Austin.
LCL	Liverpool Central Library.
SCRO	Staffordshire Country Record Office, Stafford.
TBA	The Baring Archive, London.
TNA	The National Archives, London.
WLO	Weston Library, Oxford.

### Organisations

BFASS	British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.
IBMA	Imperial Brazilian Mining Association.
MCA	Manchester Commercial Association.
SJDR	St. John d'El Rey Mining Company.

### Publications/Resources

<i>ASR</i>	<i>Anti-Slavery Reporter.</i>
LBS	Legacies of British Slave-Ownership database.
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Parliamentary Papers.</i>
WCA	Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index.

## Abstract

The Problem of Anti-Slavery in the Age of Capital, c. 1830-1888

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This thesis explores the relationship between Britain and transatlantic slavery in the post-emancipation period. Following West Indian emancipation various types of British capitalists continued to profit from both the slave trade and slave-ownership. These economic connections had to be rationalised within a Britain politically and ideologically committed to anti-slavery. I propose that the British government, abolitionists, and capitalists were faced with the problem of anti-slavery, namely the question of whether it was possible to operate morally in an Atlantic economy built upon chattel slavery. I explore a number of controversies relating to both British slave-ownership and involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. I argue that these debates must be considered as part of a longer tradition of slavery apologetics that stretched back to the struggles over slave trade abolition and West Indian emancipation. In doing so I complicate our understanding of Britain as anti-slavery nation.

Debates over British involvement of in transatlantic slavery blended economic and moral arguments. As such my thesis stresses the historically contingent nature of appeals to economic rationality, a key strategy of British capitalists justifying profiting from slavery. By examining business records, private correspondence, and government papers I establish the material basis of British involvement with transatlantic slavery. I also analyse debates that took place in newspapers, journals, and parliament to explore the arguments advanced about Britain, commerce, and slavery. I demonstrate how British capitalists justified profiting from transatlantic slavery through a construction of Britons as more civilized than foreign slave owners, slave traders, and enslaved people. That this imagined geography provided a solution the problem of anti-slavery speaks to the heterogeneous nature of anti-slavery ideology in Victorian Britain.

## Introduction: The Problem of Anti-Slavery in the Age of Capital

In June of 1840 abolitionists from around the globe crowded into London's Freemason's Hall to attend the first General Anti-Slavery Convention. This was a grand occasion with even grander aims. In the opening address Thomas Clarkson, the 81-year-old veteran of British abolitionism, laid down the gauntlet to his audience: 'My dear friends you have a most difficult task to perform; it is neither more or less the extirpation of slavery from the *whole world*.'<sup>1</sup> Implicit in this call to arms were two assertions; that slavery had, mostly, been overcome in the British Empire and that this success should be exported to the wider world. British abolitionists having seen the Anglo-American transatlantic slave trade abolished and West Indian slaves emancipated looked out on a world still dominated by slavery. Yet, some like the Irish abolitionist Richard Allen also looked inwards. Warning against triumphalism Allen told the Convention 'I have long been of the opinion that while we were speaking strongly against those abroad who are connected with slavery, we, ourselves, as a nation, were not entirely clear of the guilt.'<sup>2</sup> The Irishman feared that many British subjects remained heavily involved in transatlantic slavery and proposed a committee investigate the following:

1. Whether manacles for slaves are manufactured in this country?
2. Whether large quantities of inferior fire-arms are also manufactured in Great Britain, to be sold to the Africans for their slave wars?
3. Whether cotton goods of a particular fabric and to a large amount are manufactured in this country, and solely intended for being used in barter for African slaves?

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<sup>1</sup> BFASS, *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention, called by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and Held in London, from Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, to Tuesday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1840* (London: 1841), p.

3. [<https://archive.org/stream/oates71027137#page/n3/mode/2up>, accessed 5 July 2017] (Italics in original)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 265.

4. Whether persons in England hold shares in Brazilian and other mines which are worked by slaves?
5. Whether any British Joint Stock Banks have branch establishments in countries in which the slave-trade prevails?
6. What are the quantities of gunpowder exported from any port or ports in Great Britain to Africa and other parts of the world, respectively?<sup>3</sup>

Allen's questions spoke not only to fears about the complicity of Britons in the multi-national system of transatlantic slavery, but also to the diversity of British commercial activity in the early Victorian period. The first four decades of the nineteenth century had been a period of economic innovation and ascendancy. British bankers, manufacturers, merchants, and shareholders had inserted themselves into the economies of the Americas and Africa. This process had corresponded with the dismantling of slavery within the British Empire from the Abolition Act of 1807 onwards, but now there appeared to be a tension between commercial expansion and moral progress. Allen's speech was met with still more examples of British wrongdoing from the crowd. London was said to be home to 'sleeping partners in the mercantile houses of Cuba; and these traitors to humanity are the main pillars of slavery and the slave-trade'. This was a problem for the abolitionists who hoped that Britain's anti-slavery example might inspire the rest of the world to follow suit. If Britain were to be an anti-slavery beacon then, in the words of Joseph Sturge, 'it must be one great object of this Convention to drag out these atrocities to public light.'<sup>4</sup> According to John H. Hinton the solution was simple; those whose capital supported slavery should be exposed and 'ought to be exhibited to universal execration.'<sup>5</sup> In theory publicity and infamy would force British capitalists to abandon involvement in slavery, cleansing

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 266.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

commerce and maintaining the nation's reputation. This thesis explains why such condemnation failed to materialise and how the practices revealed on the Convention floor were reconciled in a Britain politically and culturally opposed to slavery.

Victorian Britain has been described as an 'anti-slavery nation'. This term was coined by Richard Huzzey as a means of capturing the way in which opposition to slavery played an important role within British political culture in the decades after emancipation.<sup>6</sup> Within such a context one would expect the links to slavery identified at the 1840 Convention to have sparked controversy, soul-searching, or government intervention. This was far from the case as no popular movement or sustained political inquiry into British complicity with slavery ever emerged. Few attempts have been made to understand this absence as anything other than rank hypocrisy on the part of the British government and its subjects.<sup>7</sup> I contend that such a conclusion misread the questions raised by the 1840 convention. Richard Allen's revelations addressed a tension and betrayed the contradictions in Britain's commitment to anti-slavery and its economic relationship with the wider world. In addressing this tension I make a contribution to longstanding historical attempts to conceptualise the relationship between anti-slavery and capitalism. I do so by proposing that attempts to expose British complicity with slavery by abolitionists such as Richard Allen were just one of many solutions to what I term the problem of anti-slavery.

The problem of slavery, as conceptualised across a series of landmark works by David Brion Davis, can be understood as the contradictions embodied in 'converting humans into totally compliant, submissive chattel property.'<sup>8</sup> Within the British Empire the end of the slave trade, slavery, and post slavery 'apprenticeship', all provided solutions to

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<sup>6</sup> R. Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 5-20.

<sup>7</sup> M. Sherwood, *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade since 1807* (London: IB Tauris, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> D. B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Vintage, 2014), p. 13, see also D. B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975, pp. 39-41.



this problem by defining slavery as a morally and legally indefensible. However, in Victorian Britain new questions emerged. How might this repudiation of slavery within the Empire square with the continued intercourse with slave systems throughout the wider world? How was the involvement of British subjects with slavery and the slave trade reconciled with cultural and political opposition to human bondage? Rather than confronting the problem of slavery, various abolitionists, capitalists, and government officials attempted to make sense of Britain's position in the world and faced instead the problem of *anti-slavery*. These groups approached the problem from different perspectives. Abolitionists attempted to cleanse British commerce of its troubling connections. Capitalists asserted they were conducting their business morally. The British state sought to reconcile an explicitly anti-slavery foreign policy with a commitment to commercial expansion.

This chapter sets out the scope of my thesis, providing a number of key definitions. Next, I survey the relatively small and fragmentary historical work on other aspects of British complicity with slavery, which was often the result of nineteenth-century commercial expansion. In doing so I establish the need for more work on how British profiting from slavery was rationalised in the post-emancipation period. I set out how this thesis will expand our understanding of the relationship between slavery, anti-slavery, and Victorian capitalism. What emerges is a picture of Victorian Britain where opposition to slavery was widely expressed, but partial in focus and indecisively practiced.

### Definitions and Boundaries

To understand the problem of anti-slavery in the age of capital it is vital to set out a few key definitions. Firstly, it is important to distinguish between “anti-slavery” and

“abolitionism” or “abolitionist.”<sup>9</sup> Those latter terms are reserved for individuals and groups who actively campaigned for the end of slavery and the slave trade or as Turley has termed them ‘the active minority – the anti-slavery reformers.’<sup>10</sup> Here ‘abolitionist’ most often refers to members of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), or one of the many provincial societies in Britain that actively campaigned or lobbied the government to take action against slavery and the slave trade.

The term ‘anti-slavery’ is more slippery but might be best understood as broad-based opposition to slavery. As Linda Colley argues this opposition to slavery was central to ideas of British patriotism, especially after 1838.<sup>11</sup> Within this broad opposition to human bondage lay countless different interpretations of why slavery was wrong, how it should be ended, and when it should come to an end. Richard Huzzey defines anti-slavery as a form of “ideology,” drawing on Michael Freedon’s use of the concept, meaning ‘the family of ideas regarding the wrongfulness of slavery.’<sup>12</sup> This definition usefully captures the numerous and often contradictory ways in which opposition to slavery could be expressed and practiced. Anti-slavery as “ideology” is central to Huzzey’s depiction of Britain as ‘anti-slavery nation’ and it is a definition maintained here with minor qualifications.

The depth of opposition to slavery felt by any individual actor is impossible to know for sure, and it is clear that some, particularly former West Indian slave-owners, invoked anti-slavery cynically. This thesis will demonstrate how Britons heavily involved in the system of transatlantic slavery made appeals to anti-slavery. The fact that links to slave traders and even slave-ownership could be defended arguably stretches the concept of anti-slavery “ideology” to breaking point. However, after 1838 only the most maverick

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<sup>9</sup> This distinction echoes that of David Brion Davis in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, pp. 21-22 and extended discussion in R. Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 5-20.

<sup>10</sup> D. Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 354-355.

<sup>12</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p.8; M. Freedon, ‘Ideology and Political Theory’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11 (2006), pp. 3-22.

of individuals would publicly defend slavery in the abstract. Even critics of emancipation such as Thomas Carlyle stopped short of calling for the return of slavery.<sup>13</sup> Recognition of this fact also requires an acknowledgement that for the majority of Victorians anti-slavery was far from synonymous with a belief in racial equality. Rather, opposition to slavery often rested upon the understanding that people of African descent were less civilized than white Britons. In fact, Douglas Lorimer has argued the abolitionist campaign against slavery ‘intensifi[ed]’ a particularly hierarchical ‘race consciousnesses among Victorians’.<sup>14</sup> Later in this chapter I will suggest that looking back to pre-emancipation apologies for slavery might deepen our understanding of how profiting from slavery could be rationalised as consistent with a professed opposition to slavery. Ultimately, I utilise Huzzey’s definition of anti-slavery as heterogeneous and diverse, whilst placing my own work alongside recent research on the legacies of slavery in Britain.

Although anti-slavery can refer to an opposition to slavery in the widest sense, the problem of anti-slavery as conceptualised within this thesis is limited to discussion of British complicity with transatlantic slavery. I use the term to encapsulate both the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery as practiced in the Americas and Caribbean. This perspective of course excludes slavery in Africa and the Indian sub-continent. Indian and African slavery lived on past the Emancipation Act of 1833 and this would generate controversy in anti-slavery Britain. However, a brief discussion of Indian and African slaveries, and their relationship to the British Empire, will explain why they mostly fall outside the boundaries of this study.

After 1833 there were still a large number of slaves within the areas of India under British rule, at this point still administered by the East India Company. Debates over the Emancipation Act coincided with the renewal of the Company’s charter sparking

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<sup>13</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 85-9.

<sup>14</sup> D. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 69.

debate over the question of slavery in India itself. However, Indian slavery in both form and extent was poorly understood. Slavery in India was a diverse heterogeneous institution that did not quite fit with the common British understanding of racialised, chattel slavery as practiced in the Caribbean.<sup>15</sup> An 1838 Law Commission investigating Company rule in India highlighted at least sixteen paths into slavery, including the practice of selling one's self into bondage. Rather than being grounded in the idea of property rights and absolute ownership the variegated slavery practices of India were bound up in Islamic and Hindu law as well the caste system. Indian society was 'an intricate system of reciprocal rights and obligations' of which slavery was just one and East India Company rule depended on the military support of an Indian elite committed to maintaining these hierarchies.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary estimates placed numbers at anywhere between 1 and 16 million individuals held in bondage and this lack of clarity over numbers compounded attempts to conceptualise the problem.<sup>17</sup> Howard Temperley has traced how the Colonial Office, Company officials, and a government-appointed Law Commission came to the conclusion that a compensated emancipation would prove too complex, disruptive, and costly to enforce in British-ruled India. Rather a policy of 'delegalization' was pursued forbidding British courts from recognising slavery rather than actively freeing slaves. These reforms undertaken in 1843 ultimately saw much of Indian slavery redefined as debt bondage.<sup>18</sup>

Slavery within Africa would pose persistent and shifting questions as Britain's colonial presence in the continent developed from the 1830s onwards. At the point of West Indian emancipation British possessions in Africa amounted to the formal colonies of the Cape of Good Hope and Sierra Leone, as well as a number of trading forts dotted

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<sup>15</sup> M. Finn, 'Slaves Out of Context: Domestic Slavery and the Anglo-Indian Family, c. 1780-1830', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 19 (2009), pp. 181-203. Also see I. Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> H. Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition*, 21:2, pp. 167-189, pp. 177-9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-186.

along the Gold Coast and Gambia River. Within these formal possessions a West Indian-style emancipation, or what Suzanne Miers calls the 'colonial model' was theoretically enforced.<sup>19</sup> However, as Britain began to increase its formal African possessions, beginning with the annexation of the Gold Coast in 1874, a policy of Indian style delegalization was adopted. As in India this was a reaction to the diversity of forms of bondage and coerced labour within African society, which were poorly understood by European observers.<sup>20</sup> Colonial official also believed that wholesale emancipations would prove disruptive. Hardening of colonial rule from the 1880s onwards would see slavery dealt with via a 'veritable hodge-podge of pragmatic solutions worked out by each administration'.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, from the perspective of the majority of Britons slavery in Africa and India was a relationship between indigenous groups in which the British themselves were not complicit. Many British subjects did own slaves as can be seen in the inventories and wills of East India Company officials. However, as Margot Finn has noted parliamentary records generated from the 1780s onwards saw Indian slaves rhetorically repositioned as servants, reflecting the fact that the majority were domestic slaves forming part of the household.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the early 1840s would see brief controversy over the ownership of slaves by some British officials in West Africa. The 1833 Emancipation Act would only be promulgated there in the 1840s and an 1843 Act banning pawning, a form of debt bondage, was generally ignored by officials who operated beyond Colonial Office supervision.<sup>23</sup> Despite these realities both Africa and India were perceived as potential arenas for free labour unlike the United States, Brazil, or Cuba. For many Victorians there was what Seymour Drescher has called a

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<sup>19</sup> S. Miers, 'Slavery to Freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa: Expectations and Reality', *Slavery & Abolition*, 21:2 (2000), 237-64, p. 238.

<sup>20</sup> P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Miers, 'Slavery to Freedom', pp. 249-250.

<sup>22</sup> Finn, 'Slaves Out of Context', pp. 197-198.

<sup>23</sup> G. E. Metcalfe, *MacLean of the Gold Coast: The Life and Times of George Maclean, 1801 - 1847* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 311-14.

‘categorical bifurcation’ of two types of labour: slave and free.<sup>24</sup> The category of free labour could include the “delegalized” slaveries of India and Africa as well as the coerced labour of indentured Indian and Chinese workers in the Caribbean, although all these systems might be indistinguishable in practice from transatlantic slavery.<sup>25</sup> Discussions of Indian and African slavery then fall outside my concern, as British subjects were not perceived as actively maintaining these slave systems. Rather, policies such as delegalization and ignorance of British slave-owning strengthened belief in the British Empire as a slave free zone. Being anti-slavery never demanded an abandonment of all forms of coerced labour; the question it posed was whether it was possible to operate morally in within an Atlantic economy built upon chattel slavery.

The idea of Britain as geographically isolated from slavery is key to understanding the concept of the anti-slavery nation. Both David Brion Davis and Seymour Drescher have argued Britain was conceptualised as a site of freedom geographically isolated and distinct from slavery in the rest of the world.<sup>26</sup> As Christopher Brown has demonstrated such a vision of Britain could only emerge after the American Revolution transformed the question of slavery into a debate over the future of the Empire.<sup>27</sup> Following emancipation this freedom from slavery was then extended across the British Empire. The problem of anti-slavery was how this perception of Britain could be maintained alongside commercial links to the transatlantic slave system. The borders of empire limited the majority of Britons’ moral responsibility and sustained the image of Britain as an anti-slavery nation. This is what Richard Huzzey, repurposing a term first articulated by Felix Driver, has termed the ‘moral geography’

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<sup>24</sup> S. Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labour versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 31-2.

<sup>25</sup>For Chinese indentured labour C. Bischof, ‘Chinese Labourers, Free Blacks, and Social Engineering in the Post-Emancipation British West Indies’, *Past & Present*, 231:1 (2016), pp. 129-168.

<sup>26</sup> D. B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 81; S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> C. L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 2006), pp. 451-461.

of British anti-slavery and my thesis as a whole hinges on the perception of the British empire as somewhere free from the taint of slavery.<sup>28</sup>

By the 1840s the division between “freedom” and “slavery,” in the Atlantic world at least, was roughly understood to conform to the borders of the British Empire. This relationship is analogous to what Catherine Hall has identified as the Victorian understanding of ‘the gap between metropole and colony: civilization here, barbarism/savagery there.’<sup>29</sup> Britain’s claims to anti-slavery were rooted in the sense that its subjects and government were uniquely opposed to slave labour and the slave trade. Such a belief underwrote a British sense of moral and civilizational superiority that shaped perceptions of Cuba, Brazil, the United States, and more as places that could be condemned, ignored, or transformed on the basis of their involvement with transatlantic slavery. This was an ‘imagined geography’ that culturally separated Britain and its Empire from the rest of the world.<sup>30</sup> However, as with the gap between metropole and colony the division between the British Empire and various slave societies was ‘a slippery one, constantly being reworked.’<sup>31</sup> This reworking of the division between anti-slavery Britain and transatlantic slavery had to take account of the ability of capital to transcend borders of all kinds. This raises another definitional question, that of capitalism and its relationship to anti-slavery in the context of this thesis.

That capitalism has some relation to anti-slavery has been accepted since Eric Williams explicitly linked the two concepts in his 1944 work *Capitalism & Slavery*.<sup>32</sup> For

Williams, working in a Marxist tradition, market capitalism was associated with the

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<sup>28</sup> R. Huzzey, ‘The Moral Geography of British Anti-Slavery Responsibilities’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22 (2012), pp. 111-139; F. Driver, ‘Moral Geographies: Social Sciences and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 13:3 (1998), pp. 275-287.

<sup>29</sup> C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 74, Said, *Culture & Imperialism* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> E. Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

emergence of wage labour and the organisation of the economy around free market and free trade principles. Market capitalism was defined in relief to mercantilism, monopoly and reliance on unfree labour and in particular slavery. Here slavery, and the slave trade, within the British Empire played an important role in the accumulation of capital during Britain's transition to an industrialised, capitalist economy.<sup>33</sup> For Williams, British anti-slavery was a consequence of this transition, and this is an interpretation that will be discussed in the next chapter. More recently, Sven Beckert has depicted capitalism as a global network, which integrated the industrial capitalism of Europe with 'war capitalism'; a system of violent exploitation of land and labour in the Americas in which slavery played a key part.<sup>34</sup> What is key for this thesis is how for both Williams and Beckert capitalism has a clear geographic aspect. Capital moves across borders, often as credit, is invested and generates profit before it travels back across borders to be reinvested. As Williams put it by 1832 'British capital ... was thinking in world terms.'<sup>35</sup> This spatialized understanding of capitalism corresponds to the social scientist Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world systems theory', which conceptualises capitalism as essentially transnational in nature.<sup>36</sup> For both Williams and Beckert capitalism includes a connection between, to use Wallerstein's terms, a core and periphery. For both authors the division between core and periphery was also that between slavery and freedom. For my purposes, capitalism can be understood in part as the flow of capital, and the technologies that allowed this, between Britain and various slave societies. How were these capital flows reconciled with Britain's self-image of isolation from transatlantic slavery?

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 105-106, pp. 126-153.

<sup>34</sup> S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 119-131; Daniel Rood's excellent review essay makes explicit Beckert's intellectual debt to Wallerstein as well as identifying the importance of geography in other recent histories of capitalism. D. Rood, 'Beckert is Liverpool, Baptist is New Orleans: Geography Returns to the History of Capitalism', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 36:1 (2016), pp. 151-167.



The above discussion makes clear that the problem of anti-slavery can be best understood, to borrow David Lambert's phrase, as a 'problem of geography'.<sup>37</sup> Within this thesis spatial metaphors are used as a means of capturing the ways in which Victorians thought about both specific geographic locations, as well as the relationships between different sites. Here "space" can be understood as the physical plane upon which human interactions occur 'which, like time, produces the basic co-ordinates of human life.'<sup>38</sup> However, space is not only the physical location where events occur as different spaces, places, or sites have meanings projected onto them through the way they are discussed and through the actions performed within them. For example, Britain would be seen as a space of freedom, whilst Brazil would be seen as a slave space. Britain and Brazil were also of course distinct geographic units, separated not only by political borders but also by the physical barrier of the Atlantic Ocean. They can be considered both as spaces in their own right, or as sites with space between them. This dual meaning of space helps to capture the interplay of imaginative and physical geographies that underpinned discussion of Britain's post-emancipation relationship to slavery. This thesis, then, both narrates events that took place within a specific geographic context and provides analysis on how this space was conceptualised by historical actors.

Recognising the problem of anti-slavery as a problem of geography also requires further elaboration on the relationship between imagined and physical geographies. The term imaginative geographies refers to the different ways Victorians conceived of the world in spatialised terms and how various cultural and ideological meanings were projected onto the relationship between distinct geographic units. The key imagined geographies for this thesis are firstly, as noted above, the perceived division between the British Empire as a space of freedom and other societies as sites of slavery.

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<sup>37</sup> D. Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 10-11

<sup>38</sup> T. Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015). P. 16.

Secondly, Huzzey's suggested moral geography which saw responsibility for policing slavery and the slave trade limited to actions which fell within the borders of the British Empire, or upon the high seas where the British navy held sway. I am interested in the relationship between these imagined geographies and the material connections between Britain and the rest of the world which are key to my definition of capitalism. These material connections also make clear that both imagined and physical geographies were not static rather they were constructed and challenged through the movement of British capital, goods, and people throughout the Atlantic world. By addressing the spatial aspects of the problem of anti-slavery I also pay attention to both how things physically moved throughout the Atlantic world; how these movements were represented within the British metropole; and how these different mobilities facilitated the transmission of ideas about the economy and anti-slavery. Different visions of Britain's economic relationship with slave societies existed and competed. Richard Allen and Joseph Sturge envisioned a world economy where British commerce was not entangled with slavery; though this vision was never achieved British involvement in transatlantic slavery should not be seen as inevitable. Reconciling capitalism and anti-slavery rested on particular constructions of African consumers, the Brazilian labour market, or the Cuban economy. Here the economic geographies of Williams, Beckert, and Wallerstein intersect with the imagined geography of Hall and Said. Recognising this cultural aspect of capitalism also allows for recognition of the role of the British state in facilitating the global reach of British capital. Material connections were predicated upon imagined geographies but, as will be discussed in my methodology, physical geographies also structured the ways in which Britons acquired knowledge about other societies. As we shall see controversies over involvement in transatlantic slavery often turned on whether certain economic practices should be regulated or prohibited.

Within this thesis capitalism and anti-slavery are understood as spatial phenomena describing Britain's relationship to different parts of the Atlantic world. Understanding how these two geographies were reconciled requires a consideration of the relationship between ideology, ideas, and political economy. Frank Trentmann has convincingly argued that economic interests are 'not pre-social but are embedded in society and culture'.<sup>39</sup> Throughout this thesis I will demonstrate that the nature of Britain's relationship with the wider world rested on a number of cultural, or to borrow Trentmann's term, 'moral-political' representations. These included conflicting representations of different Atlantic world spaces, but also different representations of the various types of economic activity British capitalists engaged in. In picking apart how these representations were contested and constructed I propose a cultural approach to economic history that will be laid out within my methodology.

Finally, the chronological span of this thesis stretches roughly from the 1820s to the end of slavery in Brazil in 1888. I borrow Eric Hobsbawm's periodisation of the Age of Capital and expand it to include both the Latin American speculation boom of the 1820s and the final years of transatlantic slavery. Whilst Hobsbawm dates the term capitalism to around 1849 the concept of "capital" as something that might be expended in, or accumulated by, involvement in transatlantic slavery was understood at an earlier date.<sup>40</sup> As the Scottish abolitionist David Turnbull told the 1840 Convention 'the terms "coward" and "capitalist" were never more truly convertible than in the person of the trafficker in slaves.'<sup>41</sup>

The majority of the case studies I analyse take place in the 1840s, the early part of which has been described as the peak of anti-slavery's prowess.<sup>42</sup> These years then provide an effective vantage point from which to observe how British involvement with

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<sup>39</sup> F. Trentmann, 'Political Culture and Political Economy: Interest, Ideology and Free Trade', *Review of International Political Economy*, 5:2 (1998), pp. 217-251, p. 234.

<sup>40</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848 - 1875* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 523.

<sup>42</sup> H. Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 166.

slavery could be rationalised and justified. Connections to West African slavers, Cuban plantations, and Brazilian mines all predated emancipation and in some cases would stretch well into the late nineteenth century. Whilst individual chapters might focus on a single select committee, parliamentary act or even company general meeting these events are always positioned within Britain's political and economic landscape. This is done not only through an awareness of how anti-slavery as a concept developed before and after-emancipation, but also by highlighting continuities in slavery apologetics.

### Literature and Structure

Anti-slavery ideology functioned through the shared belief that Britain and its imperial possessions were, and should remain, free from slavery. However, the demarcation between the slave world and free world was not so neat. After emancipation British subjects dealt with slave traders, financed slave plantations, and owned slaves themselves. This was part and parcel of a period of commercial expansion that saw British capital extended further across borders, including crucially the one between freedom and slavery. The consumption of slave-grown sugar and cotton could be rationalised as a transitory problem whilst slavery died out across the world, but in many cases British subjects were actively involved with slavery. The historiographical consensus is that these instances of British involvement in slavery provoked little concern, though there has been little discussion of why that was the case. Here I provide a brief survey of British complicity and profiting from slavery in the post-emancipation period. I argue that the historical consensus of a lack of controversy over these cases has understated the way British banks, company directors, and merchants actively worked to rationalise their links to slavery.

From a historiographical perspective the two most controversial aspects of Britain's post-emancipation relationship to slavery related to the import of slave-grown sugar and cotton. In both cases Britons not only consumed the goods produced by slave

labour, but also invested in slave economies particularly through the extension of credit by British merchants. Historians have struggled to reconcile this fact with Britain's professed anti-slavery variously reading it as evidence of capitalist self-interest or humanitarian decline. In my first chapter I review the literature on sugar, cotton, and the United States and argue that for the majority of Britons these connections were not viewed as at odds with an opposition to slavery. Rather anti-slavery was pluralist in nature and the internal slave systems of the Americas were seen as beyond the remit of the British government. Whilst abolitionists did criticise the import of Brazilian sugar or American cotton they rarely did so from the perspective of complicity with slavery. Neither sugar nor cotton imports were among the forms of British capital supporting slavery exposed at the 1840 Convention. I will suggest that the merchants and industrialists involved in the sugar and cotton trade were somewhat insulated from criticism as the ownership of slaves took place overseas. This thesis is more concerned with those instances in which Britons owned slaves or participated in the slave trade from within the borders of empire, disrupting the moral and political geographies of British anti-slavery.

Broadly speaking there were two ways that British commerce contributed to transatlantic slavery in the post-emancipation period. Firstly, there was the impetus British merchants and manufacturers provided to the slave trade, not only through importing the produce of slave labour, but also by providing credit in various forms to slave traders. Secondly, following emancipation British subjects continued to own slaves abroad a practice that was technically rendered illegal by the 1843 Act for the More Effectual Suppression of the Slave Trade. This brief review, and the structure of the thesis, will mirror the British anti-slavery movement by concerning itself with the slave trade first, and slave ownership second.

British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade was the issue that came closest to disrupting Britain's anti-slavery self-image. In ports such as Rio or Havana British

merchants, often acting as consuls, held partnerships in slave trading firms. Whilst on the West African coast British merchants stood accused of supplying slave traders and were consequently investigated in an 1842 parliamentary select committee. This latter controversy has traditionally been of greater interest to historians of British involvement in Africa.<sup>43</sup> However, British involvement in financing and supplying the slave trade has received scant attention from historians of anti-slavery. David Eltis has argued that the British government, and particularly Palmerston, did try to address these issues but the 'process of squeezing British capital out of the trade was protracted and largely unsuccessful.'<sup>44</sup> Both Huzzey and Eltis identify widespread British faith in the moral and civilizing power of commerce as key in negating criticism of British merchants.<sup>45</sup> I complicate this narrative by exploring how controversy over British involvement in the slave trade was far from inevitable by picking apart the idea of legitimate commerce.

My second chapter explores how the export of British manufactured goods to West Africa came to be viewed by abolitionists, government officials, and naval officers as supporting the slave trade. The export of British manufactures to West Africa has been identified by scholars such as Joseph Inikori, Sven Beckert, and Eric Williams as a key part of Britain's Atlantic economy though there has been little investigation of the moral questions this raised after slave trade abolition.<sup>46</sup> Drawing on human geography, particularly the study of mobility, I argue that after 1838 the movements of slave traders, naval, and British mercantile interests converged on the western coast of Africa. It was within this context that links to slave traders fell within Britain's moral geography. My third chapter explores how British merchants in Cuba, Brazil, and West

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<sup>43</sup> P. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (London: MacMillan, 1965), pp. 305, p. 430-1; Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, pp. 246-293.

<sup>44</sup> D. Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 81-85; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> J. E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 408-456; Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, pp. 65-73, Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 36-37.

Africa were able to rationalise these links to slave traders. This requires paying greater attention to the defences offered by the British mercantile community than previous historians. Merchants successfully portrayed themselves as legitimate traders whilst limiting their own personal responsibility for slavery at each stage. Such an interpretation moves past unhelpful binaries of identifying either the West African merchants or their abolitionist critics in Britain as the true standard bearers of anti-slavery.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, I demonstrate that the British government came to an uneasy compromise with merchants whilst remaining sensitive to accusations of complicity with the slave trade.

West Indian emancipation was far from the end of British slave-ownership, but there has been relatively little historical attention to this fact. Louise Guenther and David Murray have discussed slave-ownership among the British merchant community in the Brazilian port of Bahia and British officials in Cuba respectively.<sup>48</sup> However, post-emancipation slave-ownership, and the metropolitan response, has mostly been studied through histories of British-owned mining companies as these entities generated the greatest amount of controversy. Huzzey has used these companies, and the apparent lack of controversy they generated, to argue that ‘apathy and inaction’ characterised the British response to slave-ownership.<sup>49</sup> A similar interpretation has been offered by Howard Temperley and Chris Evans both of whom have cast the aforementioned 1843 Act as a ‘dead letter’.<sup>50</sup> This reading highlights the reluctance of the British government to intervene in the internal politics of other states. However, as I demonstrate in my fourth chapter British slave-owners of various kinds played an

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<sup>47</sup> R. Braithwaite, *Palmerston and Africa: The Rio Nunez Affair: Competition, Diplomacy and Justice* (London: British Academic Press, 1996); Sherwood, *After Abolition*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>48</sup> L. H. Guenther, *British Merchants in Nineteenth-Century Brazil: Business, Culture, and Identity in Bahia, 1808-1850* (Oxford: University of Oxford Centre for Brazilian Studies, 2004), D. R. Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain, and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908).

<sup>49</sup> Huzzey, ‘Moral Geography’, p. 125.

<sup>50</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 232; C. Evans, ‘Brazilian Gold, Cuban Copper and the Final Frontier of British Anti-Slavery’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 34:1 (2013), pp. 118-134.

active role in protesting and neutering the 1843 Act. I particularly point to the protests of banking and commercial interests that have been largely ignored by previous historiography. In doing so I demonstrate how the 1843 Act can in fact be read as legitimising certain forms of slave-ownership, including sugar plantations in Surinam and the Danish West Indies.

Works on British slave-ownership that have looked beyond the 1843 Act have generally focused on the histories of individual companies. Most prominent have been works on the St. John d'El Rey Mining Company, which have explored how British slave-ownership functioned overseas.<sup>51</sup> These works demonstrate that British slave-ownership continued to thrive into the late nineteenth century and generally credit British anti-slavery with a role in shaping management of the workforce. Anti-slavery here often appears as a fuzzy concept and can generally be traced to the frequent attacks on slave-owning mining companies in the BFASS's *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. Given the ebbing popular influence of the BFASS from the mid-1840s, I look beyond abolitionist societies for evidence of anti-slavery's influence on British slave-ownership and find it at work in the companies themselves.<sup>52</sup> My fifth chapter foregrounds the fact that these companies were joint-stock ventures and reveals that contests over company management and directorial accountability became suffused with the language of anti-slavery. Matt Childs has shown that during the 1870s British government and abolitionists would be drawn into condemnation of the St. John d'El Rey's slave-ownership by the nascent Brazilian anti-slavery movement.<sup>53</sup> However, for

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<sup>51</sup> M. C. Eakin, *A British Enterprise in Brazil: The Saint John d'el Rey Mining Company and the Morro Velho Gold Mine 1830-1960* (Chapel Hill, Duke University Press, 1990); M. D. Childs; 'Master-Slave Rituals of Power at a Gold Mine in Nineteenth-Century Brazil', *History Workshop Journal*, 53 (2002), pp. 43-72; Chris Evans has also explored slavery in British owned Copper mining companies in C. Evans, 'El Cobre: Cuban Ore and the Globalization of Swansea Copper, 1830-1870', *Welsh History Review*, 27/1 (2014), pp. 112-131.

<sup>52</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 229.

<sup>53</sup> M. D. Childs, 'A Case of "Great Unstablensness": A British Slaveholder and Brazilian Abolition', *Historian*, 60:4 (1998), pp. 717-40.



much of the nineteenth century it was the financial press and company general meetings where expressions of anti-slavery could be found.

### Methodology

David Brion Davis has argued that the ‘sobering knowledge [of complicity with slavery] did nothing to tarnish Britain’s self-image as the benevolent champion of universal emancipation.’<sup>54</sup> This is an astute comment and is largely borne out in the historiography laid out above. However, as I have indicated, more work needs to be done to reveal how this self-image was contested and constructed. One way is to look beyond the sites where historians have usually identified anti-slavery rhetoric. Whilst abolitionist societies, parliament, and then Foreign and Colonial Offices all have a role to play in this story so do chambers of commerce, company general meetings, and the financial press. In this section I set out the conceptual frameworks that have informed my reading of these sources. I pay particular attention to how information and knowledge about different slave societies was transmitted to Britain. In doing so I engage with how concerns about trust and reputation structured economic activity, and argument, in Victorian Britain. My analysis of the problem of anti-slavery, then, forms part of a broader understanding of what can be called British economic culture. I also introduce the concept of mobility as a means of understanding both the role of imagined and physical space economic culture. Finally, I also consider the degree to which anti-slavery Britain was not solely the creation of slavery’s opponents, but also those who offered apologies for various forms of human property.

Frank Trentmann has argued that ‘[m]aterial circumstances and structures [...] require language and communication to be shaped into meaningful interest by contemporaries’.<sup>55</sup> Understanding the debates over connections between British subjects and transatlantic slavery therefore requires both a focus on the language used

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<sup>54</sup> Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Trentmann, ‘Political Culture and Political Economy’, p. 238.

to represent these material connections and an engagement with how information about economic activity in slave societies was communicated to Britain. These concerns are central to my conceptualisation of economic culture, a term which within this thesis encapsulates two interrelated aspects of the Victorian economy. Firstly, it captures how the relationship between the state and the market can be understood in terms of how 'ideas and practices shaping collective identity and power relations.'<sup>56</sup> Secondly, it describes the way in which historical actors 'negotiate[d] the meanings of economic relationships through daily experience and behaviour.'<sup>57</sup> These two aspects are constitutive of one another as government policy towards the economy was informed by the ways in which different economic relationships were represented and laws and regulations helped determine which forms of economic activity were feasible or acceptable within Victorian Britain. Ideas, practices, and representations helped determine both whether certain forms of economic activity sparked controversy, and which activities could be defended. Below I establish my approach to reconstructing Britain's economic culture. In doing so I set out a number of ideas relating to economic knowledge, trust, reputation, and moralities that informed my reading of primary sources. These concepts are vital to understanding how certain types of economic activity were communicated to, and established as acceptable within, a Britain ideologically opposed to slavery.

When the committee tasked with investigating Richard Allen's motion reported back to the Convention they were convinced that 'British hands and British capital are yet employed in forging the instruments and nourishing the sinews of [transatlantic slavery].'<sup>58</sup> Yet the evidence relating to the six different ways British capital was employed in slavery was of a very mixed character. In some cases the committee had

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<sup>56</sup> F. Trentmann, M. Daunton, 'Worlds of Political Economy: Knowledge, Practices and Contestation', in F. Trentmann, M. Daunton (eds) *Worlds of Political Economy: Knowledge and Power in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> M. Daunton, 'The Future Direction of British History: Thinking about Economic Cultures', *History Workshop Journal*, 72 (2011), 222-239, p. 223.

<sup>58</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 518.

produced hard evidence, for example the number of slaves owned by mining companies in Cuba and Brazil was 'no less than 3225'.<sup>59</sup> Other evidence was far more anecdotal, such as the claim that collars for slaves were 'manufactured [in Birmingham] but with a small measure of concealment.' For the abolitionists the extent to which British capital was involved in the slave trade was less important than the 'revolting and melancholy fact' that there was any involvement at all.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, this thesis will not attempt to quantify the degree to which Britons profited from slavery, for two main reasons. Firstly, the difficulty of finding accurate statistical material, particularly in the case of West African trade.<sup>61</sup> The second problem is a definitional one, specifically identifying what exactly counted as complicity with the slave trade. The 1840 Convention identified at least six examples of British capital supporting slavery. This could surely be expanded to include consumption of slave-grown cotton and sugar, or the sale of sugar-boiling equipment to Cuban plantations. Differing definitions have been at the heart of the debate over the contribution of the Atlantic economy to British industrialisation.<sup>62</sup> However, as my main-body chapters make clear, what counted as complicity with slavery was very much up for debate. To a modern observer British complicity in transatlantic slavery is easy to identify, but I intend to unpick how the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable economic involvement in slavery were negotiated in the post-emancipation period itself.

My focus on the definitional question raises its own issues given that many examples of Britons profiting from slavery failed to provoke controversy. A prime example of this is the manufacture of manacles and chains for slavery and the slave trade. William Allen, at the 1840 Convention, argued that the practice was prevalent in both Birmingham

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> M. Lynn, 'The Profitability of the Early Nineteenth-Century Palm Oil Trade', *African Economic History*, 20 (1992), pp. 77-97.

<sup>62</sup> See J. E. Inikori, 'Slavery and the Development of Industrial Capitalism in England,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17 (1987), pp. 771-793; D. Eltis and S. L. Engerman, 'The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrialisation in Britain,' *Journal of Economic History*, 60 (2000), pp. 123-144.

and Glasgow, however it did not become a point of anti-slavery agitation.<sup>63</sup> Chains and shackles are amongst the most visceral images slavery and were constantly used by abolitionists to stress the oppressive and violent nature of human bondage. Yet, outside of the 1840 Convention little controversy emerged. American abolitionists looking to convince British audiences that they had a moral duty to oppose Southern slavery would occasionally point to the manufacture of chains. James W. C. Pennington, a former slave, rattled a British-made chain whilst lecturing in Newcastle. A decade later Henry Highland Garnet, another black abolitionist, whilst promoting the Free Produce Movement told an audience in Carlisle that “England wove the fabrics that were exchanged for the captive Africans and forged his chains.”<sup>64</sup> British-made chains might prove a useful prop in scandalising the audience within a provincial lecture hall, but this outrage did not translate to action. Explaining a lack of controversy is a difficult task and rather than relying upon counter-factual speculation, I look to the few occasions where the entanglement of British capital with slavery provoked open debate.

For a debate over the role of British capital in transatlantic slavery to take place abolitionists, government officials, and other critics had to have some access to information about the Atlantic economy. As the 1840 Convention demonstrates abolitionists possessed varying degrees of information about the deployment of British capital in transatlantic slavery. This was partially a result of physical geography because as previously noted slavery and slave trading took place elsewhere. Therefore, I consider the historical contingencies that determined both the creation and dissemination of sources. Such a consideration is particularly important in understanding why certain instances of British complicity with slavery remained

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<sup>63</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 266.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in R. J. M. Blakett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1983), p. 13; ff. 18, *Newcastle Chronicle*, 21 Mar 1840, p. 120-1, ff.2, *The Carlisle Journal*, 22 Nov 1850.

uncontroversial. For example, Baring Brothers, a London based bank, acquired slaves in Cuba and St. Croix through the mortgaging of plantations. There is a large amount of correspondence discussing these plantations and their enslaved workforce within the Barings archive. However, Barings never attracted wider condemnation, as these letters were private communications between the bank's directors and its employees. Public companies however, such as mining ventures in Brazil, had to explain their expenditure on slave labour through the publication of accounts and annual reports, which provided the evidential basis for abolitionist critiques. Similarly, as demonstrated in chapter two, parliamentary debate over British supplying of the slave trade was a consequence of the material changes in slave trading necessitated by British naval suppression. Physical geographies and practical concerns in many ways determined the degree of information available about the Atlantic economy. However, as the case of case of British-made manacles also demonstrates that awareness of a material fact does not necessitate knowledge of its immorality. Bearing this in mind it is important to establish what is meant by "knowledge" within this thesis.

Knowledge here is conceptualised as inherently rooted in social relationships; it is understood as providing the link between the observation of material circumstances and the decisions made by historical actors.<sup>65</sup> Defining knowledge in this manner explains why abolitionist hopes of ending British involvement in slavery through publicity alone were ill founded. The material fact of slave-owning by British mining companies, for example, only became objectionable if it was "known" to be morally wrong and if it were possible to imagine an alternative ways of operating in Brazil. Debates over the problem of anti-slavery then can be understood as contests over how to interpret the information that British capital was deployed in slave societies.

Defining knowledge in this manner also rejects the conclusion that the refusal of

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<sup>65</sup> This definition of knowledge draws on the history of science, specifically S. Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

individuals, corporations, or the state to end involvement in transatlantic slavery resulted from a simple recognition of economic circumstances. Rather, I follow Frank Trentmann's argument that economic '[r]ationality stands for what social actors find plausible and meaningful at a historical moment rather than for what might be theoretically "true".<sup>66</sup> Britons needed information about the Atlantic economy for debates over anti-slavery, morality, and rationality to take place, but these debates were ultimately an epistemological struggle over 'what forms of knowledge about slavery were trustworthy'.<sup>67</sup> .

Within this thesis, then, I explore how knowledge about slavery, the Atlantic economy, and British capital was constructed and contested across a number of different texts. These include parliamentary debates, official correspondence, the press, and the private correspondence of both companies and individuals. I am particularly interested in the justifications and apologies offered for involvement in slavery within these texts. Rather than defending slavery as moral, an unacceptable line of argument within anti-slavery Britain, these apologies made claims about the economies of slave societies and the futility of government regulation. Steven Shapin has argued that 'the identification of trustworthy agents is necessary to the constitution of any body of knowledge'<sup>68</sup> My methodology then must also contend with both the role of trust in British economic culture, and how individuals established their trustworthiness.

Any individual or group hoping to establish the reliability of their account of Britain's economic relationship to slavery also had to establish their own trustworthiness.

"Trust" was also vital to the functioning of economic relationships in the nineteenth century. Within British economic culture trust can be understood as the reciprocal relationship between two or more historical actors that is established over time

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<sup>66</sup> Trentmann, 'Political Culture and Political Economy', p. 226.

<sup>67</sup> D. Lambert, 'Sierra Leone and Other Sites in the War of Representation over Slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), pp. 103-132, p. 104.

<sup>68</sup> Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, p. xxxv.

through the experience of exchange.<sup>69</sup> If someone was trusted, then, they could both be expected to honour agreements and also provide reliable and accurate information. Within this thesis I am interested in how interlocutors positioned themselves as trustworthy sources of knowledge about the slave societies of the Atlantic. However, I am also interested in unpicking how the various trust relationships through which Atlantic capitalism functioned were represented in the metropole. For example, British merchants in West Africa were involved in economic relationships with individuals involved in the slave trade; these mercantile relationships functioned through process-based trust. However, this trust relationship had the potential to undermine an individual's position as an objective observer of the role of British capital in the slave trade. The reasons for this fact lie in the relationship between the processes that built up trust and another key facet of the Victorian economy, that of "reputation".

"Reputation" can be understood, in part, as the public expression of "trust." The reputation of an individual or company was the means by which they might gain access to reciprocal relationships, built upon trust, such as credit or governmental guarantee of property rights. During the nineteenth century reputation was more often expressed in terms of "character" which, as Margot Finn has argued, was 'clearly understood to constitute an essential form of social capital'.<sup>70</sup> This designation of reputation as social capital reflects how a good reputation was essential to both relationships between economic actors and between the government and the market. Discussion of reputation or character within this thesis will focus on the cultural means through which individuals and corporate bodies built up, and, maintained, this social capital.

Ultimately, I see reputation or character as the means by which joint-stock companies,

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<sup>69</sup> My discussion of Trust here is heavily indebted to Sherlynn Haggerty's conceptualisation of the role of trust in the business culture of eighteenth-century Atlantic merchants, Haggerty identifies various different forms of trust including process-based trusts, guarantee by institutions (assurance) and a merchant's trust in the State as guarantor of property (Confidence) see S. Haggerty, *'Merely for Money?' Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1780 – 1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 66 – 96.

<sup>70</sup> M. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003); p. 20.

merchants, or even abolitionists achieved legitimacy both as economic actors, but also as reliable sources of knowledge about the Atlantic world.<sup>71</sup>

This thesis pays particular attention to the ways in which reputations as opponents of slavery, savvy businessmen, or honest company directors were crafted not only through actions, but how those actions were represented textually. As Haggerty has noted an individual's reputation often rested on the company they kept or communities they were members of.<sup>72</sup> For example, my third chapter explores how merchants utilised a number of different mediums, including the press, select committees, and correspondence with government to distance themselves from links to slavery that might damage their reputation. At the same time corporate bodies, most notably joint-stock companies, had to craft a reputation as reliable and this often rested on the individual character of their directors.<sup>73</sup> However, as my fifth chapter demonstrates, there were also a number of texts whose primary concern was the construction or mediation of these companies reputation. Specifically, company annual reports and the nascent financial press where companies positioned themselves as sound investments.<sup>74</sup> These chapters bear out my distinction between trust and reputation, as it becomes clear that economic actors operating within trust relationships might reveal information that would harm their reputation if expressed in a public forum. Reputation, especially when expressed as character, could be adjudged both by a moral evaluation of the company people kept and was also of a

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<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of the importance of reputation and legitimacy to corporate bodies see T. L. Alborn, *Conceiving Companies: Joint-Stock Politics in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Haggerty, *Merely for Money*, pp. 121–125.

<sup>73</sup> A. Hunt, *Personal Business: Character and Commerce in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> M. Poovey, 'Writing about Finance in England in Victorian England: Disclosure and Secrecy in the Culture of investment', *Victorian Studies*, 45:1 (2002), pp. 17-41; J. Taylor, Privacy, Publicity, and Reputation: How the Press Regulated the Market in Nineteenth-Century England', *Business History Review*, 87:4 (2013), pp. 679-701.



person's behaviour.<sup>75</sup> This observation raises another vital aspect of economic culture as conceptualised in this thesis; the relationship between ideas of morality and economy.

The relationship between morality and the economy, as conceptualised in this thesis, differs from E. P. Thompson's interpretation of a moral, communal economy superseded by a market driven economy.<sup>76</sup> Instead morality is treated as a non-normative concept and I pay attention to how different interlocutors attempted to moralise the nineteenth-century British economy. I work from the assumption that various types of economic activity could be represented as either morally acceptable or morally unacceptable for Britons to engage in. Immoral acts might not necessarily be illegal, but forms of economic activity that were perfectly legal were often subject to severe moral critique, which could constrain the options available to historical actors. Take for example the critique of individuals who speculated in joint-stock shares as gamblers, or the web of familial obligations that structured inheritance.<sup>77</sup> In the most extreme examples the British state could outlaw certain types of commercial activity or property on the basis of their immorality. The abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of 1833 can be considered as evidence of this fact and all Atlantic commerce in this period occurred in the context of this legislation. This thesis then pays attention to contests over the morality of whole branches of commerce, particularly in chapters two and three, as well the way in which the day to day life of capitalists was shaped by moral expectations.

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<sup>75</sup> S. Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 95-116.

<sup>76</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136.

<sup>77</sup> J. Taylor, *Creating Capitalism: Joint-Stock Enterprise in British Politics and Culture, 1800-1870* (London: Boydell, 2014), p. 56; L. Davidoff, C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchison, 1987), pp. 206-207; R. J. Morris, *Men, Women, and Property in England, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Taking this non-normative approach to questions of morality also opens up new possibilities when engaging with the rhetoric of Victorian interlocutors. Rather than focusing simply on the explicitly moral arguments of abolitionists regarding slavery's sinfulness it allows a closer inspection of arguments that, at first, appear amoral in nature. The apologies for links to transatlantic slavery offered in company reports, correspondence with the government, or through the press often maintained a sense that connections to slavery were an unfortunate but unavoidable feature of the Atlantic economy. However, a close reading of these sources reveals how such claims and appeals to economic rationality rested on a number of cultural assumptions grounded in Victorian thinking about race, civilization and various other factors. The role of morality in the Victorian economy, then, can be considered as a key aspect of the public reputation of individual economic actors, corporations, and even whole branches of commerce. The British commitment to anti-slavery presented the various capitalists discussed in this thesis with a problem of how to maintain both legality and moral acceptability of their businesses. At the same time it is important to note that few, if any, interlocutors in this debate be they slave-owner, West Africa merchant, or metropolitan abolitionist were critical of capitalism as a whole. Rather, critical voices hope to render transatlantic commerce as moral as possible, in a manner similar to the questions asked about empire by humanitarian reformers in the same period.<sup>78</sup>

What happened to British ideas about knowledge, reputation, and morality when applied to commercial activity happening outside of metropolitan Britain or its empire? Did these ideas travel, and if not why not? These questions are essential to understanding the problem of anti-slavery and they reinforce the essentially spatial character of the debates discussed in this thesis. The competing knowledge claims about slave societies and the role of British investment in them helped construct the

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<sup>78</sup> A. Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 4-5.

imaginative geography of Atlantic world capitalism. At the same time physical space placed constraints on what information could be gleaned about slavery in Brazil or the West African slave trade. The interrelationship of these imagined and physical geographies can be most clearly conceptualised through what cultural geographer Tim Cresswell calls the 'politics of mobility'.<sup>79</sup> This phrase captures how the physical movement of goods, capital, and people is both productive of and produced by cultural, social, or ideological processes. This theme is most explicitly explored in chapter three, but throughout the thesis I maintain a focus on how Britons represented other societies and how this facilitated the deployment of capital within them. Ultimately, rather than threatening the imagined geography of British isolation from slavery these mobilities reinforced ideas of Africa, the Americas, and Caribbean as both culturally different and physically distant from Britain.

One of the key concerns of this thesis is understanding how profiting from slavery was justified in the post-emancipation period. If the setting was novel the problem was an older one. Since the mid-eighteenth century various groups of Britons had been justifying, to varying degrees, involvement with slavery. This body of thought has generally been termed pro-slavery, in part because it has generally been studied by anti-slavery historians as the defensive and reactionary response of slave-owners and traders to the rise of abolitionism.<sup>80</sup> Recently historians have begun to take a more sustained look at British justifications for slavery and the gradations of begrudging support, apology, and vehement defence that were voiced. Paula Dumas has demonstrated the existence of a diverse 'culture of proslavery' in Britain, defining 'proslavery' as the 'arguments and individuals who promoted the institution of slavery, as beneficial for them, the colonies, and Britain's national interest in a public manner.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> T. Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', *Environment and Planning D – Society & Space*, 28:1 (2010), pp. 17-31.

<sup>80</sup> For an example see Davis, *Age of Revolution*, pp. 39-82.

<sup>81</sup> P. E. Dumas, *Proslavery Britain: Fighting for Slavery in an Era of Abolition*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 2.

Works such as that of Dumas understandably take West Indian emancipation as their end point. Yet, placing the defences, apologies, and justifications offered after emancipation within a longer tradition of British pro-slavery offers a chance to identify both continuities and ruptures.

Some of the most fruitful work on pro-slavery has focused on its function in identity formation. As David Lambert and Christer Petley have demonstrated that in the cases of Barbados and Jamaica respectively, defending slavery amounted to defending a way of life.<sup>82</sup> Defenders of slavery in both colonies argued that they 'were part of an extended British nation and presented abolitionism as a potentially revolutionary force that would cause the whole system to collapse.'<sup>83</sup> Such a position stressed the economic benefits brought by the West Indian colonies and attempted to position West Indians as a part of a white British culture defined against black slave labourers. Elsewhere, as Michael Taylor has argued, defences of slavery 'were integral to imperial economic thought in the 1820s and 1830s.'<sup>84</sup> Works that have been held up as examples of conservative political economy were first and foremost attempts to stave off emancipation. Srividhya Swaminathan has argued that defenders of the slave trade also stressed that they were 'loyal citizen[s] of empire' and that such claims, alongside abolitionist rhetoric, contributed to shaping a new sense of Britishness.<sup>85</sup> Whilst the owners of slave-worked mines or Surinamese plantations, discussed in chapters four and five, would not defend slavery in the abstract they echoed many earlier attempts to prolong slavery in the British Empire.

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<sup>82</sup> D. Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); C. Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).

<sup>83</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica*, p. 48.

<sup>84</sup> M. Taylor, 'Conservative Political Economy and the Problem of Colonial Slavery, 1823-1833', *The Historical Journal*, 57:4 (2014), pp. 973-995, p. 975.

<sup>85</sup> S. Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1795-1815* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 129, p. 173.

Extending a history of pro-slavery, or slavery apologism at least, after 1833 also places my work within the developing field of studies of legacies of British slave-ownership.<sup>86</sup> Nicholas Draper has demonstrated that the compensation awarded to slave-owners was something actively campaigned for and won by Britons who had invested large sums of capital in human property.<sup>87</sup> British emancipation can in many ways be considered as a compromise between slave-owners and their opponents.<sup>88</sup> This particular legacy must be taken into account when exploring British complicity with slavery after emancipation. Work on these legacies has mostly been interested in tracing how the profits generated by slavery and the compensation process were reinvested in the British economy.<sup>89</sup> However, Catherine Hall has explored the ‘writing strategies of the slave-owners and their descendants as they grappled with a world of otherness in which chattel slavery was no longer acceptable.’<sup>90</sup> Hall argues that former slave-owners sought to maintain the racial hierarchies of slavery in a post-emancipation world, demonstrating that much of the rhetoric of slavery apology could live on. We might add company reports and financial journalism to the novels and travel writing, which Hall identifies as bearing the legacy of the slavery’s racial and social hierarchies. This is particularly true of chapters three and four which address how slave-ownership was actively legitimised and can be seen as carrying what Hall has called the ‘war of representation’ of slavery into new arena.<sup>91</sup> In Victorian Britain the contest was not over slavery’s morality but its relationship to property and commerce.

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<sup>86</sup> C. Hall, N. Draper, et al (eds) *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> N. Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation, and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> David Brion Davis and Paula Dumas have also argued for emancipation as compromise rather than defeat of slave-owners, Davis, *Human Progress*, p. 207; Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> K. Donington, ‘Transforming Capital: Slavery, Family, Commerce and the Making of the Hibbert Family’, in C. Hall, N. Draper, et al (eds) *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>90</sup> C. Hall, ‘Reconfiguring Race: The Stories the Slave-owners Told’ in *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 106.

The continuities of slavery apologetics highlighted above also raise the question of the role of race as a social construct within this thesis. Whilst white hostility towards black-skinned individuals can be traced back to the earliest contact between Europeans and Africans historians have been near unanimous in identifying a hardening of explicitly racist attitudes within Britain in the years after emancipation.<sup>92</sup> According to Douglas Lorimer, among others, the mid-nineteenth century saw the emergence of scientific racism within Britain alongside an older tradition of ethnocentric thought grounded in a belief in English moral and civilizational superiority.<sup>93</sup> It was this latter strand of thinking that blurred understandings of civilization and race that characterised debates over the problem of anti-slavery. Both sides in the debate over emancipation were convinced that Britain stood at the pinnacle of civilization and opposition to slavery came to be identified with this belief.<sup>94</sup> As we shall see when British capitalists discussed race they maintained the association of Black people, whether African, Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-Brazilian, with manual labour, a perspective that was at home with the hierarchical understanding of British society.<sup>95</sup> Such rhetoric was much more prominent than explicitly scientific racism or the biblical arguments that had been prevalent prior to West Indian emancipation.<sup>96</sup> However, in many cases British capitalists sought to avoid a discussion of enslaved people at all preferring to advance economic arguments, where moral, racial, and civilizational claims were more implicit. A key justification for slavery both before and after emancipation was the stress placed by slave-owners, slave traders, and other defenders of the system on property rights. The primacy of property rights and sanctity of contract relate to another key question

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<sup>92</sup> For the earlier history of racism see: W. D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1150-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 3-44; D. B. Davis, 'Constructing Race: A Reflection', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 54:1 (1997), pp. 7-18.

<sup>93</sup> Lorimer, *Colour*, pp. 12-16, Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 198-199.

<sup>94</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 107.

<sup>95</sup> Lorimer, *Colour*, p. 92, T. C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> M. Taylor, 'British Proslavery Arguments and the Bible, 1823-1833', *Slavery & Abolition*, 37:1 (2016), pp. 139-158.

raised by the problem of anti-slavery: how did involvement with slavery map onto a highly moralised British economy? G. R. Searle argued that in Victorian economic culture slavery came to be a red line in terms of unacceptable economic activity as “legitimate trade” was incompatible with transactions that in any way resulted, directly or indirectly, in the buying and selling of bodies.<sup>97</sup> However, as discussed below the definition of legitimate trade could include a myriad of different links to slavery and the slave trade. This thesis aims to understand how profiting from slavery could be reconciled within a Victorian economy where credit relations, business partnerships, and joint-stock investments were constantly moralised.<sup>98</sup>

Debates over the moral consequences of commercial activity, whether positive or negative, were a constant in Victorian public discourse. For example, Boyd Hilton has argued that until the mid-nineteenth century Britons, particularly Evangelicals, struggled, but ultimately succeeded in reconciling the profit-motive with Christian other-worldliness.<sup>99</sup> Considering this moral and cultural aspect of the nineteenth century economy brings us back to Frank Trentmann’s contention that concepts such as economic rationality are culturally constructed and historically contingent.<sup>100</sup>

Apologies for connections to slavery rested upon the suggestion that they were the inevitable result of amoral market relations. Rather than taking this assertion at face value I examine how those invested in transatlantic slavery attempted to represent their economic activity as existing outside of questions of the morality of slavery.

Finally, I argue that appeals to economic rationality were consistently combined with explicitly moral and civilizational arguments. Here the question of imagined geographies re-enter the question as British economic activity in Brazil, West Africa,

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<sup>97</sup> G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 76.

<sup>98</sup> For further discussion of morality in the nineteenth century economy see Hilton, *Age of Atonement*; P. Johnson, 'Market Disciplines' in P. Mandler (ed.), *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>99</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, p. 115.

<sup>100</sup> Trentmann, 'Political Culture and Political Economy', pp. 225-226.

and Cuba was consistently represented in terms of extending the civilizing influence of commerce. These arguments rested both on the belief, as established above, that Britain was free from the taint of slavery and superior in terms of civilization to the various slave societies of the Atlantic World. As in the period prior to emancipation '[p]olitically and ideologically motivated comparisons between different worldly sites' were made to justify, or critique, British involvement in slavery.<sup>101</sup> These comparisons of different worldly sites, and the people within them, also indicates the how different types of human variation played a key role in debates over slavery and British capitalism. As Sadiya Qureshi has argued Victorians often held 'twinned notions of diachronic human variation and developmental civilization [that] remained both powerful and relevant to discussions of human history and national difference.'<sup>102</sup> From this perspective enslaved Africans, Brazilian slave-owners, or Dutch colonial officials could all be conceptualised as lagging behind Britain in terms of morals and civilization. The claims made by abolitionists, government officials, and capitalists contributed to the production of knowledge about the world outside the British Empire. As I shall demonstrate throughout this thesis spaces outside the British Empire were represented as inappropriate arenas for British anti-slavery sentiment.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, post-emancipation Britain was faced with the problem of reconciling its opposition to slavery with numerous commercial links to the slave economies of the Americas. Whilst Richard Allen argued that Britain must 'root out all participation in [slavery]' the question of what counted as participation was very much up for debate.<sup>103</sup> British subjects dealt with slave traders and bought or sold slaves long after it had become morally, and sometimes legally, unacceptable. Many did so from within

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<sup>101</sup> Lambert, 'Sierra Leone and Other Sites', p. 103.

<sup>102</sup> S. Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), p. 189.

<sup>103</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 265.



the boundaries of empire, a fact that would appear to disrupt the moral geography of anti-slavery. To understand how this involvement with transatlantic slavery could be rationalised with opposition to slavery it is important to understand the legacies of slavery apologism after emancipation as well as Victorian economic culture. As I will demonstrate potentially troubling entanglements with slavery were consistently rationalised as temporary blips in a perceived march towards freedom led by Britain.

## Chapter I: Slavery's Products and The Problem of Anti-Slavery

The landscape of British anti-slavery in the years following West Indian emancipation was hotly contested terrain. Diverse interpretations of the anti-slavery responsibilities of both individual Britons and the British state were advanced and competed with one another. This chapter deals with the two aspects of British anti-slavery that have previously received the most attention from historians. Firstly, I will trace the historiographical debate surrounding the role of anti-slavery politics in the struggle between free trade and protectionism. These debates have been central to historiographical attempts to understand the relationship between capitalism and British anti-slavery. Between 1841 and 1853 the British government slashed prohibitive duties on a variety of slave-produced goods. Sugar, however, was the only commodity to provoke genuinely fierce parliamentary debate; a fact bound up in the legacy of British emancipation and commitment to slave trade suppression. I briefly examine the muted debate over slave-mined copper ore to demonstrate that not all of slavery's products received equal attention. Next, I explore British attitudes towards American slavery including the ambivalent response to the American Civil War. The sugar duties and American slavery dominated the attention of both early Victorians and later historians. By surveying both the historiographical and contemporary debates I demonstrate the benefits of stressing the pluralism of anti-slavery when attempting to understand Britain's post-emancipation relationship to slavery.

In this chapter I complicate Richard Huzzey's argument that British responsibility for slavery was limited by the political boundaries of empire by demonstrating that the various moral geographies of anti-slavery were the result of shifting understandings of who shouldered the burden of moral responsibility. Previous attempts to understand the geographic stretch of humanitarian concern or moral responsibility have focused

on the connections fostered by market capitalism or the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> I reframe the question by demonstrating how the differing conceptions of who should be the primary moral actor. The sugar duties debate was principally concerned with the state as economic regulator and moral arbiter, whilst debates over slave-grown cotton placed the moral burden on individual consumers. Attempts to moralise manufacturers or merchants were rare and often explicitly linked to economic self-interest. This chapter, then, explores the role of intersection of imagined geographies and political economy. I argue that Britain's relationship to Brazil, Cuba, or the United States was never understood in purely economic terms. Rather, abolitionists offered differing representations of free labour and slave labour economies that framed the debate over whether it was practical for Britons to reject slave produced goods. Ultimately, I demonstrate that Britain's self-image as a world leader in anti-slavery survived debates over free trade, cotton, and the American Civil War. I suggest these can be viewed as contests over who should provide the solution to the problem of anti-slavery; the state, consumers, or capitalists.

### The Problem of Anti-Slavery and Free Trade

Reconciling Britain's opposition to slavery with its commercial relationship to the wider world has been as problematic for historians as it was for the Victorians, if not more so. Nowhere is this truer than in the historiography of anti-slavery and the sugar duties. A recent survey of historical literature on the relationship between slavery, anti-slavery, and free trade has aptly described the British debate as a 'quagmire'.<sup>2</sup> In this section I map the various strands of historical debate that have stemmed from Eric Williams's argument that repeal of the sugar duties was evidence that 'the weakness of

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<sup>1</sup> Huzzey, 'Moral Geography', pp. 138-139; T. L. Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1', *Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2*, in T. Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); D. Lambert, A. Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography*, 38:3 (2004), pp. 320-341.

<sup>2</sup> M-W. Palen, 'Free Trade Ideology and Transatlantic Abolitionism: A Historiography', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 37:2 (2015), pp. 291-304, p. 293.

the West Indian system was less that it was immoral than that it was unprofitable.’<sup>3</sup> Williams’s depiction of anti-slavery as capitalist self-interest has been challenged by other interpretations that have cast anti-slavery and free trade as oppositional forces, or the free trade movement as the successor to a declining abolitionism. I navigate these historiographical debates and situate my own work among more recent attempts to understand anti-slavery as playing a complex role in Victorian politics, as arguments both for and against foreign sugar were expressed through a language of anti-slavery. I will argue that for many contemporary commentators, the answer to the questions posed by free trade in slave produce was conceptualising their moral responsibility as limited by geography. I complement this historiographical survey with an account of the more muted contemporary debate over slave-mined copper ore, which bore similarities to the sugar duties debate but failed to spark national controversy. Ultimately, the debate over the sugar duties was one over the role the British state should play in opposing slavery.

Before delving into the historiographical debate over the sugar duties it is important to establish the timeline of repeal. Until the 1830s the British government operated a protectionist tariff system charging prohibitively high duties on the import of foreign produce compared to those from within the borders of empire. From 1830 slave-produced West Indian and Mauritian sugar was charged 24s per hundredweight (Cwt.)<sup>4</sup> However, when in 1841 Lord Melbourne’s Whig government introduced a budget which ‘intended to reduce the duties on all foreign sugars from 63s to 36s per hundredweight slavery had ended in the British Caribbean.’<sup>5</sup> This reduction would have maintained a 12s difference between foreign and colonial sugar, but sparked fierce opposition and the government was defeated by an amendment couched in anti-

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<sup>3</sup> E. Williams, ‘Laissez Faire, Sugar and Slavery’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 58:1 (1943), pp. 67-85, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> C. D. Rice, “Humanity Sold for Sugar!” The British Abolitionist Response to Free Trade in Slave-Grown Sugar’, *Historical Journal*, 13:3 (1970), pp. 402-418, p. 409.

<sup>5</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 145-6.

slavery terms.<sup>6</sup> The rest of the 1840s would see a progressive shift towards free trade with the lowering of both foreign and colonial duties by 10s in 1844. Following the fall of Peel's administration after Corn Law repeal in 1846 Lord John Russell's government passed a bill setting out the gradual lowering of duties on all sugar, with the duties eventually equalizing in 1854 after some opposition from the Lords at the end of the 1840s.<sup>7</sup> This gradual march towards free trade in sugar was accompanied by a reduction in tariffs on a number of other products of slave labour and must always be interpreted as part of a broader platform of free trade. However, it was sugar that excited the most comment, both at the time and amongst subsequent historians.

For many historians interested in the relationship between free trade and slavery the contest over the repeal of the sugar duties is the final chapter in the story of British abolitionism. In *Capitalism & Slavery* Eric Williams argued that slavery was vital to the development of British capitalism, and that the demands of this capitalist system were ultimately responsible for emancipation.<sup>8</sup> Within this context sugar duty repeal was the final step in dismantling the old monopoly of the West Indies and emancipation was a consequence of a self-interested transition to market capitalism. That sugar duty repeal was a foundational moment in the emergence of a more *laissez-faire* economy is inarguable. Repeal was part of a broader campaign against import tariffs centred on the Corn Laws that gripped British politics from the 1830s onwards. This was a shift in British political economy that by the late nineteenth century established free trade, small government expenditure, and free markets as articles of faith.<sup>9</sup> Both Williams's overall framework and specific analysis of the sugar duties question have been challenged. Seymour Drescher has convincingly argued that abolition of the slave trade was in fact an economically disastrous policy and understood as such, rather than one

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 145-50, *Hansard*, 7 May 1841, Series 3 Vol. 58, c. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Rice, "Humanity Sold", p. 409.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, pp. 210-211.

<sup>9</sup> F. Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); M. Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: The Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1799-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 110-111.

motivated by self-interest.<sup>10</sup> However, Williams's scepticism of the motivations for anti-slavery and attempts to understand its relationship to emergent capitalism has been maintained. Determining the exact nature of this relationship has been one of the key problems of anti-slavery historiography.

If, for Williams, sugar duty repeal exposed the fact that British anti-slavery had cloaked self-interest, others interpreted it as evidence of declining humanitarianism. C. Duncan Rice, argued that abolitionists had in fact opposed reform of the sugar duties. For Rice, the protests of the BFASS and a plethora of provincial anti-slavery societies proved that opponents of slavery raised a serious moral objection to admission of slave-grown sugar. Key to the disagreement between Rice and Williams was who was taken as representative of anti-slavery opinion. Rice argued that Williams had been too credulous of Richard Cobden's claims that the anti-slavery movement had been subsumed into the campaign against the Corn Laws.<sup>11</sup> Identifying the legitimate standard bearers of abolitionism has long been a point of contention among historians. For David Brion Davis, British abolitionism was the preserve of an ascendant middle class for whom anti-slavery 'reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order.'<sup>12</sup> Drescher's abolitionists on the other hand were the Methodist working classes expressing opposition to shifts in the labour market.<sup>13</sup> However, the debates over sugar duty repeal belie attempts to identify a single strand of anti-slavery thought, as demonstrated by those works whose primary focus is anti-slavery after emancipation. For historians who look well beyond 1833, the sugar duties debates are often represented as the peak of British anti-slavery sentiment rather than the final chapter. Howard Temperley, in a study of abolitionist societies after emancipation, takes the

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<sup>10</sup> S. Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Rice, "Humanity Sold", pp. 405-406.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Age of Revolution*, p. 350.

<sup>13</sup> Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 122-125. For a discussion of Drescher and Davis's differing perspectives see T. C. Holt, 'Explaining Abolition', *Journal of Social History*, 24:2 (1990), pp. 371-378.

defeat of Melbourne's government in 1841 as a high point of organised anti-slavery's influence. However, he also notes that throughout the 1840s the abolitionist movement was riven with divergent opinions. Even the BFASS who were the most prominent abolitionist opponents of sugar duty reduction witnessed a number of splits. Following the proposed reduction of 1841 George Bennett, a member of the BFASS's governing committee, broke cover in asserting his support for free trade and the end of monopoly in the press.<sup>14</sup> Temperley has identified BFASS's failed campaign against the sugar duties as a key point from which popular support for the society, and abolitionist groups in general, began to decline.<sup>15</sup> David Turley, like Temperley, has argued that diversity of opinion among abolitionists was symptomatic of decline, particularly as they lost the West India interest as a coherent opposition to define themselves against.<sup>16</sup> Opponents of sugar duty appeal found themselves up against fellow abolitionists and groups such as the Anti-Corn Law League, who as Simon Morgan has argued, actively positioned themselves as the moral successors to the campaign against slavery and the slave trade.<sup>17</sup> Such interpretations move past viewing repeal of the sugar duties as the result capitalist self-interest or sincere abolitionists thwarted by parliament. However, they ultimately conform to a decline narrative of humanitarianism by binding the fate of anti-slavery's influence to the waning abolitionist societies. By looking beyond these societies recent historiography demonstrates the complexity of anti-slavery belief and action in Victorian Britain. Moving beyond the fractious debates within anti-slavery societies, Huzzey has argued that '[b]oth sides of the sugar contest claimed to be authentic standard-bearers of anti-slavery and prosperity.'<sup>18</sup> Framing the debate over slavery and free trade in such a manner recognises that both opponents and advocates of repeal might appeal to anti-

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<sup>14</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>17</sup> S. Morgan, 'The Anti-Corn Law League and British Anti-Slavery in Transatlantic Perspective, 1838-1846', *The Historical Journal*, 52:1 (2009), pp. 87-107.

<sup>18</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 98.

slavery with a degree of legitimacy. However, this simple binary of for and against free trade itself has to be questioned. The sugar duty debate must be placed in its proper context, specifically that of the parliamentary politics of the 1840s, which were plagued by division on economic, religious, and social policy. Different wings of the Whig and Tory parties could, and did, work together or come apart on a bill-by-bill basis.<sup>19</sup> Free-trade zealots were generally drawn from two separate intellectual streams, the secular utilitarian approach and the evangelical, which converged over a belief in removing “unnatural” government impositions that disrupted either the “natural” function of the market or providence.<sup>20</sup> Anna Gambles has argued for protectionism as ‘alternative fiscal politics for a propertied polity’ that sought to strike a balance between urban/rural or industrial/agrarian interests.<sup>21</sup> As Michael Taylor has demonstrated the imperial aspect of the Conservative political economy had actually been an expression of the economic defence of slavery in the post-emancipation period; the West India interest remained ardent protectionists as they now feared competition with slave sugar.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the sugar duties the thorny issue of slavery further complicated this muddled picture as those who were neither ardent free traders nor protectionists came to terms with a debate that touched upon British anti-slavery, the economy, and social cohesion.

At the same time the sugar duties debate, and broader arguments over free trade, cannot be separated from what Thomas Carlyle termed the “Condition of England” question as the British government were faced with a collapse in living standards in the 1830s and 40s.<sup>23</sup> Industrialisation and mechanisation had produced a great deal of social upheaval and economic uncertainty. This context, alongside stripping back of

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<sup>19</sup> B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 513-524.

<sup>20</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>21</sup> A. Gambles, ‘Rethinking the Politics of Protection: Conservatism and the Corn Laws, 1830-52’, *English Historical Review*, 113(453), pp. 928-952, p. 935.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, ‘Conservative Political Economy’, pp. 973-995, p. 994.

<sup>23</sup> R. Huzzey, ‘Free Trade, Free Labour, and Slave Sugar in Victorian Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, 53:2 (2010), pp. 359-79, pp. 364-366; Hilton, *Mad, Bad, Dangerous*, pp. 573-588.



state responsibility for unemployment through the 1834 New Poor Law, contributed to periodic social protest in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was during this period that Chartists began their agitation for working class political rights, combining political campaigning, petitioning, and monster meetings. Whilst historians have disagreed over whether the movement's aims were essentially political or socio-economic in nature, Chartism and other forms of protest clearly warranted some government response, either through reform or repression.<sup>24</sup> Whilst Corn Law Repeal might be debated in terms of the effect of free trade on wages, sugar was increasingly viewed as a necessity rather than a luxury product.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Disraeli summed up the confused nature of the sugar question when he stated "all considerations mingle in it; not merely commercial, but imperial, philanthropic, religious; confounding and crossing each other."<sup>26</sup> To begin to navigate the complexity of the sugar question then it is imperative to understand why it came to be particularly offensive compared to other products of slave labour.

Sugar's peculiarly offensive status has been invoked as evidence of abolitionist insincerity by both contemporary commentators and historians. A poem in *Punch* describing the 'very well-spread table' of the 'Anti-Slavery Hannibal' is illustrative of this fact. Within this sketch, Hannibal protested that he would not 'Help Brazil of her sugar to rid!' as 'WILBERFORCE, CLARKSON, forbid!' These protests are juxtaposed with Hannibal sipping slave-grown coffee, wearing slave-grown cotton, brandishing a slave-mined copper coin.<sup>27</sup> Historians from Williams to Davis have pointed to the lack of anti-slavery protest over American cotton as the prime example that abolitionists were at best blinkered and at worst self-interested.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Sidney Mintz has pointed to the sugar duty debates as a 'parliamentary high-water mark for

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<sup>24</sup> Hilton, *Mad Bad Dangerous*, pp. 612-622,

<sup>25</sup> Gambles, 'Rethinking the Politics', p. 938; S. W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Anti-Slavery Hannibal', *Punch*, 22 Aug 1846.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, 'Laissez Faire, Sugar and Slavery', pp. 75-79, Davis, *Age of Emancipation*, p. 285.

disingenuousness.’<sup>29</sup> This critique might be fairly applied to members of the West India interest, formerly staunch defenders of British slavery, who sought to maintain protection of their sugar production. However, the BFASS explicitly looked to distance themselves from protectionist voices like Viscount Sandon.<sup>30</sup> Rather than being dismissed out of hand, the argument for sugar as a special case should be taken seriously. To do so one must consider how the commodity was seen to relate to two key issues: suppression of the slave trade and West India Emancipation.

Sugar’s relationship to the slave trade question was tied to the fact that since abolition in 1807 Britain had become increasingly committed to policing the transatlantic trade in slaves. British anti-slavery had first been expressed as condemnation and then agitation against the slave trade, a decision Davis describes as ‘tactical’ but possessing ‘profound ideological meaning.’<sup>31</sup> Whilst there was often a slippage between condemnations of slavery and the slave trade the latter was generally represented as the greater evil. In fact moral condemnation of the slave trade became near universal in Atlantic World diplomacy from the end of the Napoleonic Wars onwards, even as many nations remained illicitly involved.<sup>32</sup> By the 1840s Cuba and Brazil stood as the last remaining new world destinations for African slaves, they were also home to burgeoning sugar economies with the latter in particular undergoing a ‘revolution’ in sugar production.<sup>33</sup> Removing the sugar duties then would give impetus to the slave trade in a way that increased consumption of cotton, tobacco, or coffee would not. Lord Brougham in defending a call to exclude slave sugar from Britain noted that a reduction in the duties charged on foreign copper ores, some of which were mined by Cuban

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<sup>29</sup> Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, *Age of Revolution*, p. 417.

<sup>32</sup> M. Mason, ‘Keeping up Appearances: The International Politics of Slave Trade Abolition in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 66:4 (2009), pp. 809-32, p. 811.

<sup>33</sup> F. W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), pp. 30-39.

slaves, had 'only found employment for one additional vessel' in the slave trade.<sup>34</sup>

Fighting against sugar duty repeal could be viewed as a meaningful continuation of the fight against the slave trade.

There were numerous means of opposing the slave trade some antithetical to free trade, others that chimed with it. Since the abolition of 1807 the British government had become committed to the naval suppression of the slave trade via a squadron deployed off the West Coast of Africa. From the end of the Napoleonic War suppression had also been at the heart of Britain's foreign diplomacy. Suppression was pursued through bi-lateral treaties allowing the search of foreign vessels and making slave trade abolition a condition when recognising newly independent states.<sup>35</sup> Admission of slave sugar might appear to undermine Britain's claims to moral prestige that rested in part on commitment to suppression. This was certainly the point argued by ardent defender of suppression Robert Harry Inglis, an Anglican Tory, during an 1846 debate.<sup>36</sup> However, support for suppression was far from a guarantee of a protectionist outlook. Palmerston, who as foreign secretary was particularly belligerent in his pursuit of naval suppression, became a supporter of repeal and professed to see no contradiction between the policies.<sup>37</sup> Even more counter-intuitively the BFASS, the most stringent opponents of repeal among abolitionists, were opposed to naval suppression largely due to the pacifism of their Quaker leadership.<sup>38</sup> The various positions taken on free trade in sugar related to differing expectations of the British state's responsibility for the slave trade. For Palmerston this responsibility ended with the navy, for others repeal of the sugar duties gave tacit sanction, and impetus, to the slave trade. Huzzey connects the campaign against the sugar duties to later efforts to

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<sup>34</sup> *Hansard*, 27 July 1846, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 88, c. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 81-101.

<sup>36</sup> *Hansard*, 27 July 1846, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 71, cc. 78-81; J. Wolffe, 'Inglis, Sir Robert Harry, second baronet (1786-1855)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter ODNB), (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2004).

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/14406>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>37</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 76.

end naval suppression, both of which causes were championed by radical liberal William Hutt.<sup>39</sup> However, Hutt was not critical of anti-slavery in of itself and to understand his position and that of many other free trade acolytes it is important to understand how the sugar question related to emancipation.

The relationship between the sugar question and emancipation is captured by a clause within the BFASS constitution calling for the 'the adoption of fiscal regulations in favour of free labour.'<sup>40</sup> The society believed it was the British government's responsibility to ensure measures were taken to favour free labour over slave labour. The free labourers in this case were of course the former slaves of the West Indies and Mauritius. The BFASS's insistence on the government's responsibility to protect free labour reflected the campaign Sturge had spearheaded against West Indian apprenticeship. Sturge and other 'moral radicals' had sought to influence policy through the exertion of pressure from without on government, stressing the responsibility of the state rather than the individual.<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that for the BFASS sugar was merely the exception to a general preference for free trade, there was a great deal of overlap in membership of the BFASS and ACLL.<sup>42</sup> Sugar's exceptional status lay in a more 'holistic' view of emancipation which required the British state to help manage the transition to free labour, a belief that was tied up in the missionary work of men like Sturge and William Morgan who looked to transform West Indian society as a whole.<sup>43</sup> Whilst Hall has characterised this missionary attitude as patronising in its conceptualisation of Africans it did at least recognise responsibility on the part of the British state towards former slaves, as opposed to figures like Thomas Macaulay who argued that any obligation had been terminated with the end of

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<sup>39</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 111-113.

<sup>40</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery*, p. 128.

<sup>41</sup> A. Tyrrell, 'The "Moral Radical Party" and the Anglo-Jamaican Campaign for the Abolition of the Negro Apprenticeship System', *The English Historical Review*, 99:392 (1984), pp. 481-502.

<sup>42</sup> Morgan, 'Anti-Corn Law League', p. 88.

<sup>43</sup> Huzzey, 'Free trade, Free Labour', pp. 367-368; Tyrrell, 'Moral Radical', pp. 487-488.

slavery.<sup>44</sup> The resonance of the sugar duties debate then came in part from how different groups conceptualised a world economy where free labour competed with slave labour and what role the state should play. As we shall see for some free-trade zealots state protection could be viewed as anathema to the anti-slavery cause.

The awkward post-emancipation alliance of BFASS, the West India interest, and other protectionists must be considered alongside an earlier tradition of anti-slavery that had seen free trade and free labour as complimentary. Figures such as James Cropper campaigned for a reduction in the sugar duties in the 1820s and also promoted expanded sugar production in India.<sup>45</sup> In the context of the 1820s tariffs protected West Indian slave-owners, whilst penalising supposedly free labour sugar from elsewhere in the Empire. By the late 1830s Cropper and free traders such as Richard Cobden and John Bright were arguing that government protection of the West Indies prevented a fair contest between free and slave labour. John Scoble of the BFASS described this position as 'sophistry' an interpretation echoed by some historians; however there seems little reason to doubt the sincerity of the likes of Cobden and Cropper.<sup>46</sup> As Huzzey has argued free-trade abolitionism was simply representative of a political economy that envisioned a minimalist role for the state in the campaign against slavery and everything else.<sup>47</sup> Such a perspective rested on the assumption that slavery in Cuba or Brazil would eventually come to an end, and that open competition with free labour could hasten this process.

The various different perspectives aired during the sugar duties debate boiled down to a single question: what were the anti-slavery responsibilities of the British state? This was the result of the abolitionist movement's success in framing slavery as a national sin, something which the British people as a whole represented by their government

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<sup>44</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 108, Huzzey, 'Moral Geography', p. 112.

<sup>45</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>46</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>47</sup> Huzzey, 'Free Trade', pp. 378-379.

were responsible for.<sup>48</sup> There were numerous strands of anti-slavery thought competing and combining with each other including hard-line protectionists, free trade apostles, and those who saw sugar as exceptional. Others such as Thomas Fowell Buxton saw the free trade question as somewhat irrelevant, instead pressuring the state into supporting an expedition up the Niger River intended to tackle the slave trade at its source.<sup>49</sup> These were not disagreements over the morality of slavery, but how the problem should be tackled. Importantly, it is worth noting that no one single solution won out. The British government both established free trade in sugar and remained committed to naval suppression.<sup>50</sup> This is the essence of the ‘moral geography’ of anti-slavery a sense of slavery as a national question that the British state had some responsibility to address. The broad consensus reached was that this responsibility ended at Britain’s borders.

Acknowledging the centrality of the British state in the sugar duties debate requires a reassessment of the extent to which anti-slavery politicised consumption. Certainly consumption of slave-produced sugar had played a part in the campaign against both the slave trade and Caribbean slavery. Elizabeth Heyrick’s call to boycott sugar was key in putting immediatism, rather than a gradual end to slavery, on the agenda in the 1820s. As Clare Midgely notes, sugar boycotts challenged the male leadership of the abolitionist movement and added to the pressure on the government.<sup>51</sup> Charlotte Sussman has argued that awareness of sugar’s slave origins was promoted through language that associated sugar itself with revulsion and disgust and drawn explicit

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<sup>48</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>49</sup> H. Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger 1841-1842* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 21-30.

<sup>50</sup> R. Huzzey, ‘Politics of Slave Trade Suppression’ in R. Huzzey and R. Burroughs (eds), *British Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Policies, Practices and Representations of Naval Coercion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> C. Midgely, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 59.

through lines to twentieth century boycott movements.<sup>52</sup> However, this interpretation requires some qualification as prior to emancipation, boycotts of slave grown sugar happened within the confines of empire and a protectionist system. Refusal to consume sugar was aimed at harming the revenues of both slave-owners and the government who sanctioned them. However, in the case of foreign sugars individual boycott only became prominent after the failure to prevent repeal of the sugar duties, with Temperley casting it as a 'last resort' for the likes of BFASS.<sup>53</sup> Whilst some consumers were inspired to abstain from slave-produced goods this individualised approach was secondary to debates over the role played by the state. As we shall see in the next section, individual abstention and a more expansive sense of moral geography was more characteristic of debates over American slavery.

The majority of British complicity with the slave trade escaped wider comment or condemnation, as such it is worth considering sugar's particular resonance through a comparison to another commodity: copper ore. As demonstrated above, many Britons believed the government had a responsibility to end the slave trade and British free labourers were being thrown into direct contest with slave labour. This was of course also true of copper ore imported from Cuba. Britain's copper industry in the nineteenth century had two distinct strands; copper mining and copper smelting. The former saw the raw material of copper ore extracted from mines the majority of which were located in Cornwall, which held a near monopoly on British copper mining up until 1850.<sup>54</sup> Smelting was centred on Swansea, where an ample supply of coal, favourable geographic location, and the innovative 'Welsh process' of mixing copper ores allowed for the production of particularly pure base metal.<sup>55</sup> The success of Swansea smelting

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<sup>52</sup> C. Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 16, pp. 188-205.

<sup>53</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> D. B. Barton, *A History of Copper Mining in Cornwall and Devon* (Truro: D. Bradford Barton, 1968), pp. 45-74.

<sup>55</sup> E. Newell, "'Copperopolis': The Rise and Fall of the Copper Industry in the Swansea District, 1826-1921", *Business History*, 32:3 (1990), pp. 75-97.

and Cornish mining had been linked but a series of tariff reforms in the 1820s saw British ports opened to foreign ores for the first time. The 1827 Customs Act is credited by Edmund Newell as 'opening the door for foreign ore to enter Britain' by exempting ore imported in bond, meaning to be re-exported rather than sold in Britain, from import duties.<sup>56</sup> However, this exemption on foreign ores imported in bond would be removed in 1842 as Peel reduced the duties on copper ore, unwrought copper, and pure copper. Different grades of copper ore were also subject to different duties but in 1848 these duties were reduced to 1s per ton of ore, having been as high as £6 6s 0d for ore with less than 20% copper content previously.<sup>57</sup> The British market would only be fully opened to foreign ores in 1848, and the duties would be swept away alongside those on sugar in 1853. Arguably, the British state's increasing sanction of the import of slave-mined copper had the potential to become a cause which abolitionists could rally round. However, abolitionist comment on the copper duties question was muted. The majority of abolitionist comment on copper ore actually related to the question of British ownership of Cuban copper mines, such as the Royal Copper Mines of El Cobre, first promoted in 1835.<sup>58</sup> Discussion of the import of slave copper barley registered among abolitionists at the 1840 convention; though Joseph Price, a Welsh delegate, who drew attention to the fact that most copper ore was re-exported.<sup>59</sup> In parliament the majority of comment on copper came from free traders that adverted to the admission of copper as evidence of protectionist hypocrisy on the slavery issue. Lord John Russell was typical when he attacked Peel over a reduction in copper duties but not in that of sugar noting that the 'two cases were exactly analogous.'<sup>60</sup> If anything copper mining was worse as 'slaves [were] subjected to the hardest and most

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, pp. 79-80.

<sup>57</sup> L. Valenzuela, 'Challenges to the British Copper Smelting Industry in the World Market 1840-1860', *Journal of European Economic History*, 19:3 (1990), pp. 657-87, p. 674.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, 'El Cobre', pp. 114-116.

<sup>59</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 518.

<sup>60</sup> *Hansard*, 18 Apr 1842, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 62, cc. 650-651.



oppressive kind of labour'.<sup>61</sup> Copper was for the most part a way to needle opponents of reducing the sugar duties and prominent anti-slavery voices in parliament had little to say on the issue.

If the question of copper duties did little to move Parliament or Exeter Hall in Cornwall itself they proved far more controversial. When Sir Richard Hussey Vivian, MP for East Cornwall, defended a reduction in the Sugar Duties on the grounds that 'it is in fact, splitting hairs, to say that you will not import sugar from Brazil, whilst you import ... copper ore from Cuba' he was airing a common argument.<sup>62</sup> However an editorial in the *Cornwall Royal Gazette* took aim at Hussey Vivian's support for a reduction in duties on foreign ores views linking them to pecuniary interest and noting that 'Sir Hussey it would seem, prefers the *cheap* ... Copper Ore, in despite of his early hatred for slavery.'<sup>63</sup> Vivian was an inactive partner in a firm of copper manufacturers, Vivian and Sons, who imported ores from Cuba.<sup>64</sup> Protests over the import of slave copper were provincial in nature emanating from Cornish mining interests. The *Royal Cornwall Gazette's* attack on Sir Hussey Vivian also poured scorn on William Huskisson, architect of the 1820s reforms and at this point deceased for over a decade, claiming that 'Cornwall has seen all her interests either injured or jeopardised by the Free trade system, which the government has long secretly encouraged'.<sup>65</sup> As early as 1830 Cornish mining interests had protested to parliament about the admission of foreign ores.<sup>66</sup> This predated the first shipment of Cuban ore, which landed in Swansea in 1831 and yielded double the amount of metallic copper expected from Cornish ores.<sup>67</sup> In the case of copper ore then, it appears anti-slavery had become grafted onto an older

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Hansard*, 14 May 1841, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 58, cc. 428-429.

<sup>63</sup> *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, 28 May 1841.

<sup>64</sup> R. H. Vetch, rev. J. Lunt, 'Vivian, Sir Robert John Hussey (1802-1887)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28342>, accessed 18 May 2017]; R. R. Toomey, *Vivian and Sons, 1809-1924: A Study of the Firm in the Copper and Related Industries* (London: Garland Publishing, 1985).

<sup>65</sup> *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, 28 May 1841.

<sup>66</sup> Valenzuela, 'Challenges to the British Copper Smelting Industry', p. 675.

<sup>67</sup> C. Evans, 'El Cobre', p. 113.

conflict, as Cornish mining interests found a new weapon in what they viewed as a struggle against the threat of foreign competition

Complicity with slavery prompted the widest debate when it intersected with other questions perceived to be of national importance. However, the case of copper ore demonstrates that even small-scale disputes were inflected with anti-slavery. Similarly, the most provincial of concerns could produce expansive moral geographies as in the case of Joseph Treffry who in protesting copper duty reduction stated that Cuban ships brought copper ore to Britain's shores and in return received 'goods, perhaps, they can barter on the Coast of Africa for the very Slaves required in working the Foreign Mines even to the starvation of the British Miner at home!' <sup>68</sup> Treffry tied together British ownership of Cuban mines, slave mining of coppers, and the re-export of copper made goods into the slave trade. The moral responsibility of the British state was certainly limited by its borders but individuals were often more expansive in their conceptualisation of responsibility for slavery. Treffry in many ways mapped out a supply chain of slavery in which British capital intervened at many stages. Such an expansive moral geography might be interpreted at first glance as support for Thomas Haskell's argument that involvement in transnational markets expanded humanitarian horizons.<sup>69</sup> Treffry's concerns however were more parochial; as owner of Fowey Consols, the second largest copper mine in Cornwall, his livelihood was directly threatened by free trade.<sup>70</sup> Whilst it is impossible to know if Treffry's anti-slavery declarations were genuine he clearly recognised the political utility of framing the debate between free trade and protection in such terms. Anti-slavery would also be invoked by an 1842 petition to Queen Victoria by 'Cornish miners', which protested at

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<sup>68</sup> *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, 17 July 1840.

<sup>69</sup> Haskell, 'Capitalism and Humanitarian Sensibility Part 1', p. 135.

<sup>70</sup> Barton, *Copper Mining*, p. 58; J. Simmons, rev. E. Newell, 'Treffry, Joseph Thomas (bap. 1782, d. 1850)' *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/38076>, accessed 10 July 2017]

mining ventures overseas.<sup>71</sup> The protectionist local press portrayed free trade in ore as a contest between Cornish miners and Cuban slaves, though by the late 1840s free labour mining in Australia and Chile appeared to pose as great a threat.<sup>72</sup> Self-interest and fears for the local economy could lead to an expansive moral geography, but ultimately the burden still fell upon the state to take action.

The question of free trade versus protection was not simply a question of the relationship between state and market, rather it was a debate suffused with moral concerns frequently expressed in spatial terms. The relationship between free trade and anti-slavery is best conceptualised as a debate over the role the British state should play in opposing the slave trade. This was the question at the heart of the struggle over the sugar duties. For the opponents of repeal the British state was variously responsible for ending of the slave trade, protecting the interests of the newly free Caribbean population, or the profit margins of their former masters. Proponents of free trade were made up both of those who had faith in the ability of free labour to outperform slave labour, and those like Thomas Macaulay who believed that the British state's responsibility for slavery ended with its diplomatic and naval efforts against the transatlantic trade. Britain's relationship to the slave societies of Brazil and Cuba could be viewed as both economic competitor and providing a moral example. In the case of sugar these debates were further muddled by domestic concerns over public order, which elevated the sugar question to a debate of national importance. At the state level, anti-slavery was always likely to be limited by political boundaries and the parliamentary consensus was that British responsibility ended with the enforcement of suppression. Whilst the anti-slavery responsibilities of the state were hotly debated in the debate over the sugar duties British capital and consumers were rarely moralised in the same way. As we shall see, the debate over American slavery

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<sup>71</sup> *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, 29 Apr 1842.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*; *Cornwall Royal Gazette*, 28 May 1841.

put greater emphasis on the moral responsibility of individuals, but was similarly characterised by the pluralism of British anti-slavery.

### The Problem of Anti-Slavery and the United States

British opinion on American slavery has long been a point of debate for historians. The United States was at the forefront of anti-slavery concern within Britain, not least due to the fact that abolitionists, many of them fugitive or former slaves, traversed the Atlantic to rally support. However, this journey was also made by millions of bales of slave-grown cotton, a thread that bound British industry to a reviled system of oppression. This apparent contradiction came to a head with the outbreak of the American Civil War. In this section I survey the historiography of British attitudes towards American slavery. I argue that as in the case of the sugar duties Britons had myriad solutions to the problem of American slavery, ranging from transatlantic cooperation to pragmatic justification. However, British comment on America was united in its condemnation of slavery in principle, a fact that belies attempts to paint particular classes, cities, or the nation as a whole as adherents to the Confederate or Union cause. Whilst the economic links between Britain and American slavery were a point of contestation reliance upon slave-grown cotton was ultimately reconciled with British commitment to anti-slavery.

As with the debates surrounding free trade in sugar it is best to conceptualise the problem of anti-slavery and trade with the United States as operating on a number of different levels. In fact, one might conceptualise of two contradictory forms of transatlantic co-operation in relation to American slavery. Firstly, Lancashire mill owners and Southern plantation owners were bound together in a web of connections centred on the credit relations of Liverpool merchants, a transatlantic collaboration that, as Sven Beckert has demonstrated, allowed both American slavery and British

industry to thrive.<sup>73</sup> At the same time historians have stressed the essentially transnational character of American anti-slavery as activists, authors, and former slaves criss-crossed the Atlantic with the goal of constructing an imagined geography that isolated American slave-owners behind a 'moral cordon'.<sup>74</sup> Finally, at the state level America's internal slave system lay beyond the remit of British government intervention. The United States could be viewed from multiple perspectives; both as a market for exports and potential rival, as well as a consistent stumbling block to suppression of the slave trade. Slavery in the American South fell outside the moral responsibility of the British state, but large numbers of British subjects were connected in some way to the American slave system. A review of the literature on Anglo-American relations reveals how these two forms of transatlantic co-operation could coexist. Finally, I will demonstrate how during the American Civil War both Union and Confederacy had to take British anti-slavery into account as they competed for popular, diplomatic, and economic support.

From the late eighteenth century to the advent of the American Civil War the economies of the United States and Britain were tied to one another by slave-grown cotton. Recent work has focused on how cotton bound together European wage labour and the Southern plantation system.<sup>75</sup> American cotton first arrived on British shores in 1795 at a point when a series of technological innovations had allowed Lancashire based manufacturers to compete with Indian textile production for the first time.<sup>76</sup> Beckert argues that these innovations were the result of imperial networks specifically focusing on the figure of Samuel Greg, whose links to the West Indies provided a source of both cotton and credit.<sup>77</sup> However, it was connections with the slave society of the United States that would come to dominate the British market. Grown and picked by

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<sup>73</sup> Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 202-207.

<sup>74</sup> Blakett, *Antislavery Wall*, pp. 3-46.

<sup>75</sup> As well as Beckert, see G. Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 187-210.

<sup>76</sup> Riello, *Cotton*, pp. 211-237.

<sup>77</sup> Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 56-62.

slave labourers in the American South, cotton was then shipped to Liverpool where it moved through the hands of several different merchants and brokers before making its way into Lancashire's textile factories. For Beckert Liverpool merchants were the key figures whose 'genius' lay in the 'ability to combine ingredients often considered antagonistic: wage labor and slavery, industrialization and deindustrialization, free trade and empire, violence and contract'.<sup>78</sup>

From Beckert's perspective the expansion of Southern slavery emerges as an Anglo-American joint venture built upon the credit provided by Liverpool merchants, both to Lancashire manufacturers and Southern slave-owners. The interdependence of British industry and American slavery was acknowledged by contemporaries. Addressing the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention the New York abolitionist Harry Brewster Stanton noted '[a]s cotton rises or falls in Liverpool, so it not only the money market, but the slavery of America.'<sup>79</sup> Recognition of this fact arguably placed some burden on Britons to take action, but as we shall see the burden of responsibility for slavery was generally seen to lie with the consumer rather than the state. The dominance of American cotton would only be decisively ended through political decisions and the military exigencies of the American Civil War. Egyptian and Brazilian cotton production boomed during the war years and more global cotton production characterised by debt bondage would emerge in the late nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> The importance of slave grown cotton to British industry cannot be disputed, but as I will demonstrate it did not preclude anti-slavery condemnation of the United States.

Whilst the debate over the sugar duties had revolved around the anti-slavery responsibilities of the British state this was not the case with American cotton. Slavery within the United States lay beyond the political reach of a British state reticent to

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200.

<sup>79</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 421.

<sup>80</sup> Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 279-307.

interfere in the internal politics of other, as they saw it, “civilized” states.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, America had outlawed participation in the transatlantic slave trade in 1808. Unlike sugar the import of slave-grown cotton could not be seen as in conflict with Britain’s legal and naval efforts against the slave trade. Whilst there was a thriving trade in enslaved people within the United States this was again conceptualised as internal matter in which the British state had little right to intervene.<sup>82</sup> Again, unlike the cases of sugar or copper, the domination of the British market by American cotton also meant that the question of protectionism versus free trade was not an issue.

American slaves were not generally perceived as being in direct competition with British subjects. Rather as the economist John T. Danson stated in 1857 “as far as yet appears [cotton] must continue to be grown, chiefly by slave-labour.”<sup>83</sup> Whilst not all observers were so fatalistic there was little sense that the British government could actively effect American slavery. The majority of British subjects saw American slavery as lying outside both their personal moral geographies and that of the government.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, American abolitionists were for the most part patriots and proud democrats who would have scorned internal interference from a foreign government.<sup>85</sup> A discussion of American abolitionist activity in Britain reveals that they generally hoped to gain the support of institutions and individuals rather than the state.

The United States dominated the attention of both organised and popular anti-slavery in the years between the end of apprenticeship and the American Civil War. In the antebellum period American abolitionists of all stripes came to Britain intent on proselytising for their particular approach to ending the peculiar institution. Whilst

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<sup>81</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> For the antebellum American slave trade see: M. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1996); W. Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); C. Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, p. 84, ff. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Huzzey, ‘Moral Geography’, pp. 123-124.

<sup>85</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 214.

there was a great deal of disagreement among abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic a sense of co-operation was more successfully forged here than in any other transnational context.<sup>86</sup> David Turley notes that Anglo-American collaboration amongst abolitionists was at its peak in the 1830s and 1840s and that it formed part of a larger movement of middle class internationalism.<sup>87</sup> As I will demonstrate the nature of Anglo-American anti-slavery rarely required serious investigation of British complicity in American slavery.

American abolitionism was as fragmented as its British counterpart with anti-slavery societies divided both territorially and tactically in the American North. The biggest rupture was between those who sought to secure emancipation via political means and the more radical wing who rejected the American constitution and argued that the Northern states should secede from the Union.<sup>88</sup> The 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention transferred these conflicts transferred to London and highlighted the fragmented nature of both British and American anti-slavery. The Convention is famed for a dispute over the refusal to allow female representatives among the Garissonian delegation to take seats on the Convention floor, reflecting the practice of distinct British anti-slavery societies for men and women. The fallout of this event would see British abolitionists choose sides between William Garrison's Antislavery Society and Lewis Tappan's American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. According to both Turley and Temperley endorsing either side appeared to rest upon personal preference for George Thompson, allied to the former, or Joseph Sturge, friend of the latter.<sup>89</sup> For all the conflict within the abolitionist movement both groups had broadly the same aim in their campaigning in Britain; namely to publicise the horrors of American slavery.

Whether the majority of the British public understood, or cared about, the finer points

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<sup>86</sup> See Martje Janse on the failure of British abolitionists in the Netherlands in M. Janse, "Holland as Little England"? British Anti-Slavery and the Continental Abolitionist Movement in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 229 (2015), pp. 123-160.

<sup>87</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>88</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 210-211; Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery*, pp. 219-221.



of difference between American abolitionists is more doubtful, as can be demonstrated by a discussion of the role of black Americans in transatlantic abolitionism.

Black Americans, many of them former slaves, were vitally important in disseminating information about American slavery. In the two decades before the American Civil War hundreds of black Americans crossed the Atlantic. Whilst individuals such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, or William and Ellen Craft were often sponsored by specific abolitionist groups they generally succeeded in providing a united front in their condemnation of American slavery, providing what Richard Blackett has called a 'third way' in transatlantic anti-slavery.<sup>90</sup> Black Americans worked across ideological boundaries to both inform British audiences of the horrors of American slavery and, more crucially, to transmit a message of moral condemnation back across the Atlantic. Whilst black Americans gave talks almost everywhere in Britain it was the American audience that was key. They hoped to project an image of a world where, as Douglass put it, the American slave-owner could not travel without being "looked down upon as a man-stealing, cradle-robbing, and women-stripping monster, and he might see reproof and detestation on every hand."<sup>91</sup> For black Americans the positive reception received in Britain was a means of piercing American claims to moral superiority, as were the annual celebrations of Caribbean emancipation held within the United States in opposition to Independence Day.<sup>92</sup> British anti-slavery sentiment was perceived to have rhetorical value, though small financial and fundraising contributions were also made to the cause.<sup>93</sup> However, American abolitionists did engage in some campaigns where British subjects could take a more active role.

The desire of American abolitionists to isolate slave-owners found particular expression in campaigns against spiritual rather than economic ties with slave-owners.

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<sup>90</sup> Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, p. 203.

<sup>91</sup> Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> J. Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 142-143.

<sup>93</sup> Turley, *English Antislavery*, p. 206.

The desire to morally isolate American slave-owners lay at the heart of the ‘Send Back the Money’ campaign, which saw abolitionists rail against the Scottish Free Church’s receipt of donations from Southern slave-owners.<sup>94</sup> This controversy is known for the prominent role played by Garrisonians, though as Turley notes the Glasgow Emancipation Society distributed pamphlets on the controversy written by Lewis Tappan.<sup>95</sup> ‘Send Back the Money’ was part of a wider effort to encourage religious condemnation of slave-owners. The 1840s saw attempts to foster international collaboration between Evangelical churches through the formation of the Evangelical Alliance in London in 1846. The Alliance’s proposed admission of slave-owning Southern churches was protested by a ‘monster gathering’ organised by the Garrisonian Anti-Slavery League.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Irish abolitionists would encourage a rejection of famine relief raised by Southern churches in the late 1840s.<sup>97</sup> The logic behind such moves was that religious fellowship and acceptance of charity gave moral sanction to slave-owners. As such whilst Britons were pressured to renounce ties to American slavery it was an audience of slave-owners on the other side of the Atlantic that remained of greater concern to abolitionists.

Both the “Send the Money Back” and Evangelical Alliance campaigns failed in their attempts to force repudiation of American slave-owners. Leaders of the Free Church such as Thomas Chalmers and William Candlish argued that the Church could not interfere with a “civil and political institution”; these letters were circulated in the American South and undermined the attempts at moral suasion anticipated by abolitionists.<sup>98</sup> The focus on moral suasion among transatlantic abolitionists, may well explain why Britons were more likely to be chastised for their religious than economic

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<sup>94</sup> For a narrative account of the campaign see I. Martin, *Send Back the Money: the Free Church of Scotland and American Slavery* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 210.

<sup>96</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 217.

<sup>97</sup> N. Rogers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 287.

<sup>98</sup> Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, p. 89.

links to slave-owners. Ultimately, inciting moral revulsion for slavery was not enough to bring about action. The Free Church maintained that whilst it ‘zealously deplored’ American slavery that did not warrant returning the money, still less breaking ties with American churches.<sup>99</sup> The assertion that slavery was wrong but that it had little to do with religious fellowship in many ways mirrors the various defences offered for commercial involvement with slavery that will be discussed in the rest of this thesis.

When American abolitionists and their British supporters adverted to the economic role Britons played in maintaining Southern slavery they hoped to promote alternative economies. The most prominent of these was the Free Produce Movement, which urged British consumers and producers to shun American cotton in favour of free labour alternatives. Henry Highland Garnet, a former slave and key proponent of the movement, addressed audiences across Britain and explicitly linked cotton consumption to the increase in political power among slave-owners.<sup>100</sup> Work on the Free Produce Movement has generally focused on the prominent role of Quakerism in facilitating the transatlantic collaboration involved.<sup>101</sup> Joseph Sturge, Elihu Burritt, and Anna and George Richardson were among the prominent Quakers who promoted the cause, but in material terms very little free labour cotton was procured. At the movement’s peak only a few hundred bales of free labour cotton were imported each year compared to the two million from the American South.<sup>102</sup> Despite the Free Produce Movement’s lack of success, the logic behind boycott and abstention of American cotton deserves further consideration as it indicates the degree to which

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<sup>99</sup> Martin, *Send the Money Back*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>100</sup> Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, p. 120.

<sup>101</sup> L. Billington, ‘British Humanitarians and American cotton, 1840-1860’, *Journal of American Studies*, 11:3 (1977), pp. 313-344; E. A. O’Donnell, ‘“There’s Death in the Pot”: The British Free Produce Movement and the Religious Society of Friends with Particular Reference to the North-East of England’, *Quaker Studies*, 13:2 (2009), pp. 184-204; A. V. Kett, ‘Quaker Women and Anti-Slavery Activism: Eleanor Clark and the Free Labour Cotton Depot in Street’, *Quaker Studies*, 19:1 (2014), pp. 137-156.

<sup>102</sup> Billington, ‘British Humanitarians’, p. 314.

responsibility for American slavery was placed on the individual, and specifically the consumer.

One of the most striking aspects of the Free Produce Movement was its focus on the consumer rather than producers, or the capital that backed them, as the target of moralising. The Free Produce Movement was as much about personal culpability as attempting to provide a genuine alternative to slave labour. Anna Richardson, in a pamphlet promoting free produce, explicitly stated was a “self-cleansing measure from voluntary participation in the crime of slavery.”<sup>103</sup> Whilst Henry Highland Garnet envisioned that the movement through public opinion influence ‘all the great firms who supplied the country’ the practical aspects of the Free Produce Movement were very limited.<sup>104</sup> The movement contracted with a couple of Nottingham and Manchester textile firms to produce goods using cotton from free labour producers in both America and India, but most activities focused on propaganda through pamphleteering and the publication of a journal *The Non-Slaveholder*.<sup>105</sup> However, it was the practical difficulties of acquiring free-labour cotton that proved a frequent point of criticism. Richard Cobden whilst attending a breakfast with Free Produce advocates Joseph Sturge and Harriet Beecher Stowe stressed that ‘you cannot distinguish the free-grown cotton product; you will be overwhelmed by counterfeits.’<sup>106</sup> A focus on the consumer rather than the role of the British state or industrialists suggests that the Free Produce Movement was more about individual culpability than earlier boycotts that had moralised government policy on slave produced goods. Individuals were clearly capable of developing expansive sense of moral responsibility for their own consumption habits, particularly when they were engaged in transnational networks such as those fostered by Quakerism. However, the Free Produce Movement is a

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in O'Donnell, “‘There’s Death in the Pot”, p. 190.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

<sup>105</sup> Billington, ‘British Humanitarians’, p. 322.

<sup>106</sup> J. S. Van Why, E. French (eds), C. Beecher, *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Europe: The Journal of Charles Beecher* (Hartford: The Stowe-Day Foundation, 1986), p. 119.,

testament of the inability to extend this sense of personal responsibility outside of a relatively small group within Britain itself. Ultimately, as Louis Billington concluded the movement is best understood as ‘part of that wider Anglo-American reform movement which believed in the utility of moral absolutes’.<sup>107</sup>

Not all attempts to find alternatives to slave-grown cotton focused solely on the consumer. There were numerous antebellum projects that sought to find new arenas of cotton production, particularly in India and Africa. For example the British India Society (BIS) whose platform ‘explicitly link[ed] a series of geographically distinct interests: Indian reform, the abolition of American slavery and British prosperity.’<sup>108</sup> Rather than focusing on abstention those involved in the BIS, including George Thompson, argued that British commercial expansion could go hand in hand with anti-slavery. Advocates of Free Trade claimed that the fates of American slaves, India’s poor, and the British working-class were intertwined, arguing that Corn Law repeal would see more bread and less cotton imported from the US with India taking up the slack.<sup>109</sup> Whilst these interests could coalesce in theory the practice proved more dubious. The East India Company attempted to expand cotton production by hiring American plantation overseers in a bold, and ultimately doomed, attempt at transferring expertise.<sup>110</sup> Christopher Florio argues that ‘seemingly everyone viewed the overseers’ endeavour as an antislavery effort, because Indian cotton, by definition was not slave-grown American cotton.’<sup>111</sup> This is despite the fact that the American overseers tried, and failed, to implement the violent form of labour management found on a Southern plantation. Clearly, anti-slavery could produce a moral geography that was at once

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<sup>107</sup> Billington, ‘British Humanitarians’, p. 334.

<sup>108</sup> Z. Laidlaw, “Justice to India – Prosperity to England – Freedom to the Slave!” Humanitarian and Moral Reform Campaigns on India, Aborigines and American Slavery’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 22:2 (2012), pp. 299-324, p. 313.

<sup>109</sup> *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, 22 Aug 1840.

<sup>110</sup> C. M. Florio, ‘From Poverty to Slavery: Abolitionists, Overseers, and the Global Struggle for Labor in India’, *The Journal of American History*, 102:4 (2016), pp. 1005-1024; Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>111</sup> Florio, ‘From Poverty to Slavery’, p. 1018.

expansive in scope, but blinkered in its acceptance of a strict divide between free and enslaved labour. The utility of professed anti-slavery intentions to justify all manner of abuses will be considered at length throughout this thesis.

A focus on initiatives such as the BIS allows us to collapse the binary between moral reformers and hard-nosed business interests. This can be pushed further by considering how anti-slavery shaped the economic decisions made by those interested in the cotton economy. Beckert has argued that the most important factor in motivating British manufacturers to consider Indian and Egyptian cotton production was concerns over the perceived instability of slavery. Whilst Beckert credits 'forward-looking manufacturers' in the Manchester Chamber of Commerce for lobbying the government for a free labour alternative, there is little sense of how this idea of slavery as untenable in the long-term was developed.<sup>112</sup> Jay Sexton has demonstrated how commercial and moral concerns muddled when it came to financial dealings with the US. A reticence on the part of British financiers to extend credit to Southern states is attributed not only to their land speculation that led to an 1837 financial crisis, but also to the morally deleterious effects of slave-owning.<sup>113</sup> This concern over the long-term viability of slave economies can only be properly understood by acknowledging that much of the broader discussion of American slavery emanated from abolitionists and that Britain's anti-slavery culture helped shape attitudes towards America's slave economy.

Rather than assessing the practical effects of campaigns such as the Free Produce Movement or the BIS's plans for India it is worth considering how successfully a particular image of American slavery was conveyed to a British audience. The wild success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as well as its many imitators, meant a negative depiction of Southern slavery, which already existed within British society, was further strengthened and conveyed to vast swathes of the British

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<sup>112</sup> Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 123-127.

<sup>113</sup> J. Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era 1837-1873* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 69.

public.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, Black abolitionists succeeded in presenting themselves as ‘the bona fide representatives of millions of oppressed human beings whom they successfully portrayed as the pariahs of American society.’<sup>115</sup> Such representations of slavery arguably succeeded in transmitting the American ‘anti-slavery impulse’ across the Atlantic.<sup>116</sup> However, whilst the majority of Britons might be convinced of American slavery’s immorality this did not translate to a unified response.

Many Britons viewed American slavery through the lens of British emancipation. Reviews of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the conservative press condemned what they perceived as a rash call for immediate emancipation.<sup>117</sup> Chapter four of this thesis will discuss the legacy of Britain’s gradualist approach to emancipation in dealing with British slave-owners, but it also played an important role in dictating attitudes towards slavery in the United States. Richard Blackett has also argued that anti-black racism had become more prevalent among Britons by the 1850s.<sup>118</sup> However, it might be fairer to argue that crude racial thinking and opposition to slavery had rarely been mutually exclusive in Britain. Ryan Hanley has recently demonstrated evidence of working class racism as early as the 1820s.<sup>119</sup> As in the case of the sugar duties debates British attitudes towards American slavery are probably best conceptualised as unified in condemnation, but plural in their response. It is clear that by the outbreak of the American Civil War Britain’s relationship to the United States and Southern slavery was far from straightforward. The antebellum period had seen thousands of Britons become economically dependent on the cotton economy, though doubts over the sustainability of the slave-system had crept into the minds of some industrialists. At the same time abolitionists and the popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had fixed an

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<sup>114</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>115</sup> Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, p. 195.

<sup>116</sup> J. L. Huston, ‘The Experiential Basis of the Northern Antislavery Impulse’, *The Journal of Southern History*, 56:4 (1990), pp. 609-640, p. 615.

<sup>117</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 25.

<sup>118</sup> Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, p. 159.

<sup>119</sup> R. Hanley, ‘Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814-1833’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), pp. 103-123.

overwhelmingly negative view of slavery in the minds of the majority of Britons. Secession would bring these various strands together as Union and Confederacy competed for diplomatic, economic, and popular support in Britain. Here the issue of slavery would be key and British condemnation of the South's peculiar institution, publicly at least, remained consistent throughout. However, this opposition to slavery did not translate simply into full-fledged support for the North, a fact that can be explained by once again recognising the diversity of anti-slavery opinion within Britain.

The historiography of Britain and the American Civil War has generally focused on identifying support for either side within specific classes or geographic regions. Scholarship has been divided into a 'traditional' interpretation and a 'revisionist' critique, both of which have laid particular stress on the opinions of the working classes towards the conflict. The traditional position, as first expressed by E. D. Adams and later restated by Philip Foner, held that the 'British aristocracy, the upper-middle class and political conservatives were solidly pro-South, the lower-middle and working classes were firmly pro-North.'<sup>120</sup> The revisionist position, most clearly articulated by Mary Ellison, challenged this view by arguing that economic factors and scepticism of Northern imperialism played a key role in fostering Confederate support amongst Lancashire's working classes.<sup>121</sup> More recent works by Duncan Campbell and Richard Blackett have further complicated this revisionist trend, but have offered differing conclusions on the nature of public opinion. Campbell argues that 'most English observers, irrespective of class, wished to remain neutral in the struggle and distrusted (and even disliked) both sides.'<sup>122</sup> Blackett meanwhile sought to interrogate Ellison's contentions about Lancashire cotton workers as well as applying it to other areas within Britain, ultimately concluding that 'political creed' was a key factor in

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<sup>120</sup> D. A. Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), p. 2; E. D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (London, 1925); P. S. Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981).

<sup>121</sup> M. Ellison, *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>122</sup> Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, p. 10.



determining opinions on the conflict.<sup>123</sup> Blackett's investigation of membership lists from Pro-Union or Confederate societies does suggest a class or religious element did help determine individual support.<sup>124</sup> Whilst issues can be taken with Campbell's definition of public opinion his analysis does appear to capture the British state's official position towards the war, in which anti-slavery was only one factor.<sup>125</sup>

The British government's official position on the American Civil War was one of neutrality, though recognition of the Confederacy as an independent state was considered. Specifically, in 1862 the Palmerston administration considered joining France in an offer of mediation, which following early Confederate military victories would have almost certainly resulted in recognition of the right to secede.<sup>126</sup> The late 1830s debate over Texan independence can help to demonstrate how such a position might be reconciled with an official commitment to anti-slavery. Both British and American abolitionists had campaigned for the British government to make emancipation a condition of recognising secession from Mexico. Amongst those abolitionists linked to the BFASS there was hope that Texas might operate like Canada as a safe haven for runaway slaves and a pamphlet by John Scoble argued that emancipation should be a condition of British recognition.<sup>127</sup> However, as discussed above the British government's main anti-slavery priority was suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, and in the case of Texas to fend off annexation to the United States. As such, a slave trade suppression treaty was the price of recognition as granted in 1840. Ironically, Texan slave-owners exploited calls for emancipation from abolitionists through misrepresenting the threat of British anti-slavery imperialism to

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<sup>123</sup> R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), pp. 1-6, p. 23.

<sup>124</sup> Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>125</sup> R. J. M. Blackett, review of D. A. Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003) in *The Journal of Southern History*, 71:1 (2005), pp. 162-164.

<sup>126</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 150.

<sup>127</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 199-201.

secure annexation to the United States.<sup>128</sup> The same logic applied to the British government's attitude towards the American Civil War, whilst an independent Confederacy would maintain slavery its government was happy to commit to outlawing the slave trade.

Serious consideration of Confederate recognition occurred in the context of the fraught diplomatic relationship between the Union and the British government. The idea that the United States government should be considered opponents of slavery seemed an odd proposition to a British government who had butted heads with numerous administrations over issues relating to slavery and the slave trade. The right of British naval ships to search American vessels suspected of involvement in the slave trade had been bitterly contested as had Britain's free soil policy in the West Indies and Canada, as well as fears that an expansionist US might set its sights on annexing the latter.<sup>129</sup> American foreign policy in the antebellum period had been dominated by Southern slave apologists such as Duff Green, President John Tyler's unofficial emissary to Britain.<sup>130</sup> Whilst the emergence of a Republican government represented a shift away from this foreign policy, many Britons remained deeply sceptical of the Union's position on slavery and of Abraham Lincoln, who was seen as an unimpressive figure.<sup>131</sup> Scepticism about the United States's anti-slavery credentials was compounded by early actions during the war where a cash starved federal government 'dramatically increased customs duties' through the institution of the Morrill Tariff.<sup>132</sup> This protectionist measure sat ill with a British government committed to the promotion of free trade and relations deteriorated further when Union officers boarded a British ship, *The Trent*, arresting Confederate commissioners James Mason

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 203, Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>129</sup> Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 21-22, pp. 28-34.

<sup>130</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 53-54. For the Slave owning interest in American foreign policy see M. Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>131</sup> L. Goldman, 'A Total Misconception' in R. Carwardine, J. Sexton (eds), *The Global Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 112-113.

<sup>132</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 82.

and John Slidell. The ‘*Trent affair*’ almost led to open hostilities between the Union and Britain, with war only averted following the release of Mason and Slidell alongside a begrudging apology from Secretary of State William Seward.<sup>133</sup> The British government viewed both Union and Confederacy with a great deal of suspicion. British commitment to anti-slavery did not necessitate alliance with either side. However, diplomatic thinking did not exist in a bubble and we must also consider the way in which both sides attempted to cultivate wider support in Britain, a process in which British attitudes toward slavery played a key role.

Throughout the Civil War, both Union and Confederacy jockeyed for support within Britain. The ‘public diplomacy’, as Don Doyle terms it, of Union and Confederacy operated at different levels as both sides hired journalists, lobbied politicians and relied upon sympathetic Britons to promote their cause.<sup>134</sup> In this case, British anti-slavery was a problem that both North and South had to contend with in different ways. In the early years of the war advocates of the Union, including John Bright, had to explain the reticence on the part of the Lincoln administration to frame the war as one for emancipation.<sup>135</sup> Blackett notes the difficulty of making such a case in light of years of Garrisonians arguing for Northern disunion with abolitionists such as James Haughton asking why, if Southerners wanted to secede, not let them?<sup>136</sup> Also whilst Union supporters may have viewed the United States as ‘an imperfect but viable model of society based on universal principles of natural rights’ many Britons were more inclined to view democratic projects with a great deal of scepticism.<sup>137</sup> If, as Lawrence Goldman has argued, the Union had to contend with a British public who ‘were essentially ill-informed and ignorant of American affairs’ they also had to convince a

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 104; Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 61-95.

<sup>134</sup> D. H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), pp. 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, pp. 145-149.

<sup>136</sup> Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 18.

<sup>137</sup> Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, p. 10.

public who were sceptical of war as a means of achieving anti-slavery ends.<sup>138</sup> Even Lincoln's emancipation proclamation was viewed in some quarters as a cynical move since a gradualist model of emancipation was favoured by many Britons and the violence of the Civil War appeared at odds with this.<sup>139</sup> Ultimately, for the Union the problem of British anti-slavery was only reconciled when the tide on the battlefield had turned decisively in their favour. When, in 1867, Lord John Russell praised the shared heritage and, now, opposition to slavery of Britain and the United States, he elided the difficulties the Union had faced in positioning itself as an authentic standard bearer of anti-slavery.<sup>140</sup>

British anti-slavery provided a different set of problems for Southern public diplomacy. For some advocates of the Confederacy slavery was an issue that should be played down at all costs. Some Southerners depicted the conflict a war for self-determination between an agrarian South and an imperialistic, industrial North.<sup>141</sup> Liverpool merchant James Spence wrote a series of articles for *The Times* and a book, *The American Union*, which argued for the South as Britain's natural ally.<sup>142</sup> Certainly some British subjects, such as the geologist Charles Lyell who travelled to the Southern states, were convinced by the suggestion that an independent Confederacy would emancipate its slaves.<sup>143</sup> However, the South did not speak with one voice and other Confederate agents set about offering an intellectual defence of slavery. Swiss-born journalist Henry Hotze published a weekly journal, *The Index*, propagandising on behalf of the South. Hotze was also among the founders of the London Anthropological Society whose work provided the intellectual grounding for scientific racism and arguments

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<sup>138</sup> Goldman, 'A Total Misconception', p. 115.

<sup>139</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 24.

<sup>140</sup> R. Huzzey, 'Minding Civilisation and Humanity in 1867: A Case Study in British Imperial Culture and Victorian Anti-Slavery', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5, pp. 807-25, p. 813.

<sup>141</sup> Doyle, *The Cause of all Nations*, p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp. 249-251; Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>143</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 26-7.

for a biological lack incapacity for “civilization” among black people.<sup>144</sup> Both approaches recognised that slavery was a diplomatic weakness for the Confederacy that either had to be quashed or rationalised when appealing to the British public.

Whilst both Union and Confederacy had to negotiate British anti-slavery sentiments Civil War diplomacy was also based on the need for commercial and financial support. Jay Sexton in *Debtor Diplomacy* has stressed how both Union and Confederacy required foreign finance for the war effort, and that the South in particular conflated financial and political recognition.<sup>145</sup> The perceived instability of slave economies was cited by British bankers as reason to avoid investment in the South, a belief that continued into the war as the Confederacy struggled to attract support from the City of London. Anti-slavery shaped what Britons knew about the Southern slave system and this clearly had some influence in shaping economic attitudes towards the Confederacy. In the early years of the war the Confederate government had hoped to strong arm Britain into recognition through withholding cotton. The miserable failure of Confederate attempts to win support via withholding cotton exports saw a shift to seeking finance for a large government loan through the sale of cotton bonds. The Erlanger loan failed to attract widespread support for the Confederacy, with many shares purchased by Southerners in Britain looking for repayment on existing debts.<sup>146</sup> The Confederacy had much greater success in procuring arms and more controversially building ships in Britain.<sup>147</sup> However, economic ties and sympathy should not be conflated with support for slavery. As with other aspects of Southern diplomacy, slavery was a topic best avoided even when working with those who stood to profit through collaboration with the Confederacy.

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<sup>144</sup> Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 41; R. E. Bonner, ‘Slavery, Confederate Diplomacy, and the Racist Mission of Henry Hotze’, *Civil War History*, 51:3 (2005), pp. 288-316.

<sup>145</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 1-16.

<sup>146</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 134-135, pp. 161-165; D. B. Ball, *Financial Failure and Confederate Defeat* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>147</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, p. 145. For a first-hand account of Confederate shipbuilding see the memoir of CSA agent J. D. Bulloch, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe* (New York, G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1884).

Britain's anti-slavery responsibilities to the United States operated on different levels. From the perspective of the British government American slavery, and the internal slave trade lay outside of its moral geography and legislative reach. This was a perspective shared by American abolitionists who did not want foreign intervention, but saw the British government's role as limited to maintaining the free soil status of the West Indies and Canada. Britain could help geographically isolate American slave-owners, and this became a particular concern when recognition of both Texan and later Confederate independence was being considered. The Free Produce Movement sought to place the onus on British consumers as the means of removing economic and moral sanction for slavery. Other projects like that of the BIS looked to the other end of the supply chain for a solution, where the emergence of free labour might bring prosperity to the British and emancipation to America. Each approach expressed a different moral geography, what they shared was both a condemnation of slavery and a belief that its endpoint lay somewhere in the future. That this future end of slavery might conceivably be within an independent Confederate states of course appears odd to a modern-day observer, but as Davis has argued 'antislavery ideology held that the gradual eradication of coerced labour was synonymous with the material and moral progress of humanity as a whole.'<sup>148</sup> Such a belief underpinned the variety of British positions on the American Civil War, and could also justify reliance on American cotton as a temporary measure. The Union's triumph in the American Civil War would solve any lingering conflicts as American slavery ended and the deep scepticism towards Northern motives was quickly forgotten.

### Conclusion

British anti-slavery in the post-emancipation period must be understood as heterogeneous. Britons were united in their public condemnation of slavery, but as the above discussion has demonstrated there was great variety in terms of practical

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<sup>148</sup> Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, p. 281.

responses. Ultimately, some Britons could reconcile consuming the products of slave labour or even supporting the Confederacy. Historians have generally viewed this a contradiction that can be best explained through narratives of British hypocrisy, advancing racism, or declining anti-slavery sentiment. I have suggested that taking account of differing political economies and moral geographies within British anti-slavery provides a better solution to this problem. Richard Huzzey has argued that British anti-slavery was characterised by two distinct moral geographies; those who believed responsibility for slavery was limited by political boundaries and those who believed Britons were bore some responsibility for slavery beyond the borders of Empire. However, I would argue that a discussion of these two moral geographies must also take into account the shared assumption after 1838 that British subjects were no longer directly involved in slavery or the slave trade.

As I have shown, debates over slave sugar or copper ore ultimately revolved around the anti-slavery responsibilities of the state. British consumers were more likely to bear the moral burden in discussions over the United States where it was hoped that rejection of slave cotton would form part of a broader attempt to morally isolate American slave-owners. In both cases anti-slavery concerns and the rhetoric of abolitionists helped constitute the knowledge base upon which economic decisions were made. This reflects the fact that 'economic ideas will only be adopted when [...] connected to a language through which the economy and economic behaviour is understood.'<sup>149</sup> Debates over anti-slavery responsibility contributed to a broader conceptualisation of the Atlantic economy that was expressed in terms of geography and space. Whilst the British government or an individual consumer might be conceptualised as contributing to transatlantic slavery through moral sanction or the abstract process of supply and demand British subjects were not seen as actively involved in either the slave trade or slave ownership. Both understandings of Britain's

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<sup>149</sup> Trentmann, Daunton, 'Worlds of Political Economy', p. 15.

moral responsibility for slavery positioned both slave-owner and slave trader outside the borders of the British Empire. Both moral geographies then fail to take account of the way in which British capital crossed this boundary between slavery and freedom. In the rest of this thesis I develop this geographic understanding of anti-slavery by giving serious consideration to controversies that threatened the assumption that Britain was isolated from slavery. The sugar debates of the 1840s and the American Civil War saw British subjects insulated from critique by an understanding that the perpetrators of transatlantic slavery were in fact American, Brazilian, or Cuban. It was only when British capital was identified with upholding slavery that Britain's anti-slavery image became a serious problem.



## Chapter II: Manufacturing Outrage: Mobility, Morality and Anti-Slavery

In the spring of 1838 a young William Gladstone stepped forward and, in defending the practice of apprenticeship, outlined a vision of how Britain remained entangled with slavery throughout the world. 'I am credibly informed that 50,000 human beings were brought last year to a single port of South America' the future Prime Minister told the House of Commons. Surely, argued Gladstone, it was this inhuman traffic that deserved the attention of parliament, how could it be possible that the slave trade still thrived? Gladstone believed he had the answer:

I ask are not the manufacturers of this country they who supply the means of supporting this monstrous traffic? The British manufacturer sends his goods in ships to the Brazils, and receives for them cotton, the produce of slave labour. But a portion of those goods are made for an ulterior purpose; they are adapted to the African market; they are reshipped from the Brazils to the coast of Africa, and there exchanged for the human ware that passes from Brazil to Africa.<sup>1</sup>

William Gladstone was of course the son of John Gladstone one of the most prominent former slave-owners in the British Caribbean. As such, his horror at the role British manufacturers and merchants played in servicing the slave trade was likely self-interested and one of a vast array of arguments deployed in his 'long and wearisome' defence of apprenticeship.<sup>2</sup> However, Gladstone's speech represented both an expansive view of moral responsibility and a surprising awareness of Britain's continued connections to the slave trade. The charge levelled against British manufacturers and merchants was incidental to the apprenticeship debate and failed to cause a stir at the time. However, within a few years the issue would be raised by

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 30 Mar 1841, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 42, cc. 255-257.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, c. 257.

Richard Allen at the 1840 Convention. These calls for attention to the role of British manufactures in the transatlantic slave trade came at the same moment that the Colonial Office were preparing an inquiry, and potential legal action, over the commercial links between British merchants and slave traders on the West African coast.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the next few years the role of British manufactures in the transatlantic slave trade provoked parliamentary committees, legal cases, and at times frantic private correspondence. This chapter will explore how and why these debates emerged and the difficult questions they raised about the degree to which Britain should restrict the movement of its own subjects.

As Christopher Brown noted in his masterful study of the emergence of British abolitionism '[i]t is one thing to notice an injustice and something else to act.'<sup>4</sup> This observation is particularly pertinent in the case of British manufactures in the slave trade, as the immorality of the practice was very much up for debate. This belied the rhetoric of anti-slavery campaigners such as Richard Allen who spoke in terms of a broad responsibility when he claimed 'we, ourselves, as a nation, [are] not entirely clear of the guilt.'<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Woods has recently demonstrated how abolitionists attempted to synthesize an outraged consensus by appealing to a universal sense of indignation.<sup>6</sup> However as we shall see, it was far from clear that such a consensus existed. Other leading abolitionists, notably Thomas Fowell Buxton, had long been aware of the role British manufactures played in the slave trade and appeared to view it as unproblematic. Clearly, the subject of British manufactures had to acquire political resonance to spark wider outrage. This resonance came about through a combination of different factors including shifts in the focus of British anti-slavery, governmental commitment to the suppression of the slave trade and the material reality of British

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<sup>3</sup> C. Trevelyan to J. Stephen, 10 June 1840, The National Archives (hereafter TNA): Colonial Office Papers (hereafter CO) 267-161.

<sup>4</sup> C. Brown, *Moral Capital*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 265.

<sup>6</sup> M. E. Woods, 'A Theory of Moral Outrage: Indignation and Eighteenth-Century British Abolitionists', *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:4 (2015), pp. 662-683.

commerce with slave traders. In tying together these various strands I will utilise the geographer's concept of mobility, as it was the flow, or movement, of British goods into the hands of slave traders that ultimately proved so offensive to metropolitan commentators.

Mobility can be understood as 'a fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations and practices.'<sup>7</sup> It is an increasingly popular analytic category amongst social scientists, human geographers, and more recently historians who have examined the 'politics of mobility'.<sup>8</sup> Tim Cresswell, a cultural geographer, defined the 'politics of mobility' as the way movements, or mobilities, are both productive of, and produced by, social processes.<sup>9</sup> It was the physical movement of British manufactures to Brazil, Cuba and West Africa that allowed there to be outrage at links to the slave trade. As we shall see those who commented on this practice often mapped out a geography that was constituted by the movement of goods between these different sites. Whilst these representations were often divorced from the brute reality of the movement of British goods they resulted in legislation, and other measures, that had the potential to effect the mobility of manufactured goods once they left British ports. A mobilities framework has the potential to encapsulate the wide variety of factors; legal, political and material that led to the export of British manufactures generating controversy.

When Gladstone invoked the spectre of British supplying of the slave trade it was intended as a distraction from the primary controversy of the apprenticeship system. Somewhat fittingly, once apprenticeship had ended increasing attention would be paid to the movement of British manufactures into the slave trade as anti-slavery campaigners fixed their attention to slavery outside the British Empire. This chapter will explore how the movement of manufactured goods into the slave trade gained

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> For an example of mobility utilised in a historical context, albeit in a very different manner, see the June 2014 special issue of *Mobilities* which includes several contributions from historical geographers.

<sup>9</sup> Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', p. 21.

enough political resonance to provoke wider controversy in the early 1840s. Firstly, I will sketch how the issue of supplying the slave trade was perceived in the late 1830s to around 1840. This will demonstrate that there was growing concern over Britain's commercial links to the slave trade, however the focus of this concern was almost entirely on Cuba and Brazil. Next, I will demonstrate how the reality of supplying the slave trade and Britain's commitment to naval suppression saw attention switch to West Africa following the seizure of a Spanish vessel the *Dos Amigos*. Finally, I will explore how metropolitan figures hoped to tackle the supplying of the slave trade by restricting the mobility of British manufactures and the merchants who conveyed them. This included establishing ideas of appropriate and inappropriate mobilities. In doing so I will demonstrate how the flow of goods out of Britain, and into areas associated with the slave trade, could provoke outrage and raise questions over Britain's relationship to the wider world. This chapter demonstrates the entanglement of physical and imagined geographies as government officials and merchants debated where exactly British capital should be allowed to flow. I explore how material changes briefly allowed an anti-slavery critique of British commerce to emerge. Commercial links to slave traders were not inherently problematic, rather this chapter explains how converging mobilities transformed West African commerce into a problem of anti-slavery.

#### Travelling Narratives of the Slave Trade

William Gladstone's ability to clearly map out the chain along which British-made goods moved, from Britain, to Latin America and finally to Africa, demonstrates that at least some people were acutely aware of the role that British business played in the slave trade. Despite this awareness it would only be at the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention that abolitionists would openly address the issue of British manufactures and the slave trade. This section will explore metropolitan debate and discussion on the movement of British manufactures into the slave trade and how the geographic

understanding of the problem shifted in the late 1830s. I will focus on David Turnbull's *Travels in the West* a key text that addressed the role of British manufactures in the slave trade, as well as in Thomas Buxton's *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*. As I will demonstrate these works offered differing solutions to the problem of ending the transatlantic slave trade but shared a geographic understanding of the role of British manufactures in the trade. This was a geography that was centred on the movement of British goods through Cuba and Brazil. I explore how these texts represented the role of British merchants and manufacturers and how their authors hoped to influence policy through the circulation of their works. As such I consider not only how Turnbull and Buxton represented the movement of British manufactures, but also how their own texts circulated paying heed to Miles Ogborn's call to consider how 'writing travels'.<sup>10</sup> Approaching these texts in this way provides further evidence of how culture shaped economic knowledge within Victorian Britain as both Turnbull and Buxton blended anti-slavery and political economy in their discussions of the slave trade.

David Turnbull's *Travels in the West* can be understood as a key work in disseminating information about the movement of British manufactures into the slave trade. As its title suggests Turnbull's work is a travel narrative based upon the Scottish author's visit to Cuba and Porto Rico in the late 1830s.<sup>11</sup> Within the work Turnbull discussed the myriad connections between Britons and the slave trade in Cuba including British ownership of slave-worked copper mines (discussed in chapter four) as well as financing of the slave trade. He ultimately concluded that '[e]very shilling of English capital laid out in the island ... serves to fetter some poor negro in the interior of Africa.'<sup>12</sup> With regard to the role of British manufactures in the slave trade Turnbull quoted US Consul Nicholas Trist and noted that 'British fabrics made expressly for the

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<sup>10</sup> M. Ogborn, 'Writing Travels: Power, Knowledge and Ritual on the English East India Company's Early Voyages', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 27 (2), pp. 155-171, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 134.

<sup>12</sup> D. Turnbull, *Travels in the West: Cuba; with Notices of Porto Rico and the Slave Trade* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1840), p. 133.

coast of Africa ... of British manufacture [are] annually exported to this island'. It is worth noting that Trist's critiques of Britain were likely motivated by a desire to deflect attention from his own role in the slave trade, which eventually saw him stripped of his consulship.<sup>13</sup> However, Turnbull believed Trist's claims and in repeating them he outlined, as Gladstone had done, a geography of the slave trade where British manufactures and capital flowed through key sites such as Havana before travelling to Africa.

Turnbull's concern for highlighting British complicity was grounded in his proposed solution for ending the transatlantic slave trade. Turnbull believed that Cuban and Brazilian demand for slaves had to be curbed and that this could be achieved by increasing the powers of Mixed Commission Courts, bi-national courts that judged whether a seized ship was guilty of slaving, in those countries.<sup>14</sup> A focus on the demand side of the slave trade also required a hostility towards the supply of credit and manufactures by British subjects that facilitated this demand. Within *Travels in the West* Turnbull foregrounded the issue of British complicity and wrote at length about the variety of ways British capital supported the slave trade. For example the preface discussed how:

[M]any of our manufacturers and merchants are accused, not altogether without cause, of reaping a disgraceful profit from the fabrication and sale of articles of exchange, exclusively employed in this trade in human flesh.<sup>15</sup>

The Scotsman hoped to embarrass readers into action and viewed commercial links to the slave trade as 'grievous blots on the national escutcheon'.<sup>16</sup> This concern for the national character had long been a part of abolitionist rhetoric representing slavery as

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<sup>13</sup> Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, pp. 435-446.

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, p. IX.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. IX.

a national and individual sin.<sup>17</sup> Turnbull argued anyone who exported cotton fabrics or shackles to Cuba knew full well that they were making their way into the slave trade.<sup>18</sup> However, this was far from a guarantee of wider outrage, or action and we must consider the ways in which information about British complicity in the slave trade were disseminated.

Whilst this chapter is not primarily interested in reader reception it is worth considering briefly whether readers paid attention to the geography of supplying the slave trade laid out by Turnbull. British complicity in the slave trade certainly made an impression on reviewers of *Travels in the West* with *The Monthly Review* noting that such revelations were 'startling charges' that they hoped would 'arrest the attention of the British public'.<sup>19</sup> Reviews in periodicals and newspapers should not simply be read as reception of texts, they also played a part in their dissemination as quotations in reviews helped expose texts to a wider readership.<sup>20</sup> Even *The Times*, a publication often critical of the abolitionists, drew attention to the fact that 'British capitalists, under the cloak of a foreign partnership, still assist in the trade.'<sup>21</sup> This favourable review was likely secured through connections fostered during Turnbull's tenure as the paper's European correspondent a fact that highlights the importance of social networks in the dissemination of works like *Travels in the West* to a literate metropolitan audience.<sup>22</sup> However, as Brown has argued there is a 'chasm between moral opinion and moral action'.<sup>23</sup> Simply knowing about British involvement in the slave trade did not necessitate action, but as a further discussion of the circulation of *Travels* reveals Turnbull took practical steps to ensure his work made an impact.

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<sup>17</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>18</sup> Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, p. 441.

<sup>19</sup> *The Monthly Review*, 1 Apr 1840.

<sup>20</sup> P. E. Dumas, 'The Edinburgh Review, The Quarterly Review, and the Contributions of the Periodical to the Slavery Debates', *Slavery & Abolition*, 38:3 (2017), pp. 559-576, p. 561.

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 21 February 1840.

<sup>22</sup> M. Llorca-Jaña, 'Turnbull, David (1793?-1851)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/98426>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital*, p. 2.

When David Turnbull wrote *Travels in the West* he clearly envisioned that it would find an audience of abolitionists and government officials. The book was dedicated to the Earl of Clarendon who had negotiated the 1835 Anglo-Spanish slave trade treaty, a piece of legislation Turnbull believed to be key in tackling the slave trade.<sup>24</sup> However, Turnbull went further than simply addressing his intended audience in text he also used *Travels in the West* to forge connections with abolitionists and government officials. As David Murray notes Turnbull sent a physical copy of *Travels* to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston in 1840, followed by a letter detailing his plan to amend the 1835 treaty.<sup>25</sup> Here *Travels* can be understood as a material object that allowed Turnbull access to what Turley refers to as ‘insider status’, in that he became a respected expert and had a direct line to influential members of government.<sup>26</sup> The favourable review in *The Times* also attracted the attention the BFASS who supported Turnbull in his lobbying of the government.<sup>27</sup> The circulation of *Travels* is proof of how forms of writing gain meaning through ‘the people, objects and practices that are required to make them work.’<sup>28</sup> Turnbull’s letters and favourable reviews succeeded in bringing his work to the attention of the audience he had envisioned.

*Travels in the West* helped to publicise British contribution to the slave trade and construct a geography focused on movement through Cuba and Brazil. The publication of this work in 1840 spoke to the shifting focus of anti-slavery in the post-emancipation period. As Howard Temperley has argued it was at this point that British campaigners turned their attention to tackling slavery in the wider world.<sup>29</sup> Joseph Sturge and the BFASS were committed to moral suasion through the promotion of anti-slavery activity

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<sup>24</sup> Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, p. 151, Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, pp. 135-136; D. Turnbull to Palmerston, 28 Feb 1840, TNA: Foreign Office Papers, (hereafter FO) 84-342.

<sup>26</sup> D. Turley, ‘Anti-Slavery Activists and Officials: “Influence”, Lobbying and the Slave Trade, 1807-1850’, in K. Hamilton, P. Salmon (eds) *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975*, p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 136.

<sup>28</sup> Ogborn, ‘Writing Travels’, p. 167.

<sup>29</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. xii.



abroad and moral purity at home.<sup>30</sup> David Turnbull aligned himself with this group of abolitionists and the focus on British manufactures in Cuba at the 1840 convention surely owed much to the Scotsman's presence.<sup>31</sup> Turnbull's work had provided evidence that Britain had failed to extricate itself from the global system of slavery. *Travels in the West* and the 1840 convention were attempts to stoke the fires of anti-slavery outrage by drawing attention to these facts; a strategy consistent with earlier abolitionist attempts to cultivate indignation or offence.<sup>32</sup> However, as I shall demonstrate, not all abolitionists interpreted the supply of British manufactures to slave traders as cause for moral outrage.

*Travels in the West* was not the only 1840 work to reference the role of British manufactures in the transatlantic slave trade as the issue was also broached in Thomas Fowell Buxton's *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*. The last in a series of works produced by the veteran abolitionist following the end of West Indian slavery, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* contained Buxton's own solution to the problem of transatlantic slavery.<sup>33</sup> These pamphlets and books alongside the formation of the African Civilization Society were used by Buxton to promote his proposed expedition up the Niger River to encourage legitimate trade with groups in the African interior.<sup>34</sup> Buxton's plan was to cut off the supply side of the slave trade by 'experimentally convinc[ing]' Africans to engage in legitimate commerce.<sup>35</sup> The substance of Buxton's plans will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but at this point it is worth considering how Buxton's works were produced and how this influenced the representation of British involvement in the slave trade.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>31</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 515.

<sup>32</sup> Woods, 'Moral Outrage', p. 668.

<sup>33</sup> These works include *Letter on the Slave Trade to Lord Viscount Melbourne* (1838) and *The African Slave Trade* (1839, an expansion on the former); O. M. Blouet, 'Buxton, Sir Thomas Fowell, first baronet (1786-1845)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/4247>, accessed 11 Aug 2017]

<sup>34</sup> Temperely, *White Dreams, Black Africa*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>35</sup> T. F. Buxton, *The Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840), p. 7.

Unlike *Travels in the West* Buxton's various works were not travel narratives. Instead they can be considered akin to the political economic works of Harriet Martineau, which combined information gleaned from government blue books and informants with an attempt to apply economic theory to different regions of the world.<sup>36</sup> Whilst neither Thomas Buxton, nor his daughters and nieces who did the majority of his research and writing, personally travelled to Africa or the Americas works on the slave trade drew on the expertise of individuals interested in African commerce as well as geographers such as James MacQueen.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, Buxton's estimate of the extent of the illegal slave trade, which he put at upwards of 150,000 *per annum*, was reached through 'much communication with African merchants, engaged in legitimate trade'.<sup>38</sup> Buxton had ascertained that goods manufactured in Manchester were frequently used to purchase slaves and were 'altogether unsuitable for any other market save that traffic alone.'<sup>39</sup> He used estimates of how many of these goods were exported each year as a basis for calculating the extent of the illegal slave trade. As we shall see in the next chapter among Buxton's informants were several merchants who would be accused of dealing with slave traders. Buxton himself passed little comment on the morality of this practice, relegating discussion to the footnotes as it simply informed his metrics in determining the price of slaves and the extent of the trade.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, condemnation was far from a universal response to awareness of British supplying of the slave trade. In fact, the information that British manufactures were used for slave trading could mean very different things to different people.

Whilst Buxton did not condemn the supplying of the slave trade with British manufactures he did give the issue wider publicity. *The African Slave Trade* specifically

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<sup>36</sup> C. Hall, 'Epilogue: Harriet Martineau on Empire' in D. Lambert, A. Lester, (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 348-349.

<sup>37</sup> D. Lambert, *Mastering the Niger: James MacQueen's African Geography & the Struggle over Atlantic Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 171-172.

<sup>38</sup> Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

discussed the export of British manufactures to Brazil and Cuba drawing on the published papers of the Foreign Office.<sup>41</sup> Buxton's lack of concern was likely the result of believing that slavery had to be tackled at the supply end in West Africa, whereas Britons contributed to demand. This of course differed from Turnbull's perspective and supporters of Buxton's Niger scheme openly critiqued Turnbull in the periodical press.<sup>42</sup> Despite their differences both Buxton and Turnbull helped construct a geography of supplying the slave trade that was built around the mobility of goods through Latin America. However, proponents of Buxton's perspective did at times publicise the role of Britons in the slave trade. George Stephen, an abolitionist hired by Buxton to promote the Niger expedition, expressed incredulity that nothing had been done about British goods being sent to Latin America at a meeting in Reading in 1840. The always-belligerent Stephen bemoaned the lack of a parliamentary enquiry and concluded by reminding his audience that 'every two minutes those who heard him hesitated to join the cause they were passively parties to the enslavement or murder of three of their fellow creatures.'<sup>43</sup> Stephen was clearly much more disturbed by the supplying of the slave trade than Buxton and appears to have viewed the matter in a similar light to Turnbull. For both, British involvement was a disgrace that needed to be addressed; however it could also serve to inspire renewed fervour for anti-slavery action. Stephen clearly hoped that feelings of complicity would lend support to the Niger expedition, whilst Turnbull aimed to garner publicity for *Travels in the West* and the suggestions it contained for tackling the slave trade.

For action to take place against British subjects involved in the slave trade there needed to be sustained political interest in the issue. Political support and publicity were vital to prompting action against the supplying of the slave trade by British subjects. David Turley has explored how abolitionists relied on a mixture of 'influence'

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Lambert, *Mastering the Niger*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Times, 14 Nov 1840.

and 'agitation' to bring about political action. Agitation can be understood as propaganda efforts, which looked to grab government attention for a cause.<sup>44</sup> In Turnbull's case this strategy worked; as discussed *Travels in the West* attracted the interest of Palmerston and the Scotsman was able to parlay this into being appointed consul to Havana.<sup>45</sup> Palmerston's official correspondence had been included in Buxton's *The African Slave Trade*, in which the Foreign Secretary explicitly asked for more information about British manufactures in Brazil.<sup>46</sup> If this were the case it would appear that the stage should have been set for more serious political action over the role of British manufactures in the slave trade. Publications such as *Travels in the West* and *The African Slave Trade* had drawn attention to the issue and Turnbull's appointment appeared to indicate a willingness to act. To ascertain why government action went no further it will first be important to understand the attitude towards supplying of the slave trade within the Foreign Office itself.

The Foreign Office's slave trade department has been described as the 'bureaucratic lynch-pin' of the British campaign against transatlantic slavery.<sup>47</sup> It was to this office that reports of British involvement in the slave trade were directed and they were met with great interest. David Eltis has argued that the Foreign Office was 'baffled' by British involvement in supplying or 'aiding and abetting' the slave trade.<sup>48</sup> This bafflement related to exactly how it could stop these instances of British goods and capital making their way into the hands of slave traders. However, there clearly was a will to tackle these issues particularly during the 1830s when Palmerston held the position of foreign secretary. Palmerston's commitment to suppression lay in a combination of electoral politics and principle. The future prime minister had suffered

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<sup>44</sup> Turley, 'Anti-Slavery Activists and Officials', p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> D. Murray, *Odious Commerce*, pp. 136-139.

<sup>46</sup> Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and The Remedy*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>47</sup> K. Hamilton 'Zealots and Helots: The Slave Trade Department of the Nineteenth-Century Foreign Office' in K. Hamilton and P. Salmon (eds) *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975*, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 83.

electoral embarrassment early in his career when his anti-slavery credentials had been questioned, and was well aware of the political value of a strong anti-slavery position.<sup>49</sup> For Palmerston, Britain's moral example was also of great practical importance for suppression. This is unsurprising, as Matthew Mason has noted, nations jockeyed for prestige through trumpeting their commitment to abolition in the first half of the nineteenth century. Foreign powers were also quick to leap on any suggestion of British involvement in the slave trade as a sign of duplicity and use this as a reason to undermine the negotiation of anti-slave trade treaties.<sup>50</sup>

Palmerston was not the only politician interested in protecting Britain's anti-slavery position. For example Lord Glenelg, Colonial Secretary from 1835 to 1839, wrote to Palmerston about British commission houses 'deeply engaged' in the slave trade. In the letter he argued that prosecuting those involved would lead to 'very beneficial results if some of the most conspicuous of them could be brought to punishment.'<sup>51</sup> This desire to bring the most egregious offenders to justice speaks to the importance placed on making an example of those who threatened to damage British claims to moral superiority. Clearly there was both an awareness of British supplying of the slave trade and a willingness within government to take action. It is also evident that the supplying of the slave trade with British manufactures was for the most part understood in terms of British goods moving through Brazil and Cuba. This was down in part to the assiduous reporting from officials in those countries, which would only increase with Turnbull's appointment to the Havannah consulate. Given these conditions it is perhaps surprising that there appears to have been little attempt at intervening in the affairs of the merchants and manufacturers involved in the supplying of the slave trade. This inaction equated less to a lack of desire on the part of the government than a want

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<sup>49</sup> D. Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 44.

<sup>50</sup> Mason, 'Keeping Up Appearances', p. 822, p. 827.

<sup>51</sup> Glenelg to Palmerston, 17 June 1838, TNA: FO 84-431.

of means. The goods being exported to Cuba and Brazil were perfectly legal in nature and British officials in these countries lacked the ability to interfere with regular trade. Whilst Thomas Buxton had claimed that the facts of supplying the slave trade were 'notorious to commercial men' it was only with his work and David Turnbull's *Travels in the West* that the issue would gain wider attention.<sup>52</sup> At the same time relevant members of the Whig government were increasingly concerned about British involvement in the slave trade and how it undermined Britain's moral standing. This mirrored the concerns aired at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, which further publicised the issue. However, both the political and popular understandings of supplying of the slave trade focused specifically on the flow of goods through Latin America. Whilst large amounts of British goods were undoubtedly sent to Brazil and Cuba before being re-exported for use in the slave trade it was a practice that the British government had little power to prevent. What clearly existed was a political will to address the issue in some way. It was only when British attention shifted to Western Africa that a full-blown investigation could take place. To understand how this happened we must consider the practical realities of supplying the slave trade and how this related to Britain's commitment to naval suppression.

#### Material Mobilities of Suppression and the Slave Trade

In the spring of 1842 a parliamentary select committee was tasked with investigating accusations that British merchants operating on the western coast of Africa were guilty of supplying goods that were vital to the prosecution of the slave trade. On April 19<sup>th</sup> John G. Nicholls, secretary to the Gold Coast Committee, a group of London merchants who represented the interest of the British owned forts that dotted the coast of what is now called Ghana, laid out the means by which British goods made their way into the hands of slave traders:

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<sup>52</sup> Buxton, *The African Slave Trade & The Remedy*, p. 58.

[V]essels now proceed from the Havannah with nothing whatever but dollars and doubloons; and those vessels arrive on the windward coast of Africa, where they commence their trade. The natives sell those slavers goods bought from British ships for their dollars and doubloons; probably, there follows a British ship, and with those dollars he goes on board a British ship, and purchases a quantity of goods, and in that way the thing goes on, and thus the slave trade is supplied, and I do not see how it is prevented; I do not think the whole British navy could do it.<sup>53</sup>

Nicholls's statement deserves some scrutiny. Whilst by 1842 it had been a long time since he had personally tarried on the West African coast he remained heavily involved with trade there. Likely wanting to shield British merchants from criticism, he clearly painted West Africans as providing the link to slave traders portraying the British role as merely selling their wares to the local population. Whilst Nicholls's testimony did depict one way British goods made their way into the hands of slave traders there were in fact numerous channels. However, despite the elision of the direct links between British merchants and slave traders Nicholls does provide a useful illustration of the various actors and processes involved in supplying of the slave trade. Mobility was key to Nicholls's testimony. British goods clearly moved along what modern observers would recognise as a supply chain; from the decks of British merchant vessels, into the hands of the slave trader via a West African middleman. In the other direction flowed specie and doubloons, which would make their way back to merchant houses in Britain. Alongside this stands the Royal Navy, whose presence on the coast, as we shall see, is what necessitated this supply chain in the first place. It is important to understand how the physical movement of British manufactures into the hands of slave traders came about, as it was on this reality that the representations, and

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<sup>53</sup> D. Ryder 1<sup>st</sup> E. Harrowby, Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, Part-I.- Report and Evidence (hereafter WCA), *Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter PP), 551-I (1842), pp. 14-15.

misrepresentations, of men like Nicholls were built. It was these representations that would shape metropolitan outrage and debates over Britain's relationship to Africa and the slave trade.

The first question posed by Tim Cresswell in his attempt to determine a politics of mobility is 'why does a person or thing move?'<sup>54</sup> In terms of British manufactures and merchants making their way to the West African coast the answer was simple, to buy palm oil. Following abolition British merchants plying their trade in West Africa switched attention to procuring palm oil rather than slaves. There was an increasing demand for palm oil throughout the nineteenth century due to its use in oiling machinery and in soap manufacture.<sup>55</sup> This shift to 'legitimate commerce' in palm oil actually built on the long established commercial connections between British traders and West African middlemen or brokers, which had been developed during the era of the legal trade in slaves. These were trust relationships that were vital to West African trade. Broking networks then channelled the movement of British manufactures to the West African coast, and as Nicholls stated in his testimony, many of these coastal brokers also traded in slaves. As Lynn notes 'slaves and oil were exported together in a symbiotic relationship'.<sup>56</sup> In many ways Nicholls' testimony, despite not explicitly mentioning palm oil, accurately captures the difficulty British merchants faced in trying to extricate themselves from links to the slave trade. The ability to purchase palm oil required the location of brokers who could be relied upon to retrieve the palm oil from the African interior. Merchant companies had long-standing contacts on the coast, and this explained why traders from different cities dealt exclusively with specific areas of the West African littoral. London companies dominated the Gold Coast trade, Liverpool in Bonny and the Niger, and Bristol merchants on the Ivory Coast, which came to be

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<sup>54</sup> Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> M. Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 84-85.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.



known as the Bristol Coast.<sup>57</sup> The movement of manufactured goods to West Africa then was a means to secure palm oil, but the necessity of relying on existing commercial relationships meant that British merchants continued to trade with West African brokers also interested in the slave trade.

Having established why British manufactures made their way to the West African coast and how they were channelled into specific broking networks it is important to understand how and why slave traders entered the equation. In many ways the answer is simple and has already been established the purchase of slaves, much like the purchase of palm oil, required manufactured goods. This is why in Nicholls's testimony the Cuban merchants purchased goods from Africans. West African trade functioned through the extension of trust in the form of trade goods (British manufactures, usually iron and textiles) that were determined by the specific demand emanating from different areas within Africa.<sup>58</sup> It was vital that merchants were aware of the goods desired in different areas of the West African littoral; otherwise their ventures faced ruin. This can be seen in the statement of William Hutton before the 1842 select committee who when presented with a sample of cotton goods told the committee 'If you sent a ship load of those to the Gold Coast ... they would not give even yams or plantains for them.'<sup>59</sup> In many ways then British merchants, and more specifically the supercargoes of their vessels, were locked into broking networks where they could confidently adjudge what goods were needed to guarantee a satisfactory return. The importance of identifying reliable brokers had been key to reducing risk in Britain's West African trade and many connections forged in the slave trade era likely continued.<sup>60</sup> Slave traders travelling from Cuba and Brazil were faced with the same issue, and as such sought to acquire the British made goods that their African trading

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 86-89.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 67-69.

<sup>59</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 216.

<sup>60</sup> S. Haggerty, 'Risk and Risk Management in the Liverpool Slave Trade', *Business History*, 51:6 (2009), pp. 817-834, p. 822.

partners desired. Britain was the leading manufacturer of cotton textiles and had the industry to provide goods for states across the world.<sup>61</sup> At the same time the physical movements of both slave traders and palm oil merchants were shaped by the trust relationships through which all West African commerce functioned.

Traditionally the movement of British goods into the hands of slave traders had been conceived of in terms of goods being sent to Cuba or Brazil and then re-exported. This was a prominent means of supplying the slave trade and rested largely on the fact that British merchant houses could provide credit in the form of goods for up to 24 months.<sup>62</sup> However, this form of movement became somewhat restricted by the actions of the naval suppression squadron, especially following the Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1835. This treaty reaffirmed both nations' commitment to suppressing the slave trade, but more importantly it introduced the equipment clause. This clause laid out various goods and articles that could be used as evidence to seize a vessel suspected of slave trading, even if no slaves were found to be on board. These included shackles and items such as planks for constructing slave decks, as well as suspicious amounts of water casks.<sup>63</sup> Writing in 1836 Charles Tolmé, British consul to Cuba, accurately predicted that slave traders would establish factories or baracoons, basically warehouses stocked with goods or housing enslaved Africans, on the coast and begin sending smaller slave vessels in ballast to avoid seizure.<sup>64</sup> This would also result in more goods being acquired on the coast itself, though some would still be shipped from Cuba in different vessels.

The Royal Navy's job was clearly to inhibit the mobility of slave traders and it was legal architecture such as the 1835 treaty that allowed this to occur. The slave trade however was reactive to such measures and as such it became more common to send

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<sup>61</sup> Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, pp. 60-74.

<sup>62</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 142.

<sup>63</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 100.

<sup>64</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 143.

vessels to the West African coast in ballast and under different flags not liable to seizure, such as the Portuguese and US flags. The difficulty the Navy faced in stopping this practice, as alluded to by Nicholls, demonstrates how ‘overlapping legal spheres between national and international space ... impacted the possibilities of “where” surveillance could occur and how surveillance could be enacted.’<sup>65</sup> The ability to search and seize ships was restricted by international law. The right of the British navy to inspect foreign ships was hard won and often opposed by foreign powers.<sup>66</sup> As such it was only through securing international treaties that slave trade suppression could be put into effect. In response to naval surveillance slave traders forged new mobilities and were able to acquire the British goods necessary for their nefarious traffic on the coast of Africa itself. One of these new mobilities was the increased role of factors working on the coast and the vital importance of timing the arrival of a slave vessel to coincide with the assembling of a cargo of enslaved Africans.<sup>67</sup> Anyaa Anim-Addo in her study of the coaling of British steamships argues that British companies literally ‘circumnavigated emancipation’ by taking on coal in Danish colonies where a slave workforce would be employed to refuel the ships.<sup>68</sup> In much the same way slave traders looked to circumnavigate abolition by seeking to purchase British manufactures on the West African coast and fragmenting voyages into two part ventures. It was these novel mobilities devised by slave traders to avoid naval attention that brought slavers and British merchants into contact on the West African coast, constituting the physical reality on which metropolitan outrage would be based.

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<sup>65</sup> K. Peters, ‘Tracking (Im)mobilities at Sea: Ships, Boats and Surveillance Strategies’, *Mobilities*, 9:3 (2014), pp. 413-431.

<sup>66</sup> M. Ryan, ‘The price of legitimacy in humanitarian intervention: Britain, the right of search, and the abolition of the West African slave trade, 1807-1867’, in B. Simms and D. J. B. Trim (eds), *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 231.

<sup>67</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 153.

<sup>68</sup> A. Anim-Addo, ‘“A Wretched and Slave-like Mode of Labor”: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company’s Coaling Stations’, *Historical Geography*, 39 (2011), pp. 65-84.

The most common way in which British manufactures moved into the slave trade was as a result of converging mobilities of British palm oil traders and foreign slavers who both relied on the same African broking networks. This in many ways matched the testimony of John G. Nicholls, and appears to absolve British merchants of the most direct responsibility for supplying the slave trade. However, there were much more direct connections between British merchants and slavers and these must be considered to get the fullest picture of the varying mobilities of British goods into the slave trade. One route of British manufactures into the slave trade was the supplying of Spanish and Portuguese vessels at British owned forts such as in the case of the *Dos Amigos*. The *Dos Amigos*, a Spanish slave trading vessel seized in 1839 under the terms of the Anglo-Spanish treaty, was found to have docked and traded at Cape Coast Castle, a British fort on the Gold Coast. There the *Dos Amigos* had purchased '113 Dane guns' and '16 barrels of gunpowder' from resident merchant and magistrate James Thomson; the goods were paid for in 'Mexican Doubloons'.<sup>69</sup> This case would be discussed at length by the Colonial Office and would eventually lead to the 1842 select committee. The *Dos Amigos* case clearly saw a much more direct link between British merchant and slave trader and removed Africans, who in Nicholls's testimony appeared to represent a form of moral prophylactic between merchant and slave trader.

The location of the supplying of the *Dos Amigos* raises another important aspect of the mobility politics that of moorings; the fixed infrastructural points that allow mobilities to occur.<sup>70</sup> In a very real sense British goods could not make their way into the hands of slave traders if there was no site to trade them and forts like Cape Coast Castle evidently provided a place for vessels to dock on the West African coast. That a British property should provide the mooring for slave trading was viewed as particularly

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<sup>69</sup> 'Report on the Seizure of the *Dos Amigos*', enclosed in W. Fox-Strangeway to J. Stephen, 29 Aug 1839, TNA: CO 267-155.

<sup>70</sup> K. Hannam, M. Sheller, J. Urry, 'Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings', *Mobilities*, 1:1 (2006), pp. 1-22.

egregious by government officials with one stating '[i]t appears remarkable that a vessel so evidently engaged in the slave trade ... should be thus allowed to remain with impunity in a British port'.<sup>71</sup> There were of course also moorings that facilitated the African broking networks of palm oil and slave traders. The fact that supplying of the slave trade required not only the physical movement of ships but also somewhere for them to dock is perhaps an obvious point, but also one worth making. This spatial aspect was of important consequence to metropolitan outrage over supplying of the slave trade because slavery related abuses that occurred within the political boundaries of empire that were most offensive. Cases such as the *Dos Amigos* fell within the moral geography of British anti-slavery sentiment, but only did so because of the practical demands of supplying the slave trade.

The *Dos Amigos* case's potential to provoke outrage lay not only in the fact that it occurred within British territory, but also in the fact that it appeared to directly contravene British law. The 1824 Act for the More Effectual Suppression of the African Slave Trade had among its provisions a prohibition against any British subject 'knowingly and wilfully... assist in shipping, embarking, receiving ... any person or persons ... conveyed or removed as a Slave or as Slaves'.<sup>72</sup> This act was clearly another attempt to immobilise slave traders by limiting the support that could facilitate slaving voyages. However, it also served the purpose of meeting criticisms that abolition and suppression were cynical moves on the part of Britain. Even abolitionists had to deal with the accusation of insincerity and the British government were concerned at such a portrayal.<sup>73</sup> The 1824 Act would also be central to another example of British supplying of slave traders; the case of the *Robert Heddell*.

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<sup>71</sup> 'Report on the Seizure of the *Dos Amigos*', TNA: CO 267-155.

<sup>72</sup> 5 Geo. IV. – Sess. 1824 'A Bill for the More Effectual Suppression of the African Slave Trade', *PP*, 136 (1824).

<sup>73</sup> P. M. Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814-1848* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), p. 207.

In many ways this was the most flagrant example of commercial links to slave traders as the case revolved around the *Robert Heddell's* captain Groves selling a plank to Francisco Felix de Souza, a near-legendary slave trader operating out of the port of Whydah in Dahomey (modern day Benin).<sup>74</sup> Planks were among the items that the 1835 Anglo-Spanish treaty designated as slave trading equipment, as such selling them to a slave trader arguably represented a much greater potential offence than the sale of guns, iron goods or textiles. Upon learning of the *Robert Heddell* case officials at the Colonial Office were clear that Britain's role in the suppression slave trade required something to be done. G. W. Hope argued that legal proceedings were necessitated by 'our obligation to other nations'.<sup>75</sup> This case clearly demonstrates that alongside the moral geography of the British Empire there was another imperative to anti-slavery responsibility and that was the international treaty system that had been constructed from 1807 onwards.

Both the *Dos Amigos* and *Robert Heddell* cases go some way to revealing the grounds upon which anti-slavery outrage may have occurred, specifically when the slave trade flowed through British possessions or undermined Britain's legal obligations. However, it is also important to understand how these cases came to light. In both instances the Royal Navy intercepted, and therefore interrupted the mobility, of either slave traders or those who supplied them. As we have seen the *Dos Amigos* was seized on the basis of the 1835 Anglo-Spanish treaty. The *Robert Heddell* case however, was much more unusual as it was an English vessel that was boarded the Royal Navy. This situation came about when Richard Robert Madden, an abolitionist sent by the government to investigate British possessions in West Africa following the *Dos Amigos* case, learnt that the *Robert Heddell* had traded with de Souza. Madden then informed Captain Tucker, a naval commander who was touring the Gold Coast to ascertain whether the

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<sup>74</sup> For more on de Souza see R. Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727-1892* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Memorandum of G. W. Hope for Lord Stanley, 11 Nov 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

government grant given to those forts should be reduced. Previous to this another naval officer, Lieutenant Levinge, had attempted to purchase the planks from the *Robert Heddell* only to be told they had been consigned to de Souza. Tucker would pursue the vessel and upon boarding issued a declaration forbidding the captain from dealing with de Souza until the British government had passed judgement on the case.<sup>76</sup> In both cases it is clear that the Navy played the key role in interrupting, or attempting to interrupt, the movement of British manufactures into the slave trade. The role of the Navy in revealing links to the slave trade is vitally important to understanding how British supplying of the slave trade could develop into a wider controversy.

J. G. Nicholls's testimony before the 1842 select committee clearly foregrounded how the intersection of different vessels allowed the supplying of the slave trade to take place. British merchant ships moved manufactured goods to West Africa, whilst Royal Navy vessels patrolled the coast hoping to obstruct slaving voyages out of Cuba and Brazil. Nicholls's vision of course also involved African brokers, who as we have seen played a vital part in the British palm oil trade whilst still remaining heavily involved in the export of slaves. However, there were also much more direct links to slave traders such as those found in the case of the *Dos Amigos* and *Robert Heddell*. What binds together these different instances of commercial links to slave traders is the very real and physical movements of goods from the possession of British merchants into the hands of those who looked to enslave Africans. The physical movement of vessels involved in this system was restricted, or channelled, in a number of ways. Firstly, through the commercial relationships forged on the West African coast upon which both British merchants and slave traders had to rely, as alluded to in Nicholls's testimony. Alongside this there were the treaties and laws that set out what made

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<sup>76</sup> R. R. Madden to Capt. Tucker, 22 Mar 1841; Capt. Tucket to R. More O'Ferrall, 29 Mar 1841, Enclosed in J. Stephen to Viscount Canning, 20 July 1842, TNA: CO 267-177.

vessels liable to seizure and led to the practice of slave traders purchasing manufactures in West Africa rather than in Latin America. All these factors had to be in place to provide the material basis for outrage at British supplying of the slave trade; the slavers need for trade goods, British trade in palm oil, and finally the Royal Naval seizing vessels and drawing attention to potential abuses. However, being aware of the movement of British manufactures into the slave trade would not be enough on its own to provoke anti-slavery outrage, to understand why this developed we must continue to follow Cresswell's politics of mobility and explore how the movement of these goods was understood and the social significance attached to their mobility.

#### Inappropriate Movements and Guilty Knowledge

The shift towards a geography of supplying the slave trade focused on West Africa was entirely tied up in naval suppression on the West African coast. This was true in two ways, both from a practical perspective as it was the seizure of the *Dos Amigos* that sparked a wider inquiry, but also in the way the issue was represented. This section explores how the undercurrents of concern over the role of British manufactures being moved into the slave trade were given expression by the *Dos Amigos* and *Robert Heddell* cases. The response of the Colonial Office to the issues reveals that the perception of the vital importance of Britain's moral standing was maintained. I will also explore how the attention paid to these cases allowed figures such as R. R. Madden and several naval captains to propose radical measures that would limit the mobility of British manufactures and greatly extend the moral responsibility of British subjects for slavery.

Concern at the movement of British goods into the slave trade cannot be separated from the government's commitment to naval suppression, a process that required the cooperation of other states. This had been the case throughout the 1830s when Palmerston had sought extra information on supplying of slave traders in Cuba and



Brazil, the same concerns would rear their head once again with the seizure of the *Dos Amigos*. Henry Macaulay and Colonel Doherty of the Mixed Commission Court at Sierra Leone stated in their letter informing Lord Palmerston of the *Dos Amigos's* seizure:

[W]e can hardly complain of the conduct of Spain in this respect, if we hesitate to require from our own authorities on this coast a strict search with regard to the equipment of every foreign vessel.<sup>77</sup>

The suppression of the slave trade relied on the interruption of the mobility of slaving vessels. If British subjects were free to deal directly with slave traders, then this whole process was undermined. Both Lord Palmerston in the Foreign Office and Lord John Russell, the Colonial Secretary, were well aware that cases such as the *Dos Amigos* weakened British attempts to secure suppression treaties with other nations. The seizure of the *Dos Amigos* appeared to provide the perfect opportunity to make an example of those supplying the slave trade. Cape Coast was a British possession, and what is more the perpetrator James Thomson was clearly identified by the papers found on board the *Dos Amigos*. This was firmer evidence than the accusations levelled in David Turnbull's *Travels in the West*. Upon learning of the case Colonial Secretary Lord John Russell moved swiftly to call for Thomson's arrest.<sup>78</sup> Support for this move came not only from the Colonial and Foreign Office but also from the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. The Treasury expressed Melbourne's wish that steps would be taken for 'the future prevention of any similar connivance on the part of the residents in the British settlements on the Coast of Africa with persons engaged in carrying on the slave trade'.<sup>79</sup> However, these calls were to fall upon deaf ears. To understand why the *Dos Amigos* case spiralled into a wider controversy we must explore the grounds for this refusal, and how it was received within the metropole.

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<sup>77</sup> H. W. Macaulay, Col. Doherty to Palmerston, 31 Jan 1839, TNA: CO 267-155.

<sup>78</sup> Russell to G. Maclean, 28 Sep 1839, TNA: CO 267-155.

<sup>79</sup> W. Fox-Strangeways to J. Stephen, 9 Aug 1838, TNA: CO 267-155.

Lord John Russell was informed of the refusal to prosecute Thomson in a letter from Captain MacLean, governor of the Gold Coast forts, which aimed to placate the Colonial Office and ensure the issue was quickly forgotten. This backfired spectacularly. In defending Thomson Maclean stated 'I have never seen a Spanish, Brazilian or Portuguese vessel on this coast (and I have seen hundreds) that was not so engaged'.<sup>80</sup> MacLean, like the merchants who would appear before the select committee, was attempting to demonstrate that the quotidian nature of such links to slave traders that were simply the price of doing business on the West African coast. However, the actual effect of this admission was to reorient the focus of anti-slavery concern. It was now West Africa where British manufactures moved into the slave trade and it was the government's responsibility to disrupt this mobility. This refusal to prosecute was also justified in terms of ignorance with the council of merchants, including Thomson, who ran Cape Coast claiming they had been unaware of any obligation not to deal with slave trading vessels.<sup>81</sup> These objections however were met with a frosty reception at the Colonial Office, and as G. E. Metcalfe has noted this only hardened the resolve to investigate what had occurred on the coast.<sup>82</sup>

The reaction of the Colonial Office to this refusal reveals how the decision to further investigate the Gold Coast forts was rooted not only in a commitment to suppression but also scepticism of government by commercial men. The Gold Coast forts whilst British properties were not governed by the Crown, but rather by the merchants who resided there. This had been the arrangement since 1828 when Britain had abandoned control of the forts after period of prolonged warfare in the region. In the intervening years Captain George MacLean had restored peace and stability.<sup>83</sup> However, the refusal to arrest Thomson and admission of dealing with slave traders raised the question of

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<sup>80</sup> G. MacLean to Russell, 27 Jan 1840, TNA: CO 267-162.

<sup>81</sup> Cape Coast Council Minutes, 12 Nov 1839 in G. MacLean to Russell, 27 Jan 1840, TNA: CO 267-162.

<sup>82</sup> Metcalfe, *MacLean of the Gold Coast*, p. 248.

<sup>83</sup> Metcalfe, *MacLean of the Gold Coast*, pp. 60-179.

whether this stability was built upon nefarious means. As G. R. Searle has argued many Victorians were sceptical of the moral effect of unfettered commercial activity. One of the areas where government could rightfully interfere in the economy was if commerce was viewed as 'nefarious', and an association with slavery was often the qualification for such a description.<sup>84</sup> Throughout the long correspondence between the Colonial Office, MacLean, and the committee of merchants who represented the forts in London, the scepticism of colonial officials is abundantly clear. Robert Vernon Smith and James Stephen handled most of the correspondence and were critical of the merchant's claims at every turn. For example Vernon Smith questioned whether the increase in imports to the Gold Coast was due to an increase of supplying the slave trade.<sup>85</sup> This scepticism may well have been rooted in what Alan Lester has identified as a humanitarian governmentality, where figures such as Stephen promoted 'a divinely inspired, just and stable order of government within the colonial space' in which dealings with slave traders could be viewed as wholly illegitimate.<sup>86</sup> An ideological commitment to anti-slavery clearly framed how information about the Gold Coast forts was interpreted and for the Colonial Office merchant rule appeared grubby and dishonest, something clearly had to be done.

Before taking action the Colonial Office had to garner more information and confirm whether suspicions of widespread dealing with slave traders were correct. Russell decided a commissioner for inquiry would gather this information and the man he appointed to the role was a striking choice. Richard Robert Madden was an ardent abolitionist and vocal critic of the employment of British capital in the slave trade. An Irish Catholic, Madden had spoken out publicly on the issue in a speech to America-bound Irish emigrants, as well as attending the 1840 convention.<sup>87</sup> Whilst Metcalfe

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<sup>84</sup> Searle, *Morality and the Market*, pp. 49-76.

<sup>85</sup> R. Vernon Smith minute, 6 Jan 1841, on Gold Coast Committee to J. Stephen, 5 Jan 1841, TNA: CO 267-168.

<sup>86</sup> A. Lester, *Imperial Networks*, p. 107.

<sup>87</sup> *The Emancipator*, 6 Apr 1840.

attributes Madden's appointment to the connections he had forged through his literary career it seems more likely his experiences in Cuba were of greater import.<sup>88</sup> Serving as commissioner for liberated Africans on the Mixed Commission Court in Cuba, Madden had railed against British involvement in the slave trade and had been drawn into conflicts with colleagues over the issue.<sup>89</sup> In many ways then, although the controversy over British manufactures in the slave trade would centre on West Africa it was very much forged in Cuba. It was Madden's time on the island that informed his views of supplying the slave trade.

Lord John Russell's instructions to Madden made it clear that the trip to the Gold Coast was intended to procure evidence of wrongdoing by the merchants, as well as to check up on the state of things in Britain's other African properties Sierra Leone and the Gambia. The Colonial Secretary expected that 'these inquiries will occupy your time and attention for nearly a year.'<sup>90</sup> On this front Russell would be disappointed as Madden spent only three months on the coast often bed-ridden with the illnesses that confronted so many European visitors to Africa.<sup>91</sup> However, this short time was enough for Madden to return with myriad tales of dealings with slave traders. He believed the practice to be rife not only at the Gold Coast forts, but also in the Gambia. Even in Sierra Leone British subjects moved goods into the hands of slavers as vessels and equipment seized by the naval squadron were auctioned off only to be purchased by the agents of slave traders.<sup>92</sup> The Colonial and Foreign Offices had been informed of such instances in the past, but Madden was particularly keen to name and shame perpetrators.

Perhaps, the most useful aspect of Madden's inquiry was how his presence on the coast facilitated Captain Tucker's encounter with the *Robert Heddell* as it was Madden who

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<sup>88</sup> Metcalfe, *MacLean of the Gold Coast*, p.240.

<sup>89</sup> D. R. Murray, 'Richard Robert Madden: His Career as a Slavery Abolitionist', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 61:241 (1972), pp. 41-53.

<sup>90</sup> Russell to Madden, 26 Nov 1840, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>91</sup> Metcalfe, *MacLean of the Gold Coast*, p. 261.

<sup>92</sup> D. Ryder 1<sup>st</sup> E. Harrowby. Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, Part-II - Appendix and Index (hereafter WCA), *PP*, 551-II (1842), p. 253.

informed Tucker of the vessel having traded with de Souza.<sup>93</sup> Combined with Madden's report this provided confirmation to Colonial Office suspicions that British manufactures were being utilised in the slave trade and a basis for taking further action.

The *Robert Heddell* case offered a second opportunity for the Colonial Office to institute legal proceedings and make an example of British merchants undermining suppression. Having failed to secure the prosecution of Thomson Russell was keen to make sure that the 'most effective measures in his power' would be taken to 'remedy the abuses'.<sup>94</sup> The Colonial Office wrote to the government's solicitors looking to bring about legal action, but was keen that 'no further publicity' be given to the case.<sup>95</sup> This was most likely because Matthew Forster, the vessel's owner, was a prominent figure who served as the MP for Berwick. His prosecution would have a great deal of value in demonstrating the folly of supplying slave traders, but would be very embarrassing if it publicly fell apart.

The desire to prosecute Forster bears further consideration as it speaks to an expansive view of moral responsibility that was held not only by radical abolitionists such as Madden, but also important government officials. Captain Tucker, who boarded the vessel, noted in his report to the admiralty that 'the owners were more to be blamed than the master, they having consigned goods to the notorious slave dealer de Souza.'<sup>96</sup> It was those who orchestrated the movement of goods to slave traders who were at fault rather than captains themselves who were following orders. James Stephen in offering his thoughts on the case to the new Colonial Secretary Lord Stanley in September of 1842 stated a similar opinion: 'A man who should sell crow bars and other instruments of housebreaking to a notorious burglar, is presumably guilty of

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<sup>93</sup> R. R. Madden to Capt. Tucker, 22 Mar 1841, enclosed in CO to Canning, 20 July 1842, TNA: CO 267-177.

<sup>94</sup> J. Stephen to J. Backhouse, 27 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>95</sup> J. Stephen to Solicitors, 27 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>96</sup> Capt. Tucker to R. More O'Ferrall, 29 Mar 1841, TNA: CO 267-177.

accessory to burglary.<sup>97</sup> The official mind of those involved in suppression clearly thought that British merchants should be liable for how the goods they used were sold, particularly in cases such as the *Robert Heddell* where the goods constituted slaving equipment. As such we must reconsider Marika Sherwood's hagiographic portrait of Madden as a lone voice speaking out against British involvement in slaving.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, one must not be fooled by the Colonial Office's later attempts to characterise the Irishman as a loose cannon whose role in the *Robert Heddell* case overstepped the mark.<sup>99</sup> Rather, Madden's views on supplying of the slave trade chimed with broader thought on Britain's anti-slavery responsibilities. Their novelty lay in their vehemence and the logical extension of this view of moral responsibility to encapsulate all links to the slave trade, no matter how indirect.

The Colonial Office's attempts to bring legal action against Forster would be thwarted by a consideration that plagued any attempt to outlaw indirect links to slavery, the need for evidence. Despite the fact that the *Robert Heddell* had clearly traded with de Souza and the fact that the goods on the vessel had been consigned to him attorney general Frederick Pollock concluded that there was not enough evidence to convict. This rather conservative legal opinion rested on the fact that there was no evidence of a 'guilty knowledge' on Forster's part.<sup>100</sup> As Eltis notes the requirement of a person to have 'knowingly and willingly' assisted a slave trader was a massive stumbling block for officials who looked to curb the practice of supplying slave traders.<sup>101</sup> It would appear that in the eyes of men such as Pollock the only firm evidence of 'guilty knowledge' would be written evidence where British merchants acknowledged slaving intentions of customers. It is worth noting that some British merchants, fallaciously, refused to acknowledge that they had any idea who they were trading with on the West

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<sup>97</sup> J. Stephen memo to G. W. Hope, 30 Sep 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>98</sup> Sherwood, *After Abolition*, pp. 80-85.

<sup>99</sup> Colonial Office to Canning, 20 July 1842, TNA: CO 267-177.

<sup>100</sup> F. Pollock to Stanley, 18 Feb 1842, TNA: CO 267-177.

<sup>101</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 84.

African coast. To prove otherwise would be difficult to say the least. This rejection of legal and moral responsibility will be discussed in greater depth in my next chapter.

The seeming inability to take legal action against the likes of Matthew Forster did not entirely deter those invested in the suppression of the slave trade. In fact, several strategies were put forward that might address the problem of British goods moving into the slave trade, many of which focused on restricting the mobility of British merchants. For Madden the fault lay in part with the 1824 law and one of his principle recommendations was:

[A] new law to prevent British subjects in any settlements abroad, British or foreign, from holding, hiring, buying, or selling slaves, or pawns; from suffering vessels equipped for the slave trade to anchor in the parts, to be supplied with provisions of merchandize; from selling goods at foreign slave trade factories to notorious slave dealers.<sup>102</sup>

This would explicitly outlaw all the practices Madden had observed on the West African coast. He was also keen that '[t]his Act should be freed as much as possible from the jargon of the law.'<sup>103</sup> James Stephen was similarly critical of the 1824 Act stating in a Colonial Office memo that 'Words have thus been accumulated in this statute in such a manner as to render it incomprehensible.'<sup>104</sup> Eltis attributes the refusal to redraft the bill to Victorian respect for free and civilizing commerce.<sup>105</sup> As we shall see in chapter three there is something to this theory, though it needs to be complicated as the Colonial Office clearly viewed much of the commerce in West Africa as somewhat dubious. Rather, I would argue that the practicalities of such a wide-ranging proposal as Madden's were likely seen as insurmountable, and there was also a desire for some leeway in dealing with West Africans. Ultimately, James Stephen

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<sup>102</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-II, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>104</sup> Memorandum of J. Stephen to G. W. Hope, 30 Sep 1842, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>105</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 84.

concluded that changing the law was unnecessary. A trained lawyer, he argued that because the Act did outlaw commerce such as that conducted by the *Robert Heddell* all that was required was a 'diligent and a practised reader of the acts of parliament to perceive it.'<sup>106</sup>

More interesting than abortive suggestions of new laws were the attempts to reshape what constituted evidence and a guilty knowledge. A clear theme in the *Robert Heddell* case was that the notoriety of de Souza as a slave trader was proof enough of intentions to supply the slave trade. This was a constant in the opinions expressed by Tucker, Madden and Stephen. This belief in particular informed Tucker's actions as he boarded the *Robert Heddell* where he made the vessel's skipper sign the following declaration:

I hereby solemnly promise that I will not carry or convey or cause to be carried or conveyed, nor in any way assist in the conveyance of any cargo or cargoes, goods, or merchandises, nor furnish any goods or merchandises consigned to be carried or conveyed to Mr. de Souza [...] or to any other slave merchants & factors at Whydah, or any slave trading place on the Western Coast of Africa; that I will [...] wind up any mercantile transactions there with de Souza so soon as possible and I will not in any way trade their again until the opinion of the government law officers has been obtained.<sup>107</sup>

Upon learning of this an apoplectic Forster would denounce the oath as illegal and 'arbitrary'.<sup>108</sup> In many ways he was right, Tucker's oath was an extraordinary document. In an ad-hoc manner he had set out exactly where British goods should not go and who they could not be traded with. If goods were to pass through the hands of de Souza or the port of Whydah then they must be intended for slaving. Eltis has

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<sup>106</sup> Memorandum of J. Stephen to G. W. Hope, 30 Sep 1842, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>107</sup> J. Grove to Capt. Tucker, 23 Mar 1841, TNA: CO 267-167.

<sup>108</sup> M. Forster to Aberdeen, 23 Nov 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.



argued that a clear tension existed between suppression of the slave trade and Victorian respect for law and property.<sup>109</sup> For the sake of the suppressionist cause British commerce could be constrained and channelled away from the areas where it was seen to do harm.

Tucker's oath was of course highly informal and it is far from certain that it had any effect on the trading of Forster & Smith once the *Robert Heddell* was released. However, the reference to the law officers clearly indicated that Tucker hoped his opinion would be enshrined in law. For this to happen the literal movement of ships to sites of slave trading would have to be seen as evidence of a guilty knowledge. Cresswell in setting out his politics of mobility discusses how movement is often discussed in terms of appropriate and inappropriate rhythms. Drawing on Lefebvre he argues that certain patterns of movement come to be seen as suspicious or retrograde.<sup>110</sup> Men like Tucker, Stephen and Madden in discussing supplying of the slave trade set about defining inappropriate rhythms, making note of the sites where it would be suspect for British ships and goods to pass through. This was the same work done by Turnbull's *Travels in the West* only now the focus was shifted to the other side of the Atlantic.

Where exactly were these moorings of the slave trade through which British merchants should not pass? One of course was Whydah, home to the notorious de Souza and described by Madden as a 'great slave place.'<sup>111</sup> Alongside this was the Gallinas River near the Gambia, which was home to many slave factories. The representation of these areas as sites of slave trading was mostly achieved through the testimony of naval officers such as Captain Tucker and Captain Denman at the 1842 select committee. Key to this representation was the idea that no legitimate commerce in palm oil existed in these places, and therefore any British presence there was suspect. Denman for example claimed that the commerce between Gambia and Bissao

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<sup>109</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 103-122.

<sup>110</sup> Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', p. 24.

<sup>111</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-II, p. 10.

was 'not very beneficial trade, because it is not a direct trade with the natives at all; it is a trade between the slave dealer and the British merchants.'<sup>112</sup> Denman particularly viewed trade on the Gallinas as worrying and echoed the concerns of the Colonial Office when he stated that Britain's commitment to suppression made her 'bound to prevent such a direct system of aiding and abetting the slave trade.'<sup>113</sup> These representations, as will be discussed in the next chapter, were contested, but what is important though is they were a key part of the attempt to redefine evidence of complicity in terms of mobility and geography rather than what was written on paper.

The geography of suppression was not only constructed through words, but also through actions. Incursions by the Royal Navy onto the West African coast were common in the late 1830s and 1840s and they represented physical marking of certain sites as off limits. Captain William Blount for example had gone ashore in the Gallinas and burnt down slave trading factories.<sup>114</sup> As Law notes this demonstrated a worrying disregard for African sovereignty and foreshadowed later anti-slavery imperialism on Britain's part.<sup>115</sup> Such actions designated certain areas as sites of slave trading which were open to attack, and also in a very real way limited the mobility of British merchants. This was most clear in the case of Thomas Hutton, son of the London merchant William, who had attempted to establish a factory trading palm oil at Whydah only for it to be destroyed in a naval bombardment of 1841.<sup>116</sup> Whilst merchants and parliamentarians did challenge these actions, they helped solidify the view of certain sites as slaving areas and rendered British travel there suspicious.

These attempts to redefine evidence in terms of mobility and geography were put to the test by a court case that grew out of the 1842 select committee. Over the course of

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<sup>112</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 414.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 416.

<sup>114</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, pp. 368-370.

<sup>115</sup> R. Law, 'Abolition and Imperialism: International Law and the British Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade', in D. Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), p. 169.

<sup>116</sup> Law, *Ouidah*, pp. 203-205.

the hearings a number of witnesses pointed the finger at the London based shipping agent Zulueta & Co. as having 'abetted the slave trade for a number of years by acting as agents for slave dealers.'<sup>117</sup> This was the opinion expressed by Captain Hill of the naval suppression squadron, and echoed by Henry Macaulay, judge at the Sierra Leone mixed commission court. The specific case discussed was the seizure of a vessel, *The Augusta*, captained by an Englishman and believed to be owned by Zulueta & Co. The vessel had travelled to the Gallinas with goods consigned to factors on the coast that were known slave traders. Letters referencing the slave trade were discovered on board. Zulueta & Co. was also held to have a commercial relationship with Pedro Blanco and Pedro Martinez, prominent Havannah slave traders.<sup>118</sup> Pedro de Zulueta jr., a partner in the firm, would appear before the committee to meet these charges. He admitted to shipping goods to West Africa on the behalf of Martinez, but he maintained he had no knowledge of how they would be used.<sup>119</sup> The select committee ultimately appeared satisfied by this claim, but it would not prove the end of the affair. Following the publication of the select committee's report George Stephen would bring a private prosecution against Pedro de Zulueta, utilising his evidence before the committee as proof of guilty knowledge. It was within this trial that these attempts to redefine evidence were put to the test.

The trial of Pedro de Zulueta revolved a great deal around what constituted admissible evidence and Zulueta's lawyers succeeded in having many items excluded. A prime example of this were the letters referring to the slave trade which, it was successfully argued, Zulueta could not have known.<sup>120</sup> Somewhat stymied by this development the prosecution, led by Serjeant Bompas, attempted to demonstrate that all trade to the Gallinas was illegal in nature. To do so he called on witnesses such as Captain Hill who

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<sup>117</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 324.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, pp. 505-506, Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 149.

<sup>119</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, pp. 680-685.

<sup>120</sup> *The Morning Post*, 28 Oct 1843.

had been responsible for seizing the vessel. In his evidence he said that if goods were sent to the Gallinas 'I doubt it was for a legal purpose, because no produce was given in exchange for it.'<sup>121</sup> Captain Denman would appear and further corroborate these claims saying no produce, meaning palm oil, was ever exported from the Gallinas. Zulueta's defence did attempt to counter these claims by pointing out that only 'the gentleman on the spot' in Africa would possess such knowledge.<sup>122</sup> There was a clear attempt to construct travel to the Gallinas as inherently suspicious. The prosecution also pointed to the fact that when the *Augusta* had been damaged by a storm rather than sailing to the nearby port of Cork it travelled to Cadiz, home to an associate of Pedro Martinez.<sup>123</sup> This was represented as an irregular, and therefore troubling, mobility. In a long summing up of the case the presiding judge, Justice Maule, suggested that he at least had been convinced that the *Augusta* was involved in slave trading, and that Zulueta knew a great deal about matters connected to the vessel. All the jury had to decide was whether this constituted a guilty knowledge.<sup>124</sup> Zulueta was found not guilty, providing a firm rebuff to attempts to redefine the nature of evidence.

Whilst attempts to limit the mobility of British merchants, capital and manufactures failed to be enshrined in law there was some evidence of merchants taking the step themselves. During the select committee hearings a number of owners of merchant houses came forward and claimed that they explicitly instructed the captains of their vessels not to deal with slave traders. One company, Laurie, Hamilton & Co., claimed to have 'severely remonstrated' with a supercargo John Courtland who had been accused of dealing with de Souza and another prominent slave trader Theodore Canot.<sup>125</sup>

Having seen similar accusations levelled against his own vessels William Hutton, of the Gold Coast Committee, wrote to Lord Stanley protesting that he instructed all captains

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> *The Morning Post*, 30 Oct 1843.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *The Morning Post*, 31 Oct 1843.

<sup>125</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 122.

not to deal with slave traders.<sup>126</sup> Appearing before the select committee Hutton presented the instructions given to one of his captains in March of 1840, they read: 'You are fully aware that having any communications with the slave trade or slave traders is against the laws of England.'<sup>127</sup> The full instructions bear a striking similarity to Tucker's oath, but they should be treated with a degree of scrutiny. Hutton asserted that once he passed on such instructions he had totally divested himself of any moral responsibility and as such had little control over whether his goods made their way to slave traders. As he said when cases of trading in the Gallinas were raised 'we cannot always be responsible for what masters do.'<sup>128</sup> Captains' instructions might be best understood as somewhat cynical attempt to pass moral responsibility onto the supercargoes of vessels. However, this belied the realities of West African commerce, which required the extension of a great deal of economic responsibility and trust to such individuals.<sup>129</sup> At the very least captains' instructions spoke to an acceptance that some branches of the trade were off limits and to be discouraged, even if they held little to no legal weight.

A more official restriction on mobility was the suggestion put forward to deal with seized vessels and equipment being sold into the slave trade. Madden had identified a number of individuals in Sierra Leone engaged in this practice, and it was one that was particularly troubling as the British government were responsible for the auction of vessels.<sup>130</sup> The suppression treaty with Portugal required the auctioning of these vessels and equipment, Spanish vessels on the other hand could be broken up.<sup>131</sup> One solution suggested by Henry Macaulay was that purchasers from auctions should have to take out a bond that they would not sell the vessel or equipment on to slave traders. Whilst Macaulay noted that this bond could not extend beyond the first purchaser it

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<sup>126</sup> W. M. Hutton to Stanley, 20 Apr 1840, TNA: CO 267-178.

<sup>127</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 208.

<sup>128</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, pp. 667-669.

<sup>129</sup> Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, pp. 88-91.

<sup>130</sup> R. R. Madden to Russell, 16 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>131</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 288.

might at least complicate slave-trading ventures by increasing risk and the amount of capital that slavers had to invest.<sup>132</sup> Some questions were raised over the practicality and legality of such an arrangement. When pressed former naval officer William Hamilton said he did not believe the government had any right to restrict who people traded with.<sup>133</sup> Despite these objections the proposed bond system represented another solution to the problem of supplying the slave trade that looked to limit, and interrupt, the mobility of merchants and the goods they sold.

The fallout from the seizure of the *Dos Amigos*, and related cases such as the *Robert Heddell* and *Augusta*, make clear that there was a willingness among some to extend moral responsibility to those who supplied slave traders. In attempting to curb these practices government officials, anti-slavery activists and naval officers focused on a politics of mobility. They advanced a view of evidence that focused on the movement through sites of slavery and proposed measures such as bonds and oaths aimed at limiting the movement of British merchants. Whilst these measures were not always successful they do clearly demonstrate the willingness of the government to interfere with commercial activities if they were seen to conflict with the commitment to ending the slave trade. It was clear that in the official mind an idea of appropriate mobilities of British merchants had begun to develop and that could indeed have an effect on their behaviour. This was evident not only in the captain's instructions provided by some merchant houses but also in the case of Mr. Herring a merchant who decided to abandon his trade to the Gallinas after the Board of Trade could not guarantee his safety from prosecution for trading there.<sup>134</sup> Even without legal force the debates over the movements of British manufactures into the slave trade clearly had the potential to influence Britain's relationship to West Africa.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 315.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p 274.

<sup>134</sup> *The Morning Post*, 25 May 1844.

### Conclusion

According to Christopher Brown there are certain criteria that have to be fulfilled for an 'antislavery movement' to occur. These are that an issue has to be considered morally wrong; it must attain a degree of political resonance; there must be solutions and means for addressing the problem, and finally it must attract the committed action of groups and individuals.<sup>135</sup> Brown was of course discussing the emergence of anti-slavery as a whole as a political movement, but I believe this chapter had demonstrated that to a greater or lesser degree concern at supplying of the slave trade fulfilled these criteria.

Few, if any, could justify profiting from slavery in the abstract. The popularity of the abolitionist cause was at its peak in the years directly following the end of apprenticeship and Britain's commitment to slave trade suppression meant that many within government were deeply interested in the issue. As we have seen the shift in perspective from Latin America to West Africa also allowed practical solutions to the problem to be aired. Focusing on the mobility politics of supplying the slave trade abolitionists, civil servants and naval officers offered suggestions on how to stop British goods and capital making reaching the hands of slave traders. Within British economic culture the physical movement of British goods into the hands of slave traders could be represented as either deeply troubling or unproblematic. At the same time different parts of the West African littoral were represented as inappropriate sites for British trade. However, this explicitly spatialised view of complicity with slavery could only emerge when abolitionists and colonial officials received material evidence of trade with slavers.

Yet, the various strategies designed to deal with supplying of the slave trade often faced objections or practical difficulties. The biggest of course was proving 'guilty

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<sup>135</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital*, p. 29.

knowledge' on the part of merchants. To get around this issue abolitionists and government officials attempted to define where British merchants could, and could not, go on the West African coast and whom exactly they could trade with. Whilst abolitionists like Madden wanted this enshrined in law for government officials limiting trade could prove extremely problematic. A quick return to the correspondence between the Colonial Office and Captain MacLean will demonstrate why.

Following the seizure of the *Dos Amigos* MacLean became particularly keen to ensure that he did not attract any further criticism from the Colonial Office and as such took steps to ensure the scandal would not be repeated. This included issuing a proclamation but also refusing to allow vessels he deemed suspicious to dock at Cape Coast. This amounted to the exclusion of all Spanish, Portuguese and Brazilian vessels from trading on the Gold Coast.<sup>136</sup> However, this outcome was seen as far from desirable by James Stephen at the Colonial Office who commented that perhaps, the merchants were 'moving too far in the opposite direction.'<sup>137</sup> Unlike Madden most critics did not want to hermetically seal Britain from all connection to the slave trade. Rather, the likes of Stephen, Russell and various naval commanders wanted to eliminate what they saw as nefarious commerce, whilst keeping up the profitable and beneficial trade that took place in West Africa. The outrage generated over supplying the slave trade could lead to political inquiry and proposals for limits on merchant activity, but outside of the most blatant cases it could not easily draw the line between what should and should not be illegal. The next chapter will explore how the select committee of 1842, and various other controversies, sought to draw this line and how metropolitan figures struggled to resolve the contradictions between Britain's commitments to commerce and anti-slavery.

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<sup>136</sup> Gold Coast Committee to J. Stephen, 14 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-168.

<sup>137</sup> Minute by J. Stephen, *Ibid.*



### Chapter III: Ambivalent Commerce: Merchants, Character, and Anti-Slavery

In late October of 1843 Pedro de Zulueta jr. stood trial for the aiding and abetting of the slave trade. The young Spaniard represented a London shipping agent, Zulueta & Co, who had been accused of supplying a vessel, the *Augusta*, intended for the slave trade. Determined to prove his innocence and vindicate his firm Zulueta confidently rejected the offer of a jury half composed of foreign nationals, a quirk of the nineteenth-century English legal system. 'I am quite well in the hands of Englishmen as anyone else', he told the court.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Zulueta may have sat somewhat nervously as the trial came to a close. In summing up Justice Maule, the presiding judge, had chastised Zulueta for a poor defence as well as instructing the jury that the *Augusta* had clearly been intended for the slave trade. The only question that remained was whether or not Zulueta had been aware of this fact.<sup>2</sup> Hanging over the merchant's head was the threat of transportation, a somewhat poetic fate for an accused slave trader. Zulueta was spared this fate. The jury's verdict read 'Not Guilty' and a 'shout of applause burst from all parts of the court, which continued for upwards of a minute without any interruption, it being evidently dictated by an almost irrepressible enthusiasm.'<sup>3</sup>

The shouts and cheers that met the Zulueta verdict may well have represented a wider sense of relief for London's merchant community. Certainly, several merchants and bankers had been called forth to defend Pedro Zulueta's character over the course of the court proceedings. Zulueta himself would publish the trial's proceedings casting himself as part-victim, part-prophet and warning that prosecutions like his would be the end of British commerce should they be allowed to happen again.<sup>4</sup> Zulueta's

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<sup>1</sup> *The Morning Post*, 28 Oct 1843.

<sup>2</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 322.

<sup>3</sup> *The Morning Post*, 31 Oct 1843.

<sup>4</sup> P. de Zulueta Jr., *Trial of Pedro de Zulueta Jun., on a charge of Slave Trading, under the Geo. IV, Cap. 113, On Friday the 27<sup>th</sup>, Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup>, and Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 1843. A Full*

'Address to the merchants and manufacturers of Britain' can be understood as part of a wider effort by capitalists to defend their commercial activity in anti-slavery Britain. Merchants relied upon appeals to economic rationality combined with an explicit rejection of responsibility for the actions of foreign commercial partners, effectively limiting moral responsibility to within Britain's borders. This chapter explores such defences of British commerce and in doing so argues that debates over supplying the slave trade can be understood as a struggle to define the boundaries of acceptable economic behaviour.

The British government's failure to secure a prosecution of merchants involved in the slave trade has been attributed to British faith in a *laissez faire* approach to the economy.<sup>5</sup> However, as David Eltis has argued suppression of the slave trade by its very nature required a questioning of these principles, particularly respect for property by British officials and naval officers in slave societies. In light of this 'ambivalence of suppression', as Eltis terms it, *laissez-faire* ideas on their own fail to explain the success of British capitalists in avoiding serious government censure.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the suggestion that a hard-line approach to anti-slavery symbolised by the likes of R. R. Madden and David Turnbull was impractical and economically irrational has to be problematized.<sup>7</sup> Defences of commercial links to slave traders rested on the ability of merchants to provide a plausible account of why attempts at regulation would have negative economic consequences. As we shall see Pedro Zulueta's apocalyptic predictions for the future of British trade were common to all merchants who stood accused of dealing with slave traders. As with debates over the slave trade prior to 1807 such arguments depended on the assumption that the trade merchants were

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*Report from the Shorthand Notes of W. B. Gurney, esq. With an Address to the Merchants, Manufacturers and Traders of Great Britain by Pedro de Zulueta, Jun., esq. and Documents Illustrative of the Case* (London, C. Wood & Co., 1844), pp. ix-lxx.

<sup>5</sup> L. Marques, 'The Contraband Slave Trade to Brazil and the Dynamics of US Participation, 1831-1856', *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2015), pp. 1-26, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 102-121.

<sup>7</sup> Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, p. 262.

engaging in was beneficial to the nation as a whole.<sup>8</sup> If then, as Eltis has also argued, the British government's belief in the civilizing benefits of commerce prevented the government from censuring merchants then it is important to understand how British capitalists successfully represented their economic activity as legitimate.<sup>9</sup> This chapter then offers an insight to a key aspect of British economic culture by demonstrating the role of ideas such as civilization in underpinning appeals to economic rationality, and how these ideas were often expressed in spatial terms.

Defining the moral limits of economic activity was a constant concern for Victorian politicians, government officials and capitalists themselves. G. R. Searle has argued that for many Victorians traffic in human beings and any connection to it became the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable profit, or as Searle put it 'legitimate' and 'nefarious commerce'.<sup>10</sup> This chapter seeks to complicate this view by examining how merchants and manufacturers were able to defend links to slave traders and reconcile them within anti-slavery Britain. I will explore the defence of Britain's commercial community and the various levels on which it operated. Specifically it will focus on the debates surrounding commerce and slavery in West Africa, Cuba, and Brazil. Historians interested in the peculiarities of West Africa, Cuba or Brazil have previously dealt with slave trade controversies individually. It has been less common to draw together these various case studies in hope of finding wider themes. This chapter seeks to remedy this omission. I will argue that merchants were unanimous in their rejection of moral responsibility for the actions of economic partners. In doing so men like Zulueta and Matthew Forster not only asserted the strict legality of their trade, but they also projected an image of respectability. Personal reputation or "character" was understood as a key form of social capital in the nineteenth century and merchants were determined to avoid damage to their social standing through

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<sup>8</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>9</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Searle, *Morality and the Market*, p. 63, p.76.

accusations of commercial intercourse with man-stealers.<sup>11</sup> This distancing and rejection of moral responsibility was key to merchant claims to legitimate commerce. This chapter also investigates the relationship between the process-based trust through which transatlantic commerce functioned, and the public reputation of merchants within Victorian Britain.

As discussed in the previous chapter it was the movement of British subjects and commodities that allowed the transatlantic slave trade to function. Similarly, critics' attempts to curtail this practice looked to stem these flows by restricting the physical movement of British subjects and the goods they traded. Recognition of these criminal mobilities required the imagination of a specific Atlantic geography where the movement of goods through certain sites and spaces was suspicious. This representation was far from uncontested. Merchants and manufacturers confronted abolitionists and officials with a staunch defence that was similarly shaped by political and physical geographies. As such this chapter will be split into two sections. Firstly, I will explore how merchants operating in Britain's West African possessions responded to critiques and proposed reforms during an 1842 Select Committee. At issue here was not only whether Britons materially contributed to the slave trade, but also whether their commercial activity was at odds with the Colonial Office's humanitarian designs for West Africa. Section two addresses debates outside the borders of empire. I explore how government attempts to moralise British commerce in Cuba and Brazil through the appointment of abolitionist consuls or attempted prosecutions met firm resistance from merchants. Ultimately, British merchants operating both inside and outside of the Empire succeeded in gaining recognition of their claims to be champions of legitimate and civilizing commerce.

### Civilization and the West African Consumer

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<sup>11</sup> Finn, *Character of Credit*, p. 20.. For the particular importance of reputation to merchants see S. Haggerty, *Merely for Money?: Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750-1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 101-130.

British possessions in West Africa were key sites in the war of representation over British commerce and the slave trade. This is unsurprising given that, as explained in the previous chapter, physical evidence of British dealing with slave traders could be most easily uncovered on the West African coast. The cases of the *Dos Amigos* and *Robert Heddle* were among the most publicised instances of supplying the slave trade. Whilst neither of these cases resulted in prosecution, they combined to spark a wider debate over the role British commerce played in Africa. This debate would play out across a number of different arenas from official correspondence, to parliament and the press. Arguably the most important arena was the 1842 select committee on the West Coast of Africa, prompted by R. R. Madden's accusatory report. This section of the chapter explores this debate over British commerce in West Africa and whether or not merchants were fit to govern British possessions there. Key to these debates was the perception of the relationship between commercial activity and British designs for civilizing Africa. West African merchants ultimately succeeded in winning a begrudging acceptance of their claim that trade of any kind advanced the cause of civilization and anti-slavery on the coast.

The summer of 1841 was a period of great political upheaval in Britain as a general election saw Viscount Melbourne's Whig ministry replaced by Robert Peel's Tories. As discussed in chapter one Melbourne's government was a casualty of the clash over free trade, anti-slavery, and the sugar duties. Anti-slavery concerns were of clear importance in Westminster, and away from the parliamentary spotlight another scandal was taking shape. It was at this point that the Colonial Office was contemplating their next steps in both the *Dos Amigos* and *Robert Heddle* cases. Having read Madden's report and following a long correspondence with merchants and naval officers Lord John Russell composed a memo to advise his successor of his opinions on the controversy. Among the issues addressed in this memo was Russell's concern that 'I fear the spirit of commerce has superseded the spirit of humanity in our mercantile

government of the Gold Coast'.<sup>12</sup> This fear was grounded not only in the specific problem of Britons profiting from slavery, but also in a wider concern with that morally correct behaviour and profit seeking might be at odds. This was not an unfamiliar concern with regard to Britain's African possessions; the 1830s had witnessed debates over British government in the Cape Colony and which economic practices could be considered legitimate in terms of land acquisition.<sup>13</sup> In Britain's West African possessions the question was whether links to the slave trade threatened the aim of promoting Christianity and so-called civilization.

Russell's memo to Stanley conveyed a concern held within the Whig ministry of the early 1840s that representatives of the British government, whether merchants or colonial officials, had duties that transcended the simple accumulation of capital.

Russell's concern about government on the Gold Coast related not only to supplying of the slave trade, but also to disturbing reports of the continued existence of domestic slavery and pawnage in and around the forts. These matters had been exposed by Madden's report on Britain's West African possessions, which had revealed that British subjects in and around the Gold Coast forts still possessed slaves. In one particularly troubling incident Mr. Hanson, a British subject resident at James Fort near Accra, had possessed around 300 slaves who upon his death Captain MacLean had sold off to pay debts owned by Hanson's estate.<sup>14</sup> Pawnage was a form of debt bondage practiced on the Gold Coast that many metropolitan observers, including Madden, viewed as indistinguishable from slavery.<sup>15</sup> Whilst slavery in West Africa was perceived as more benign than that which had existed in the British Caribbean the thought of any renewal of British slaveholding was still extremely troubling. Madden's sojourn in West Africa coincided with an attempt by John Jeremie, governor of Sierra Leone, to ensure the

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<sup>12</sup> Memorandum of Russell to Stanley, 26 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>13</sup> Lester, *Imperial Networks*, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> Metcalfe, *MacLean of the Gold Coast*, p. 259.

<sup>15</sup> For Pawnship see Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 115-122.

emancipation of slaves and pawns by promulgating the Emancipation Act of 1833. Jeremie wished to protect his reputation as a committed abolitionist and he aimed to undercut claims by British subjects in Africa that they were unaware that emancipation applied to them.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, Jeremie's proclamation would be difficult to enforce as the line between who was, and was not, a British subject on the Gold Coast was far from clear.<sup>17</sup> What was clear is that the merchants had seen the issue of pawning as unproblematic, a fact that added weight to Colonial Office concerns.

It was not only in the Gold Coast that concerns were raised about the damaging effect of mercantile influence on Britain's campaign against the slave trade. The Gambia was singled out by Madden both in his reports and private correspondence as a place where '[t]he opinion is sung into the ears of the governors that the extension of commerce is the sole aim and end of colonial governance.'<sup>18</sup> Madden appeared to hold Gambia's governor, Sir Henry Vere Huntley, in particular contempt casting him as a racist who acted as little more than an agent for firms like Forster & Smith.<sup>19</sup> Madden levelled similar accusations against Captain MacLean, but he appeared particularly offended by Huntley's low opinion of Africans.<sup>20</sup> This is perhaps unsurprising, as Madden had worked as the representative of apprentices in Jamaica and as commissioner for liberated Africans in Cuba.<sup>21</sup> Madden saw himself in sharp relief to Huntley who he claimed was 'strongly prejudiced' against liberated Africans in Gambia and that they were 'associated in his mind with everything that is base, barbarous and besotted.'<sup>22</sup> This construction of Huntley as a racist beholden to commercial interests is striking, as

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<sup>16</sup> A. Franklin, 'Jeremie, Sir John (1795-1841)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/14773>, accessed 29 Feb 2016]

<sup>17</sup> Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, p. 283.

<sup>18</sup> R. R. Madden to E. Howard, 4 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 599.

<sup>21</sup> Murray, 'Richard Robert Madden', pp. 42-48.

<sup>22</sup> R. R. Madden to E. Howard, 4 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

it was these exact characteristics that Madden defined himself against throughout his 'imperial career' across multiple colonies.<sup>23</sup>

Madden's attack on Huntley deserves further consideration as it reveals a particular conception of what Britain's relationship to Africa and Africans should be. Whilst Madden chastised Huntley for racial prejudice, the abolitionist's own reports embraced representations of Africans as backward. In fact, Madden commented in his official report on the Gambia that '[w]e are very loth [sic] in our colonies to meddle with the habits and prejudices of the natives, however opposed to humanity or favourable to superstition, when pecuniary or mercantile interests are not affected by their barbarity'.<sup>24</sup> In this representation of colonialism its role was to improve the indigenous populations through education and prohibition of "backward" practices. Madden's perspective fit within what Alan Lester and Fae Dussart have identified as a colonial humanitarian register that placed Europeans at one end of a civilizational spectrum and Africans in need of help at the other.<sup>25</sup> This perspective reflected Lord John Russell's concern with the persistence of slavery and pawnage on the Gold Coast. For Madden, Huntley's racism toward liberated Africans and his failure to instruct the local population of Gambia were tied up in his being beholden to the merchants.

The concerns aired about the Gold Coast and the Gambia identifies these places as sites of particular anxiety for abolitionists and the British government. The problem of supplying the slave trade was only part of a broader fear that the Britain's representatives in West Africa were ignoring their paternalistic duties as envisioned by metropolitan humanitarians. Philip Curtin has highlighted the 'cultural chauvinism' that saw missionaries reporting on Africa attribute perceived misery there to a lack of

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<sup>23</sup> D. Lambert, A. Lester, 'Imperial spaces, Imperial Subjects', in D. Lambert, A. Lester, (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, .

<sup>24</sup> WCA, PP, 551-II, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> A. Lester, F. Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.3.



Christianity or western practices.<sup>26</sup> If Britain's goal was to bring civilization and Christianity to West Africa then this process could be undermined by the greed of the mercantile community. As Searle notes, the early nineteenth century saw something of a struggle to reconcile Christianity and the profit motive where ultimately the 'acquisition of wealth was deemed eminently desirable, provided it was subsequently put to "good" uses and not coveted for its own sake.'<sup>27</sup> The representation of merchant government in Gambia and the Gold Coast gave articulation to these concerns.

Bronwen Everill has argued that many Britons saw "Civilization, Commerce and Christianity" as interrelated tools that could be employed to end the slave trade, but in the early 1840s government officials and abolitionists believed this relationship was breaking down.<sup>28</sup> This was pithily captured by Madden's claim that in Britain's African possessions '[c]ommerce and civilization have not kept pace, or indeed preserved any terms of companionship together.'<sup>29</sup> Merchants dealing with slave traders and tolerating practices such as pawning appeared to be abandoning the civilizing mission in pursuit of profit. It was this accusation that merchants had to meet at the 1842 select committee.

The 1842 select committee on West Africa grew out of another committee on the British Caribbean earlier that year, which had concluded that the post-emancipation labour crisis in the West Indies might be solved by West African emigration.<sup>30</sup> The hearings, which stretched over three months, then provided the perfect opportunity for merchants to answer claims that their influence on the coast was pernicious. This opportunity was seized with both hands, particularly as Matthew Forster both sat on the select committee and appeared as a witness before it. Unsurprisingly R. R. Madden

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<sup>26</sup> Curtin, *Image of Africa*, p. 327.

<sup>27</sup> Searle, *Morality and the Market*, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> B. Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> R. R. Madden to E. Howard, 4 Aug 1841, TNA: CO 267-170.

<sup>30</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-II, p. 3.

was apoplectic that Forster was allowed to act 'in a twofold capacity, as a judge of his own cause and a witness in support of it'.<sup>31</sup> Whilst G. E. Metcalfe has argued that Forster did not unduly influence the select committee, he was its most frequent attendee and he led the questioning, which allowed him to frame British commerce in a positive light.<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that select committees should be considered as public affairs as evidence given before them was published; witnesses did have a chance to edit their testimony but only in terms of correcting transcription errors.<sup>33</sup> Both witnesses and questioners were constrained by Britain's anti-slavery discourse. Merchants could not argue that the slave trade itself was morally defensible rather they had to represent their economic activity as working to its detriment. Parallels can be drawn to Lester's work on the Thomas Buxton headed 1835 select committee on aborigines which advocated 'profitable economics, but in such a way that a particular vision of justice was enshrined in material transactions.'<sup>34</sup> Whilst Viscount Sandon, the committee's chairman, could not be described as humanitarian in the same way as Buxton, a reconciliation of profit and the civilizing mission lay at the heart of both the hearings and subsequent report. It was up to merchants such as Forster to demonstrate that their trade was in fact legitimate and contributed to this civilizing process.

The merchants who appeared before the West Africa select committee had to face two criticisms. First, that they had undermined the suppression of the slave trade by supplying slavers. Second, that profit seeking in West Africa was having a morally deleterious effect on the local population. In the previous chapter we saw how this first accusation was met by an abdication of responsibility for the movement of goods after

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<sup>31</sup> R. R. Madden to BFASS (presumably John Scoble), undated, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, Weston Library, University of Oxford (hereafter PASS, WLO): MSS.Brit.Emp.S.22 G20/AA-Slav Soc: Fernando Po.

<sup>32</sup> Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, p. 281.

<sup>33</sup> T. M. Erskine, *A Treatise Upon the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* (London: C. Knight & Co., 1844), p. 237.

<sup>34</sup> Lester, *Imperial Networks*, p. 109

they had been sold. As we shall see this defence could apply across a number of contexts, but there were certain defences invoked by merchants that were peculiar to West Africa itself. A key claim voiced by a number of merchants who appeared before the select committee was that they provided a class of goods essentially different in character to those desired by slave traders. Witnesses such as George Clavering Redman argued that 'there are houses in Manchester that make no other goods' except those fit for the slave trade.<sup>35</sup> Abolitionists had also previously made the claim that a class of goods existed especially fit for slave trading. For example, at the 1840 anti-slavery convention Richard Allen had claimed that 'cotton goods of a particular fabric' were being manufactured 'solely intended for being used in barter for African slaves!'<sup>36</sup> If this was the case clearly manufacturers should have borne much of the criticism and scrutiny being aimed at merchants by Madden and the Colonial Office.

Merchants' claims about a particular quality of 'slave goods' deserve further scrutiny as it was parroted by many who appeared before the select committee. The Manchester textiles discussed by Redman were generally coloured and patterned cloth, which had displaced the Indian dyed textiles that had previously been central to British trade with Africa.<sup>37</sup> The claim that there was a specific form of textile suited to use in the slave trade was oft repeated but is hard to substantiate. A rare example of a manufacturer commenting on the issue can be found in Thomas Buxton's research for the Niger expedition, which saw him consult Manchester manufacturers to calculate the extent of the slave trade. In a series of letters, James Aspinall Turner, a Lancashire cotton manufacturer and future head of the Manchester Commercial Association, discussed the production of goods for slave trading. This included the assertion that 'we know pretty well what is the destination of our African goods from their being very different

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<sup>35</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 178.

<sup>36</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p.265.

<sup>37</sup> M. Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, pp. 84-85.

in style and quality when intended for slave trading.<sup>38</sup> The latter assertion reappeared during the select committee hearings. For example, William B. Sewell, Gold Coast merchant and associate of Forster, claimed that the goods used for slaving were of a coarser quality than those sold by British merchants.<sup>39</sup> The blame for supplying the slave trade then lay not with merchants in West Africa but with the manufacturers of Manchester and the foreign merchants who peddled these lesser goods.

The assertion that slaving goods were of inferior quality appears have been tied into a moral and civilizational discourse that surrounded consumption in the mid-nineteenth century. Catherine Hall has noted how Birmingham prided itself on producing goods associated with civilization and a higher standard of life, and merchants in West Africa made similar claims for themselves.<sup>40</sup> For example when select committee member John Wilson-Patten, a Lancashire MP, asked whether the colours of the textiles were '[s]o gaudy that no civilized person would wear them?', George Redman answered in the affirmative.<sup>41</sup> The implication was that British merchants traded a higher class of product with a higher class of person. These claims could even justify dealing directly with slave traders as in the testimony of Henry Dring a captain who had dealt with de Souza. The merchant argued that the coastal middle men 'keep almost the fine English goods about the beach for their own use, and they send the coarser ones up for slaves.'<sup>42</sup> However, when pushed, palm oil merchant Thomas Midgely could not deny that the goods they exported might potentially be used in the slave trade, or that they were in any way more suited to legitimate trade in palm oil.<sup>43</sup> It seems more likely that different styles of goods were more likely to cater to the demand on different parts of the coast. The term 'slave goods' can perhaps best be understood as a pejorative term

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<sup>38</sup> J. A. Turner to M. Forster, 28 Apr 1828, Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (hereafter TFB), WLO: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.444 vol. 29.

<sup>39</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 78.

<sup>40</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 271.

<sup>41</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 112.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 247-249.

for foreign trade viewed that was as represented as lacking the civilizing properties of British commerce. What is clear though is that British commerce in West Africa was represented as meeting a specific, more civilized type of demand that would disqualify the goods exported from being used in slavery. The fact that material transactions were represented in such a way is evidence of how economic activity was regularly discussed in moral terms.

Claims about 'slave goods' were implicitly linked to a belief in the supposedly civilizing benefits of British commerce. These beliefs had a long history in British thinking about West Africa. Christopher Brown has traced the origins of legitimate commerce to 1751 and the works of Malachy Postlethwayt who as editor of the *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* began to argue for diversification of African trade based upon its economic potential.<sup>44</sup> The idea of legitimate, "civilizational" commerce therefore played a role in British debates about Africa decades before the emergence of a serious abolitionist movement. Once the British anti-slavery movement began to take shape Postlethwayt's calls for a relationship with Africa based on trade of goods rather than people naturally attracted opponents of the slave trade. When merchants represented themselves as champions of legitimate commerce they consciously placed themselves within a longer anti-slavery tradition as opposed to Madden's representation of them as slave trade profiteers.

Of all the merchants involved in the select committee it was Matthew Forster who had championed the role of British commerce loudest and longest. In 1838 he invoked the civilizing benefits of British trade in a dispute over taxation on African coffee. In a correspondence with the Board of Trade, later published in *The Times*, Forster had claimed that 'to promote the industry of the natives of the coast of Africa is to dry up

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<sup>44</sup> C. L. Brown, "The Origins of 'Legitimate Commerce'" in R. Law (ed) *Commercial Agriculture, the Slave Trade and Slavery in Atlantic Africa* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p. 145.

the stream of slavery at its source'.<sup>45</sup> As such high import duties on African produce were represented as a boon to slave traders. *The Times* would return to this theme on a number of occasions printing letters from the pseudonymous 'Potestas' during the controversy over the *Dos Amigos*. These letters bemoaned how 'the exertions of private individuals are frustrated by the supineness, ignorance, and neglect' of the Colonial Office.<sup>46</sup> These letters particularly poured scorn on Colonial Under-Secretary James Stephen and argued that governmental interference was hampering both civilization and commerce in West Africa. Whilst we cannot be certain that Forster authored these letters, they certainly corresponded with his views.

Forster and other merchants championing legitimate commerce offered a different view of anti-slavery to Madden, the BFASS, and the Colonial Office. It is important to note that Madden did accept British commerce's role in improving West Africa, but only when totally insulated from slavery. However, there was a recent anti-slavery precedent for utilising legitimate commerce as a means to end the slave trade in the form of Thomas Buxton's Niger expedition. That attempt to trade directly with the African interior in the hope of eliminating the slave trade had failed spectacularly, but it worked on the same logic as that of Forster and the merchants.<sup>47</sup> George Clavering Redman who claimed 'as you extend the trade you extend civilization' summed up the central contention of the merchants' defence.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Buxton had argued that in attempting to tackle the slave trade Britain should shift its focus away from naval suppression to 'the encouragement we may be able to give to the legitimate commerce and the agricultural cultivation of Africa'.<sup>49</sup> The logic that supported these assertions reveals how cultural concerns helped shape economic rationality. Trentmann's study of the Liberal electoral victory of 1906 argues that the power of 'free trade' appeals lay

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<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 30 Aug 1838.

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 29 Apr 1840.

<sup>47</sup> Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa*, pp. 134-138.

<sup>48</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 174

<sup>49</sup> Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, p. 6.

not in the objective 'logic of the free market' but in an ideological construction of the consumer.<sup>50</sup> I would argue that ideological and moral concerns worked to shape economic expectations by constructing an ideal African consumer who could be weaned off the slave trade by legitimate commerce. This combined with a belief in Africa's economic potential are representative of how moral and economic success were conflated.

The shared philosophy of Buxton and the West Africa merchants is far from surprising given that many prominent figures who appeared before the select committee had in fact advised on the planning of the Niger expedition.<sup>51</sup> Both Matthew Forster and William Hutton had corresponded and met with Thomas Buxton as part of the abolitionist's research on West Africa. Yet at the select committee Forster played down these links and sought to elide his role in the planning of the expedition.<sup>52</sup> This was in part because the Niger expedition's failure helped to bolster merchant claims that only those who had a long-term relationship with West Africa knew what was best for the Gold Coast, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. In particular it served to discredit many of Madden's claims as he was represented as having spent far too little time on the coast to make fair judgements.<sup>53</sup> Forster would also make reference to the Niger expedition as a means of justifying the perceived lack of moral progress in West Africa, arguing such development would take 'patience' a quality 'so many zealous and apparently well-planned attempts at colonization' lacked.<sup>54</sup> Allied to these claims were Forster's assertions in the press that anti-slavery campaigners such as Madden and the BFASS were 'traders in philanthropy' whose interest in West Africa was merely self-serving.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Trentmann, 'Political Culture and Political Economy', pp. 218-219.

<sup>51</sup> 'Memorandum of a conversation between Forster, Hutton, MacLean, Nicholls, Buxton, Finden', 9 June 1838, TFB, WLO: MSS.Brit.Emp s.444 vol.31.

<sup>52</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, pp. 728-731.

<sup>53</sup> Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, p. 281.

<sup>54</sup> WCA, PP, 551-I, p. 699.

<sup>55</sup> 'Letter from Matthew Forster to the Berwick Warder', enclosed in M. Forster to Stanley, 18 Nov 1842, TNA: CO-267-179.

In this representation legitimate commerce was the only effective means for securing the end of the slave trade, and it had to precede the spread of civilization and Christianity to West Africa.

Matthew Forster, and the other merchants who appeared before the select committee, maintained that the extension of British commerce to West Africa would prove unworkable if there was any attempt at further regulation. The slave trade could not be arrested 'by harassing and annoying the legitimate trader when employing his capital, and risking the lives of his people, in diffusing the blessings of lawful commerce'.<sup>56</sup> Forster made full use of the select committee hearings to expose the failings of the naval suppression particularly focusing on the violence and abuses committed in the campaign against the slave trade accusing them of 'carrying fire and sword along the coast of Africa'.<sup>57</sup> It is true that Britain's naval squadron pursuit of suppression policies could result in the loss of African life and, as Robin Law has argued, a lack of respect for the sovereignty of African states.<sup>58</sup> Forster instead argued that burning the factories run by slave traders on the African coast, or as he termed it 'destroying the property of foreigners in a foreign country', might have a negative moral influence on Africans.<sup>59</sup> Whilst Forster's critique of naval suppression did not find its way into the select committee's final report it arguably proved the lasting legacy of the West Africa controversy. William Hutt, who sat on the 1842 select committee, would lead the anti-suppression movement in Parliament throughout the late 1840s when many of Forster's criticisms of naval barbarity would be repeated.<sup>60</sup> The criticism of suppression policies formed a part of the merchants' broader argument that interference with British merchants was damaging British ambitions for Africa.

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<sup>56</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 623.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Law, 'Abolition and Imperialism', p. 168.

<sup>59</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 420.

<sup>60</sup> Huzzey, 'Politics of Slave Trade Suppression', pp. 33-35.



West Africa appears to have been a site of particular anxiety within the British imagination during the 1840s. Both the critiques and defences of British commerce centred on the belief in a civilizing mission. For critics like Madden and Russell mercantile desire for profit had distracted British subjects on the coast from this civic duty. This desire to civilize was somewhat unique to West Africa. In Cuba and Brazil Britain had no imperial possessions and government officials would have felt little obligation to “improve” the local population’s morals and habits. The merchants’ defence was also geographically specific and was built around the construction of an African consumer who could be weaned off the slave trade through British goods. In defending the role commerce played on the West African coast the likes of Matthew Forster also made claims that would be echoed in different contexts. These were that profit-seeking brought wider societal benefits and that any unwarranted governmental interference could put British trade asunder. The report produced by the select committee ultimately recognised these arguments and asked whether regulating the activity of merchants would be worth ‘infus[ing] so much risk and uncertainty into a trade which it wishes to encourage.’<sup>61</sup> Whilst this was certainly a victory for the West African merchants the select committee were far from unequivocal in their support and the report concluded by expressing,

hope that the English merchant, animated as he is by the same feelings of horror for the Slave Trade, will endeavour to extend the influence of those feelings through the whole of his transactions.<sup>62</sup>

As in the sugar duties debate discussed in chapter one, the West Africa select committee considered whether the British state should intervene in economic activity that contributed to the slave trade. Whilst some reform was undertaken with the appointment of a judicial assessor to the Gold Coast forts, this was more a means of

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<sup>61</sup> WCA, *PP*, 551-I, p. 420, p. xix.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. xx.

solving difficult questions relating to pawnage in and around British colonial possessions.<sup>63</sup> When it came to supplying the slave trade, though, the critics of merchants could condemn, critique and implore, but not convict. The rest of this chapter will explore how this ambivalence recurred outside of the colonial context.

### Character and Commerce in Cuba and Brazil

Whilst the relationship between British commerce and slavery was under great scrutiny in West Africa across the Atlantic similar debates were being played out. As discussed in chapter one Britons were keenly aware that purchase of sugar gave impetus to the slave trade to both Cuba and Brazil. Direct commercial links between British subjects and Latin American slave trading drew less parliamentary attention than those on the Gold Coast. Instead this dialogue played out, for the most part, behind closed doors as the British government tried to reconcile its commitment to anti-slavery with the commercial activity of merchants overseas. In this section, I will explore how merchants in Cuba and Brazil were subject to similar critiques as those in West Africa and how they offered similar defences. In these cases, Britain had no legal territoriality, but officials in the Foreign Office still hoped to influence the activity of British merchants overseas. Attempts to moralise commerce in both contexts met staunch opposition from merchants who maintained that they were already acting in a morally correct fashion. By the late 1840s concern at the role of Britons in the slave trade was superseded by debates over the value of suppression as a policy in of itself. In Cuba, as in West Africa, government officials feared that British mercantile interests might be at odds with the commitment to ending the slave trade. No position crystallised the contradictions in British foreign policy more than the role of the consul in a slave society. D. C. M. Platt has argued that British consuls were first and foremost

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<sup>63</sup> Metcalfe, *Maclean of the Gold Coast*, pp. 286-287.

'agents for the expansion of British trade'.<sup>64</sup> Britain's commitment to slave-trade suppression added new anti-slavery responsibilities to this role, highlighting the tensions between suppression and commercial expansion. The debate over the Havana consulate in the late 1830s and early 1840s captures much of the tensions in Britain's anti-slavery foreign policy. The two men who filled that role can be seen as proxies for the war of representation. Charles Tolmé was a British merchant deeply embedded within Cuban commercial society and with links to the slave trade, whilst his successor David Turnbull was a staunch and militant abolitionist. David Murray has argued that Havana in the early 1840s bore witness to a 'rivalry between commerce and humanitarianism in British foreign policy.'<sup>65</sup> Whilst I draw on Murray's account of the clash between Tolmé and Turnbull, I maintain that commerce and anti-slavery were not necessarily seen as oppositional. Rather, I argue that the Foreign Office appointed David Turnbull as a means of moralising British commercial activity in Havana.

British consuls were intended to champion the rights of the British trading community within the city that they were posted. In 1839 a petition to the Foreign Office from a British merchant resident in the Cuban port city of Matanzas listed the reasons why a consul was necessary. He argued in favour of the potential increase in export of British manufactures and the need to protect British investments in Cuban estates.<sup>66</sup> From the perspective of merchants the British government's primary role was to secure and defend their property rights. In many ways Charles Tolmé, who was appointed Britain's first consul in Havana upon arrival from Hamburg in 1833, was a perfect fit for this role.<sup>67</sup> Tolmé was a partner in a Havana merchant firm, a position that was consistent with Palmerston's 1831 reform of the consular service that slashed consular

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<sup>64</sup> D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls Since 1825* (London, Longman, 1971), pp. 16-19.

<sup>65</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 154.

<sup>66</sup> Petition from a Merchant, 9 Aug 1839, TNA: FO 72-538.

<sup>67</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 139; J. Kennedy to Palmerston, 5 Dec 1838, TNA: FO 84-239.

salaries on the understanding that private enterprise would meet the shortfall.<sup>68</sup> British consuls were expected to be part of the community they represented, as this would allow access to accurate information about British commercial needs. The emergence of an anti-slavery foreign policy agenda complicated this position.

Britain's anti-slavery foreign policy was built upon the information about slavery and the slave trade provided by officials on the ground. Being embedded within a mercantile community provided access to this information and Tolmé provided important evidence on the extent of the Cuban slave trade in the 1830s.<sup>69</sup> Tensions between Tolmé and British officials emerged when James Kennedy, Britain's representative on the Havana Mixed Commission Court, accused the Consul's firm of having purchasing a part share in the *Cardenas*, a vessel that had imported 300 slaves from the West African coast.<sup>70</sup> This in fact was something that the consul could not deny. However, he forwarded correspondence with the *Cardenas's* captain, which stated that though Tolmé had personally objected to the vessel it had been 'agree'd however in order not to lose the money advanced by your house to keep the one quarter share originally destined for you for your partner.'<sup>71</sup> Tolmé, like the West African merchants, was actively trying to distance himself from responsibility for his trading partner's actions by refusing the spoils of slave trading. Lord Palmerston at the Foreign Office was far from impressed with this line of argument and declared that the consul's explanation was unsatisfactory.<sup>72</sup> This controversy would not immediately cost Tolmé his position but it did spark a re-evaluation of the role of consulate in slave societies.

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<sup>68</sup> Platt, *The Cinderella Service*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>69</sup> As Murray notes Tolmé was particularly keen to address what he saw as miscalculations in Buxton's *The African Slave Trade*, Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 112.

<sup>70</sup> C. Tolmé to Palmerston, 17 July 1838, TNA: FO 72-513.

<sup>71</sup> T. Beurmann to C. Tolmé, 8 July 1838, enclosed in C. Tolmé to Palmerston, 17 July 1838, TNA: FO 72-513.

<sup>72</sup> Palmerston to Tolmé, 31 Aug 1838, TNA: FO 72-513.

Charles Tolmé's unwelcome commercial connections raised similar issues to the conduct of the Gold Coast merchants, namely that they appeared to undermine Britain's anti-slavery posturing. James Kennedy who appeared to be locked in a bitter feud with Tolmé complained to Palmerston that 'it is most trying to have the conduct of the British consul constantly brought forward against us'.<sup>73</sup> Kennedy believed that Britain lost all claims to moral righteousness when its representatives were free to reap the benefits of slave trading ventures. This was not lost on the Foreign Secretary who concluded '[i]t is well known that no Merchant at the Havana can be totally unconnected with the trade.'<sup>74</sup> Palmerston's concern went further than a worry that such connections were embarrassing. He feared the split loyalties of commerce and anti-slavery might influence the consul's work. Palmerston believed that an official interested in the slave trade 'dare not, without ruining his own mercantile interests, make known to H. M. commissioners ... facts which he ought to communicate to them.'<sup>75</sup> Kennedy, who had accused Tolmé of withholding information and expressed concerns that English fraternising within Cuban society might lead to information about suppression leaking to slave traders, may well have stoked Palmerston's fears.<sup>76</sup> This Foreign Office correspondence constructed Havana as a city in which it was nearly impossible to disentangle commercial activity from the traffic in enslaved Africans. Economic partnership with slave traders was perceived as morally and practically compromising Tolmé's position.

Palmerston came to the conclusion that in slave a society such as Cuba there was no way to reconcile anti-slavery commitments with commercial pursuits. The only answer, then, was to forbid British consuls from engaging in trade. Allied to this move was the decision to combine the offices of British consul and commissioner for

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<sup>73</sup> J. Kennedy to Palmerston, 5 Dec 1838, TNA: FO 84-239.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum of Palmerston, 7 Dec 1838, TNA: FO 84-239.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Kennedy to Palmerston, 16 Mar 1839, TNA: FO 84-274.

Liberated Africans through the appointment of David Turnbull in 1840. Replacing both R. R. Madden and Charles Tolmé, Turnbull was tasked with simultaneously promoting British commerce and ending the slave trade.<sup>77</sup> This shift to a consular focus on preventing the slave trade, and therefore being removed from the potential taint of commerce, was at odds with Palmerston's aforementioned reform of consulate salaries. The Foreign Secretary, however, was clearly set on anti-slavery as a key aspect of the consular role and the prohibition from trade was extended to consular appointments in other Spanish colonies such as Porto Rico.<sup>78</sup> Turnbull, in *Travels*, had also attributed Tolmé's connection to slave traders to his salary only being set at £300, but his appointment to the role was not accompanied by any form of raise.<sup>79</sup> When the Scotsman suggested that he might supplement his income Palmerston reminded him that since 'all commercial transactions at the Havana are more or less connected ... with the slave trade, it is unfitting that you should engage in any commercial pursuits.'<sup>80</sup> Turnbull's appointment therefore can be seen as an attempt by the Foreign Office to moralise British commerce in the island through a particularly ascetic brand of anti-slavery. More importantly, a prohibition against commerce was considered a practical means of ending the slave trade. F. R. Cocking, an abolitionist and one of Turnbull's few supporters in Cuba, heralded the move as such stating that Turnbull had allowed a 'clearing out of the Augean stable' and Britain's reputation in Cuba was being expunged of the taint of slavery.<sup>81</sup> As we shall see British merchants within Havana would interpret Turnbull's appointment in a different manner representing the consul's anti-slavery as antithetical to commercial success.

Upon arrival in Havana Turnbull set about cleansing British commerce and officialdom of connections to slavery. The Scotsman's appointment had come not only with a

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<sup>77</sup> D. Turnbull to Palmerston, 15 Dec 1840, TNA: FO 72-559.

<sup>78</sup> W. Fox-Strangeways to B. C. T. Gray, 24 July 1839, TNA: FO 72-538.

<sup>79</sup> Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, p. 43.

<sup>80</sup> J. Bidwell to D. Turnbull, 29 Dec 1840, TNA: FO 72-559.

<sup>81</sup> F. R. Cocking to J. Tredgold, 10 Mar 1841, PASS, WLO: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.22 G77.

prohibition against trade but also a ban on slave holding for all British officials.<sup>82</sup> Soon after Turnbull's arrival he was drawn into a conflict with James Kennedy and other officials who were thrown into a frantic correspondence explaining their own slaveholding and decrying Turnbull's belligerence.<sup>83</sup> As Murray has noted Turnbull's relationship with his colleagues would be fractious throughout his spell in Cuba.<sup>84</sup> Turnbull also reported British subjects he suspected of involvement in slave trading in the hope of securing prosecution. One particularly controversial incident was that of the *Antonio*, an English-built vessel which had been sold to Messrs Fernandez, Pozo & Co., who according to Turnbull were 'notorious slave dealers.'<sup>85</sup> The consul was convinced that the vessel was due to set sail for Africa and was determined to 'protect our English dockyards from the reproach which had long been too justly applied to those of the clipper builders of Baltimore.'<sup>86</sup> Refusal to grant the sale of the vessel was the prime example of Turnbull using his consular powers to further anti-slavery ends by interrupting the mobility of a ship he believed to be guilty of nefarious commerce. The *Antonio* case saw the Cuban consular position become a lightning rod for the tensions between British commerce and anti-slavery. Thomas Lloyd of Rabone Brothers, the British firm involved in the *Antonio* case, wrote to new Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen complaining of the 'heavy loss' he had suffered due to Turnbull's conduct.<sup>87</sup> Lloyd was of course keen to prove his innocence and refute the accusation that the vessel was built with a slaving intention, enclosing testimony to that effect from a Royal Navy lieutenant who had examined the ship.<sup>88</sup> Lloyd was also keen to protect his reputation and avoid publicity. He told Aberdeen 'the pecuniary loss is

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<sup>82</sup> Palmerston to the Havana Mixed Commission Court, 24 Aug 1840, TNA: FO 84-312.

<sup>83</sup> J. Kennedy to Palmerston, 17 Dec 1840; G. Jackson to J. Bandinel 19 Dec 1840, TNA: FO 84-312

<sup>84</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, pp. 41-43.

<sup>85</sup> D. Turnbull to Palmerston, 10 June 1841, TNA: FO 84-358.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> T. Lloyd to Aberdeen, 2 June 1842, TNA: FO 84-447.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

small when compared with the libellous charge of being concerned in such nefarious transactions.'<sup>89</sup> If, as Hall and Davidoff, have argued 'the personality of the entrepreneur ... *was the firm*' then connections to slave-owners could prove socially damaging.<sup>90</sup> At the same time he echoed Matthew Forster's rejection of responsibility for the actions of trading partners accusing Turnbull of 'injuring English property on account of the crimes real or supposed of foreigners.'<sup>91</sup> Such a position was a direct refutation of Palmerston's logic in appointing Turnbull. Whereas the former Foreign Secretary viewed links to slave traders as morally and practically compromising Lloyd appeared to imply that 'foreigners' could not be held to the same moral or civilizational standards. Whilst Lloyd's business could only function through placing trust in his Cuban partners his reputation within Britain required a rejection of the moralism that governed business partnerships within Britain. Implicit in this logic was a suggestion that the moral expectations placed upon British subjects could not cross national boundaries.

Merchants in both Havana and London banded together to criticise Turnbull. In early 1841 they petitioned Aberdeen to complain that their interests had been 'materially prejudiced' by the union of commissioner for liberated Africans and consul.<sup>92</sup> On both occasions the petitioners also argued for the return of Tolmé who had the 'accustomed ability and intelligence' for the role of consul.<sup>93</sup> Murray has argued that these petitions were organised by Tolmé himself a contention supported a letter from an ally of Tolmé at the same time, which aimed to dispel any 'erroneous impressions' that his partnership in a merchant firm made him favourable to the slave trade.<sup>94</sup> Whilst much of this criticism may have been rooted in Turnbull's abrasive personality, which had

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Davidoff, C. Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 200. (Italics in original).

<sup>91</sup> T. Lloyd to Aberdeen, 2 June 1842, TNA: FO 84-447.

<sup>92</sup> 'Petition of Havana Merchants' to Aberdeen, 20 Jan 1842, TNA: FO 72-611.

<sup>93</sup> 'Petition of London Merchants' to Aberdeen, 12 Jan 1842, TNA: FO 72-611.

<sup>94</sup> F. Marryat to Aberdeen, 31 Jan 1842, TNA: FO 72-611.



won him few, if any, friends in Havana, it was firmly articulated in terms of a tension between anti-slavery and commerce. A key contention of the London merchants' petition was that Tolmé had served as consul with 'great benefit to the Public Service and to British Interests.'<sup>95</sup> This conflation of national interest with individual profits was vital to the merchants' representation of themselves as engaged in legitimate commerce. Thomas Lloyd had made similar claims when he accused Turnbull of 'opposing a legitimate and innocent transaction in which English interests were so much at stake'.<sup>96</sup> From this perspective Turnbull's anti-slavery commitments became irrational and impractical, whereas merchants became, to borrow Swaminathan's term, 'loyal citizens of the empire' advancing Britain's commercial goals.<sup>97</sup>

The protest of merchants appears to have succeeded in convincing Aberdeen to remove Turnbull as consul. The Foreign Secretary told the Scotsman that commercial interests 'require the entire and undivided attention of an individual of tact and experience.'<sup>98</sup> This was an admission that if commerce and anti-slavery were not entirely in opposition, they were at least awkward bedfellows. Turnbull himself highlighted the tensions inherent in his role when he complained about acting as notary for 'papers of a most doubtful and repugnant character' when British merchants claimed insurance on goods shipped to Africa.<sup>99</sup> What is more interesting is how the same logic that had led to Turnbull's appointment was redeployed whilst critiquing him. Palmerston had prohibited the Scotsman from engaging in any trade because he believed Havana to be a site where commerce could not be separated from the slave trade. The merchants who petitioned Aberdeen maintained that Havana was a site of slavery, but they used this representation to argue that Turnbull's position as commissioner for Liberated

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<sup>95</sup> 'Petition of London Merchants' to Lord Aberdeen, 12 Jan 1842, TNA: FO 72-611.

<sup>96</sup> T. Lloyd to Aberdeen, 2 June 1842, TNA: FO 84-447.

<sup>97</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, p. 145.

<sup>98</sup> Aberdeen to D. Turnbull, 2 Oct 1842, TNA: FO 72-611.

<sup>99</sup> D. Turnbull to Palmerston, 15 Sep 1841, TNA: FO 84-358.

Africans necessitated 'collision with the Local Authorities'.<sup>100</sup> The merchants argued that this limited Turnbull's ability to represent them in legal matters. Turnbull clearly was unpopular with the Cuban authorities who protested to Aberdeen over fears the Scotsman was attempting to promote abolitionist sentiment and insurrection in the island.<sup>101</sup> Aberdeen's separation of the consulship from the role of commissioner of Liberated Africans suggests that the hope of moralising commerce through the consulship itself has been abandoned, though continued attempts to prosecute merchants mean that this decision should not simply be read as a triumph of commerce over anti-slavery.

Aberdeen remained interested in pursuing British merchants accused of connections to the slave trade. This can be seen in the case of Robert Wardrop, the Glasgow based merchant who Turnbull accused of being partnered in a slave-trading firm.<sup>102</sup>

Turnbull's accusation was a familiar one, that Wardrop was partner in a Havana firm who exported manufactured goods and textiles to Cuba. These goods, as well as being vital to the prosecution of the slave trade, were also paid for 'in the form of shares in slaving ventures.'<sup>103</sup> This was apparently a common practice, but the case of Wardrop and his partner Villoldo drew particular attention, as Turnbull believed that he could definitively prove a guilty knowledge. The consul claimed to have seen the company's records and that since Wardrop received 'complete copies of the journal' he must be fully aware.<sup>104</sup> Wardrop remained a figure of interest even after Turnbull had been removed from his consular position. Due to the slow nature of transatlantic communication it was only in the summer of 1842 that the Treasury, Foreign Office and government lawyers would begin discussing the case. William Rothery, the legal counsel for the admiralty, did not believe there was enough evidence to bring

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<sup>100</sup> 'Petition of Havana Merchants' to Aberdeen, 20 Jan 1842, TNA: FO 72-611.

<sup>101</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>102</sup>D. Turnbull to Palmerston, 2 Aug 1841, TNA: FO 84-356.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

proceedings against Wardrop. However, the Treasury remained 'very anxious that the matter should be thoroughly investigated.'<sup>105</sup> This included following Turnbull's suggestion that the matter be referred to the Lord Advocate of Scotland.<sup>106</sup> This detail chimed with the Colonial Office's abortive attempts to prosecute James Thomson. Wardrop resided within British jurisdiction and as such could be reached by the law. Clearly, involvement in slave trading remained a concern for the government as the Treasury stressed that 'strong measures should be taken to prevent this nefarious traffic of British merchants.'<sup>107</sup> The timing of these discussions bears comment as well as they occurred alongside the select committee investigation on West Africa. As such it is fair to conclude that government interest in British involvement in the slave trade did not end with parliamentary hearings.

Governmental desire to prosecute Wardrop did not result in legal action and it is unclear what further steps if any were taken to address the situation. In April of 1842 the merchant had been interrogated by the Lord Advocate of Scotland, and as such had been forced to account for his links to slave trading. In his statement Wardrop that whilst his partner in Havana had received payment in slaves he had severely remonstrated with him about this fact.<sup>108</sup> Wardrop contended that any blame for slave trading lay elsewhere with trading or commercial partners, whose actions were beyond his control. This position was at odds with the belief that individuals or firms should be held to account, both morally and legally, for who they dealt with; an idea which lay at the heart mid-nineteenth century debates over limited liability.<sup>109</sup> Whilst the Treasury's comments on the Wardrop case appear to suggest dissatisfaction with this defence a prosecution was not forthcoming. Wardrop, echoing Thomas Lloyd,

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<sup>105</sup> C. Trevelyan to Canning, 17 June 1842, TNA: FO 84-431.

<sup>106</sup> D. Turnbull to Palmerston, 2 Aug 1841, TNA: FO 84-431.

<sup>107</sup> C. Trevelyan to Canning, 17 June 1842, TNA: FO 84-431.

<sup>108</sup> 'Interrogation of Robert Wardrop' enclosed in C. Trevelyan to Canning, 17 June 1842, TNA: FO 84-431.

<sup>109</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 257-259; Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, pp. 26-27.

explicitly rejected the suggestion that he be held morally accountable for the action of foreign partners.

Debates surrounding British involvement in Cuban slave trading revolved around many of the same anxieties as the West Africa controversy. The experiences of Charles Tolmé and David Turnbull as consuls highlighted the tensions between Britain's commercial and anti-slavery commitments. Ascetic anti-slavery as demanded by Palmerston and practiced by Turnbull was represented as inimical to Britain's interests by merchants operating in Havana. Ultimately, these two strands could not be fully reconciled resulting in the separation of the consulate and commissioner of liberated Africans. Despite this concession to the merchant community the government remained keen to make an example of those who were most closely linked to slave traders, but as the case of Wardrop revealed this was much easier said than done. Turnbull's tenure as consul coincided with the investigation into West Africa and might be understood to represent the high point of this self-reflexive anti-slavery. However, concern at involvement in the slave trade would continue into Aberdeen's tenure as Foreign Secretary.

The other great slave-trading society of the post-emancipation period was of course Brazil. The former Portuguese colony, now independent, was home to a thriving, and illegal, trade in enslaved Africans. Whilst Brazil had nominally abolished its slave trade there was little enforcement. British attempts to push for more effective measures were rebuffed as bullying and overbearing.<sup>110</sup> At the same time British merchants engaged in a wide variety of commercial ventures in Brazil, with British capital and credit being particularly important to the Brazilian slave trade through the provision of trade goods on credit via Brazilian intermediaries.<sup>111</sup> As in Cuba and West Africa these

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<sup>110</sup> L. Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 62.

<sup>111</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 155-156. The majority of work on Britain's economic connections to Brazil focuses on the post-1850 period following the termination of the slave trade for

links to the slave trade were potentially embarrassing for Britain, particularly as the Foreign Office made a concerted effort to end the illegal Brazilian slave trade. As in other contexts British complicity in slave trading could provide ammunition for rival nations who sought to discredit the British campaign for suppression. This section explores the response to a particularly public airing of accusations against British merchants by the President of the United States in 1845. The government, press, and merchants responded in different ways to these public attacks, but these responses echoed many of the themes of the Cuban and West African controversies.

Reports of British involvement in the Brazilian slave trade were a prominent feature of Foreign Office correspondence throughout the 1830s and early 1840s. Consuls and visitors to Rio would often pass comment on how British merchants supplied slave traders. As early as 1838 Lord Glenelg was reporting to Palmerston that commission houses in Rio were 'deeply engaged in the slave trade.'<sup>112</sup> Glenelg also called for the prosecution of the 'most conspicuous' offenders, further demonstrating that belief in criminality of supplying the slave trade was not limited to radicals like Madden and Turnbull.<sup>113</sup> As we have seen in other cases, this willingness to prosecute did not equate to action and in the Brazilian case one issue appears to have been how diffuse the accusations were. Glenelg offered no example of specific firms involved, rather he presented British involvement as systemic. This was likely due to the role British merchants played in supplying the Brazilian slave trade. Charlotte Pilkington, who along with her husband George reported on Brazilian slavery to the BFASS, noted that 'it is very true English capital supports voyages in a way that is very difficult to get at, in the first place the same goods are needed for the legal and illegal trade.'<sup>114</sup> In many ways this observation was the flipside of the defence offered by merchants accused of

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example R. Graham, *Britain and the Onset of Modernization in Brazil 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

<sup>112</sup> Glenelg to Palmerston, 20 Oct 1838, TNA: FO 84-265.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> C. Pilkington to BFASS, 24 Feb 1840, PASS, WLO: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.22 G79.

supplying slavers. As in Havana merchants would argue that they could not remove themselves from the slave trade, whilst anti-slavery campaigners continually struggled to pin down who was legally liable for supplying slave traders.

Despite the lack of prosecutions, the threat of potential investigations of British merchants still loomed and this was confirmed by events in early 1845. On 20 February outgoing US President John Tyler spoke before Congress in a speech, which condemned the use of the American flag in the slave trade. Tyler argued that the fault lay with British subjects who provided the credit and 'coast goods' necessary for the trade to function.<sup>115</sup> This declaration was pointed and was almost certainly intended to jab at England over the tensions surrounding the right of search. Tyler also went further in arguing that Britain's suppression efforts were merely a cover for securing a cheap labour source in the form of liberated Africans.<sup>116</sup> It was this latter accusation of bad faith that provoked Prime Minister Peel to fire back a refutation of Tyler's claims about the treatment of former slaves. On the issue of supplying the slave trade he was far more equivocal stating 'that if the law could reach the owners of British capital embarked in the Slave Trade, every exertion should be made to enforce it to the utmost.'<sup>117</sup> This last statement in many ways summed up the government's position following the 1842 select committee.

Within the Foreign Office the President's comments sparked an audit of previous investigations into British involvement in the slave trade in Cuba, Brazil and West Africa. Throughout the twenty pages of the list a striking pattern emerges. Time and again the British government would be alerted to the involvement of British subjects in the slave trade. When these accusations were weightier and came with names and

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<sup>115</sup> J. Tyler, 'Special Message', 20 Feb 1845, in G. Peters, J. T. Woolley (eds), *The American Presidency Project* (Santa Barbara: University of California). [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=67459>, accessed 8 Mar 2016]. For American building of slave ships see Marques, 'The Contraband Slave Trade to Brazil', *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2015), pp. 1-26.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> *Hansard*, 19 Mar 1845, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 78, c. 1154.

places attached, the Foreign Secretary, usually Palmerston, would direct the question to government lawyers. Each time their response would be that the evidence was insufficient or that the law did not, and could not reach those involved.<sup>118</sup> The official attitude toward British involvement in the slave trade appeared to be stuck in some form of limbo. Officials were keen to investigate, and prosecute where possible, but they failed to extend legal responsibility to the British firms involved.

For all of the government's impotence in addressing the supply of the slave trade merchants and manufacturers were clearly concerned in the issue rearing its ugly head again. The Manchester firm and shipping agent Carruthers, De Castro & Co were among those who protested President Tyler's attack on British merchants. This was motivated by accusations of slave trading levelled at the firm. The American consul in Rio, Mr. Wise, had claimed that British goods had been shipped on the slaver *Agnes*. Wise, in correspondence with Hamilton Hamilton, the British minister in Rio, had gone so far as to suggest that the Royal Navy refused to seize Brazilian slavers out of a desire to protect the interests of British manufacturing.<sup>119</sup> The *Agnes* case had all the hallmarks of one that would pique government interest as Britain's diplomatic efforts appeared to be undermined by a British subject. As we shall see Carruthers, De Castro & Co, in protesting their innocence, echoed the rhetoric of merchants in the Cuban or West African context. However, archival material also allows us to understand how the firm utilised a wider network to defend their reputation.

Carruthers, De Castro & Co asserted their innocence in the *Agnes* case in a number of ways, which demonstrate the social and material aspects of the war of representation. Key to this was the Manchester Commercial Association (MCA) a group of merchants through which the firm co-ordinated their response. The MCA launched a petition

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<sup>118</sup> 'List of Allegations of British Involvement in the Slave Trade', 29 Apr 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

complaining of the 'derogatory' nature of Tyler's comments and Peel's lack of denial.<sup>120</sup> The petitioners challenged the government to undertake a proper investigation, but also expressed their confidence that 'the charge is totally unwarrantable.'<sup>121</sup> Contacting the government through the MCA can be understood as an important part of stressing Carruthers' respectability. As Aeron Hunt has argued nineteenth-century firms viewed the connections of a businesses as evidence of a firm's good character, or lack of.<sup>122</sup> In associating themselves with the MCA Carruthers looked to position themselves as connected to respectable businesses, rather than nefarious slave trading practices located in Brazil. The firm's contact with local MP Thomas Milner Gibson and the appendage of this correspondence in a letter to the Earl of Aberdeen is further evidence this social aspect of legitimisation.<sup>123</sup> The firm also secured a personal audience with Lord Aberdeen, alongside Milner Gibson and a 'Mr Hutton', who was the owner of the merchandise shipped on the *Agnes*.<sup>124</sup> These various steps are evidence of the 'people, objects, and practices' involved in asserting the legitimacy of a firm's commercial activity and similar processes were likely at work in the London merchants' protests over David Turnbull's appointment.<sup>125</sup> The arguments made in favour of commercial activity in Brazil, Cuba, or anywhere gained legitimacy through the social practices firms like Carruthers took to construct their reputation.

The arguments contained within Carruthers' various letters bore similarities to the defences offered by other merchants. As in Havana, merchants represented connections to the slave trade as inevitable and it was claimed that extending credit in

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<sup>120</sup> 'Petition of the Manchester Commercial Association to Sir Robert Peel.' 14 June 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Hunt, *Personal Business*, p. 23.

<sup>123</sup> Carruthers, De Castro & Co to T. Milner Gibson, 20 June 1845 enclosed in Carruthers, De Castro & Co to Aberdeen, 17 Nov 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>124</sup> Manchester Commercial Association to Lord Aberdeen, 2 Aug 1845, TNA: FO 84-616; 'Report of the Deputation appointed by the Manchester Commercial Association to wait upon Lord Aberdeen at the Foreign Office on the 5<sup>th</sup> instant', Proceedings of the Manchester Commercial Association, 5 Aug 1845, Manchester Central Library: GB127.M8/7.

<sup>125</sup> Ogborn, 'Writing Travels', p. 167.



the form of goods was simply the price of doing business in Brazil. Carruthers complained of 'a ruinous system of long open-credit has been established to which all are obliged to submit'.<sup>126</sup> This comment related to the fact that British merchants give their Brazilian trade partners up to two years credit before payment was required.<sup>127</sup> This was, of course, hugely beneficial to slave traders as voyages to Africa were both risky and a long drawn out process. In this telling, Carruthers, De Castro & Co. represented themselves as the victims of undesirable market conditions and the fact that 'the energies of British merchants are cramped by absurd legislation.'<sup>128</sup> Here they echoed the doom mongering of Forster through claims that undue interference would hobble British commerce. From this perspective, legitimate commerce could be equated with any form of trade that was not the direct purchase of human beings and the British government's responsibility began and ended with guaranteeing the market conditions in which business could take place. Aberdeen's response was to echo the sentiments of the 1842 select committee stating that merchants should be guided by their 'consciences', but that he saw no reason to prosecute Carruthers, De Castro & Co.<sup>129</sup>

As with other firms, Carruthers not only looked to defend the firm's own reputation, they also made wider claims about commercial activity. In a letter from the firm's partner in Rio this was made explicit by warning that if British merchants were to cut themselves off from those involved in slavery it would 'throw out of employment thousands and thousands of our fellow countrymen'.<sup>130</sup> This claim mirrored those invoked during the struggle over the sugar duties where the needs of the working class

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<sup>126</sup> Carruthers, De Castro & Co to T. Milner Gibson, 20 June 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>127</sup> Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 142

<sup>128</sup> Carruthers, De Castro & Co to T. Milner Gibson, 20 June 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>129</sup> 'Report of the Deputation appointed by the Manchester Commercial Association', Proceedings of the Manchester Commercial Association, 1845-1859, 5 Aug 1845, Manchester Central Library: GB127.M8/7.

<sup>130</sup> Carruthers, De Castro & Co to Milner Gibson, 20 June 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

would be levied against abolitionist protestations.<sup>131</sup> Where Britain's West African commerce was explicitly linked to ending the slave trade Carruthers argued that the Brazilian market for British manufactures sustained the working classes at home. The legitimacy of commercial activity was inextricably bound up with the claim that a larger societal good was being performed by those merchants under scrutiny.

The Tyler controversy and Peel's speech also prompted Matthew Forster to re-enter the debate and he wrote to the Prime Minister claiming to speak for the merchants of Brazil, Cuba and Africa. The Berwick MP was particularly concerned that Tyler's message and Peel's lack of condemnation hinted at a more expansive view of moral responsibility and a return to Madden's position that any link to slavery was illegal. Forster was also keenly aware of the geographic thinking that lay behind criticism of merchants. As he told Peel, '[b]ecause there are pick pockets in the strand it does not follow that every gentleman traversing the strand is to be charged with or suspected of picking pockets'.<sup>132</sup> The implication was clear. British merchants had to be allowed to operate in Africa, Cuba and Brazil without fear of prosecution. Forster followed up this message with a petition from a number merchants and manufacturers on the subject.<sup>133</sup> Forster and those he represented were keenly aware that Tyler's taunts might reignite official interest into the question of supplying the slave trade.

The press in general sounded a jingoistic note in response to Tyler's attack and Peel's response. The *Manchester Observer* asked why France and the United States had 'such a desire to malign this country, and to do so by any means, however absurd or fraudulent?' According to the *Observer* it was America's own fault that they let 'scoundrels of all nations' abuse their flag, whilst 'British subjects ... engaged in the slave trade will find no shelter.'<sup>134</sup> Even the *Morning Chronicle* which had sided with

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<sup>131</sup> S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 177.

<sup>132</sup> M. Forster to R. Peel, 11 Apr 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>133</sup> M. Forster to R. Peel, 7 June 1845, TNA: FO 84-616.

<sup>134</sup> *The Observer*, 4 June 1845.

Madden in his conflict with Forster found itself more preoccupied with condemning President Tyler's hypocrisy casting him as 'one of the corresponding members of the slave-trade and anti-Anglican bureau.'<sup>135</sup> The patriotic register of this press coverage should be read alongside the consistent refusal of British merchants to be held accountable for the actions of foreign partners and the implicit suggestion that opposition to slavery was only to be expected from Britons.

The case of the *Agnes* and President Tyler's message demonstrates many of the recurring themes of the debate over supplying of the slave trade. British merchants in operating in Brazil were understood to be implicated in various ways in slave trading. The government continued to be keen on curbing this practice and were particularly likely to be provoked into action when the issue was publicised by a rival power. However, as the list of investigations produced in the aftermath of Tyler's remarks demonstrates attempts at serious action often fell flat. The response of the mercantile community was also familiar. Complicity in slave trading was denied and any government intervention was treated as inimical to Britain's commercial goals. British merchants operating in both Brazil and Cuba took steps to distance themselves from the slave trade and reject moral responsibility for the actions of foreign trading partners. As in West Africa this individual defence of reputation was allied to wider claims that represented the commercial success of merchants with the interests of the nation as a whole. In the wake Tyler's comments 'A British Merchant' writing in *The Times* had scorn for both Tyler and Peel. He attacked the former as a hypocrite and the latter as pandering to 'the West India interest and his new friends the Anti-Slavery Society.'<sup>136</sup> The letter to *The Times* also rehashed the Madden controversy and held up the conclusions of the 1842 select committee of the innocence of British merchants, a line of argument that will have pleased Forster, who given his previous

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<sup>135</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 21 Mar 1845.

<sup>136</sup> *The Times*, 29 Mar 1845.

correspondence with the paper may well have authored the letter. In anti-slavery Britain, any critiques of merchants could be rebutted as sectional, self-interested and working against the interests of humanity.

The merchants' success in avoiding censure and the abandonment of the Turnbull experiment should not be read as a rejection of an anti-slavery identity on the part of the government, but it is fair to say that their approach shifted. In both Brazil and Cuba the British government's focus increasingly moved from attempts to moralise the overseas activities of its own subjects to attributing the ubiquity of the slave trade to bad faith on the part of foreign governments. Frustration at a lack of Brazilian enforcement of suppression treaties led to the Aberdeen Act of 1845 which saw the British navy intensify its searching and seizure of Brazilian ships by interpreting the slave trade as piracy.<sup>137</sup> British subjects clearly remained involved in the Brazilian slave trade for example Rio consul James Hudson noted that British engines could be found on steamship slavers, but naval suppression took precedence.<sup>138</sup> 1850 would see Britain's naval campaign ramped up and the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies committed to suppression as a means of avoiding conflict with Britain.<sup>139</sup> This was effectively the end of the Brazilian transatlantic slave trade.

David Turnbull's replacement in Cuba was Joseph Crawford, son-in-law of Charles Tolmé, and clearly more at home amongst Havana's commercial community. There remained an anti-slavery aspect to the consul's role which Crawford would assiduously fulfil until the Cuban slave trade faded away in the mid-1860s.<sup>140</sup> The ascetic anti-slavery of Turnbull appears to have been mostly abandoned and Mixed Commission judge George Canning Backhouse's diary records evidence of slave-ownership by

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<sup>137</sup> Bethell, *Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade*, pp. 260-266.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p. 286.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 327-345.

<sup>140</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 312.

British officials as domestic servants in the 1850s.<sup>141</sup> The illegal trade in enslaved Africans to Cuba would continue, and even expand, throughout the 1850s, a fact that garnered a great deal of attention from British abolitionists.<sup>142</sup> David Murray has argued that the American Civil War created the conditions for finally ending the Cuban trade as American fitting out of slave ships almost ceased and more British naval ships were committed to suppression in the Caribbean. Finally, a Spanish Slave Trade Bill of 1866 increased Cuban powers to prosecute slavers, though there would be no recorded landing of slave ships after its promulgation.<sup>143</sup>

### Conclusion

Many of the themes addressed in this chapter came together in Zulueta's 1844 'Address to the merchants and manufacturers of Britain'. This text was intended to both vindicate its author as innocent, but also to represent the proceedings as a potential threat to his 'brother merchants'.<sup>144</sup> This work also included all the defences that other merchants had publicly and privately used to defend links to slavery. Zulueta invoked ignorance of his trading partner's intentions claiming 'it most frequently happens, that the nature of the trade carried on at that particular port is very imperfectly or rather not at all known.'<sup>145</sup> He also championed the benefits of overseas trade arguing that merchants not only advanced civilization and commerce together, but also that they made a vital contribution to the country through the revenues generated by levies on imports and exports.<sup>146</sup> Zulueta's address took the arguments seen throughout this chapter to their logical extent by arguing that his prosecution meant that any merchant who traded with a part of the world where slavery existed was similarly at risk. In doing

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<sup>141</sup> L. Martinez-Fernandez, *Fighting Slavery in the Caribbean: The Life and Times of a British Family in Nineteenth-Century Havana* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 36-37.

<sup>142</sup> 'The Slave Trade to Cuba', *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (hereafter *ASR*), 1 June 1857; 'Monster Meeting Against the Slave Trade', *ASR*, 1 Dec 1863.

<sup>143</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, pp. 298-324.

<sup>144</sup> Zulueta, *Trial of Pedro Zulueta*, p.xxix.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p.xxxvi.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, pp. lxvi-lxvii.

so he dissolved the boundary between legitimate and nefarious commerce and framed the problem of supplying the slave trade as an all or nothing question.

Zulueta's trial and its fallout attracted press interest from both supporters and detractors. Unsurprisingly the BFASS's *Anti-Slavery Reporter* paid a great deal of attention to the case, as did publications such as *The Patriot*, published by the abolitionist Joseph Pease.<sup>147</sup> But, the most common reaction appears to have been support for Zulueta and the use of his case to champion free trade and *laissez-faire* ideals. This was the line of *The Economist*, which argued that prosecutions against British merchants were meaningless and the real answer would be removal of the sugar duties.<sup>148</sup> Elsewhere the periodical *John Bull* interpreted the failure of Zulueta's prosecution as anti-slavery meeting with 'public reason' whereas Zulueta himself was praised as 'manly and temperate.'<sup>149</sup> *John Bull* would continue to bang this drum for some time and in a later issue repeated Forster's assertion that it was in fact British merchants who did the most to further the cause of suppression.<sup>150</sup> Similar opinions were put forth in *The Spectator* and it is clear that the defence of merchants like Zulueta was often intrinsically linked to a critique of abolitionism.<sup>151</sup> These publications echoed the suggestion that attempts to moralise commercial activity through government regulation or prosecutions were irrational, and did little to aid the campaign against the slave trade.

It is tempting to see the various controversies over supplying the slave trade as a contest between commerce and anti-slavery. Such a reading might naturally lead to the conclusion that commercial goals and pecuniary desires won the day. More nuanced approaches, such as David Eltis' suggestion of the 'ambivalence of suppression' has argued that suppression required a questioning of the respect for property and *laissez*

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<sup>147</sup> 'Zulueta and his impudent friends, from *The Patriot*', *ASR*, 29 Nov 1843.

<sup>148</sup> 'Trade and the Slave Trade', *The Economist*, 4 Nov 1843.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> 'The Prints in service of the Anti-Slavery society', *John Bull*, 24 Feb 1844.

<sup>151</sup> 'Trial of Pedro De Zulueta on a Charge of Slave Trading', *The Spectator*, 2 Mar 1844.

*faire* principals that underpinned Victorian politics. Whilst there is much to recommend Eltis's view this chapter has taken a slightly different approach, one that might be seen as opening the way to discuss, what might be called, the 'ambivalence of commerce.' It has done so by looking how the boundary between legitimate and nefarious commerce was negotiated between merchants and their critics.

By using the term ambivalence of commerce I mean to propose that the commercial links of British merchants to slave traders could cut both ways. Drawing from the same evidence interlocutors in the debate could represent mercantile government in West Africa as corrupting or civilizing. Likewise, in Cuba the belief that commerce required dealing with slave traders could be used to argue for or against appointing an abolitionist consul. Merchants met every critique of their behaviour and suggestion that they were driven only by avarice with claims that they actually had the true interests of Britain at heart. Allied to this was the constant assertion that governmental interference in trade in Africa, Cuba, or Brazil would damage any commercial aspirations for these places. Whilst the government sought to balance suppression and commerce merchants responded with a totalising discourse.

The various means by which merchants defended involvement in the slave trade reveal the nuances of British economic culture. It was never enough to simply demonstrate that a certain branch of trade was profitable and would be harmed by government interference. In the West African context merchants represented their trade as promoting anti-slavery, to do so required an assertion that commercial men knew more about West African consumers than their metropolitan critics. Elsewhere merchants showed a keen awareness of the social nature of their public reputation. Thomas Lloyd hoped to draw a distinction between his own character and the trust relationships through which his business functioned, whilst Carruthers' rooted their defence in the good reputation of other firms. Geography was key in both these cases as the implicit suggestion was that those outside the British metropole, whether they be

African consumers or Cuban merchants could not be held to the same moral standards as Britons. In defending their commerce as legitimate merchants sought to position themselves as possessing more accurate knowledge about the nature of trade in Havana, the Gambia, or Brazil.

In the war of representation over supplying the slave trade, vice could be transformed into virtue. Therefore, Searle's assertion that slavery was the dividing line between legitimate and nefarious commerce has to be reassessed. This belief may have been held by abolitionists and the government tried on a number of occasions to prosecute those offenders whose links to slavery were the most explicit. These attempts always resulted in failure. As the cases of Zulueta, Forster, and other merchants, made clear an extension of moral responsibility did not equate to legal liability. Links to slavery then might provide a means for abolitionists and politicians to criticise merchants, but this criticism could not go much further. All that could be done was to promulgate warnings and plead with merchants to exercise self-restraint in dealings with slave traders. Supplying the slave trade could always be defended to a greater or lesser extent. Perhaps, then, in the post-emancipation world it was only ownership of slaves that could be universally condemned. Yet, as my next chapter will demonstrate, even this was not entirely true.



#### Chapter IV: 'Drawing the Line': Legitimising British Slave-ownership after Emancipation.

In the summer of 1843 veteran abolitionist Lord Henry Brougham introduced a bill aimed at curbing the involvement of British subjects in slavery. A decade previously the British government had paid out £20 million with the aim of ending slave-ownership by its subjects. Yet, British ownership of slaves was not simply contained within the borders of the Empire. Emigration, investment, and transnational commerce meant that many Britons continued to acquire slave property overseas after 1833. There was no doubt that British subjects owned slaves overseas, but Brougham hoped to question the distinction between slave-owner and slave trader. Was the plantation owner who acquired slaves in the port of Rio any different from the man who purchased the same individuals in West Africa? And if he was, as Brougham put it, 'How was the line to be drawn?'<sup>1</sup>

This chapter uses Brougham's bill, which would be passed into law as the 1843 Act for the More Effectual Suppression of the Slave Trade, to frame a discussion of British slave-ownership after emancipation. The line between acceptable and unacceptable forms of slave-ownership was drawn not only by abolitionists, parliamentarians, and government officials, but also by British slave-owners who attempted to legitimise their slave property through lobbying for, and then exploiting, concessions in the 1843 Act. Despite technically outlawing the purchase and sale of slaves by British subjects throughout the world the 1843 Act recognised property held by existing slave-owners. The debates over the 1843 Act, then, reveal the ways in which certain forms of slave-ownership were justified, and contested, in anti-slavery Britain. I will explore how this legitimisation was secured by examining the claims made in defence of slave-ownership. The Act affirmed the acceptability of slave property purchased prior to 1843 as well

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 7 July 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 70, c. 739.

the acquisition of slaves via inheritance and the hiring of slaves, whilst the issue of mortgaging slave property remained ambiguous. These forms of “acceptable” slave-ownership did not go uncontested and there were sporadic instants when the awkward realities of slave ownership came to light. I will explore these brief moments of contestation, usually emanating from the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and the difficult questions slave-ownership posed for the Foreign and Colonial Offices.

The 1843 Act is a little heralded and oft overlooked piece of legislation, but it captures key aspects of anti-slavery Britain. Inspired in part by the debates discussed in chapters one and two, the 1843 Act looked to curb all British involvement in the slave trade. Brougham’s intention in prohibiting British slave-ownership overseas was justified as preventing ‘a competition of English capital against English colonists’ and consolidating previous slave trade acts.<sup>2</sup> The British government’s primary interest was ending the slave trade and interference with the internal politics of slave societies was rare. However, British officials in slave states were often activist in promoting anti-slavery and from 1843 this included highlighting examples of British slave-ownership.<sup>3</sup> Chris Evans, in one of the few articles on the 1843 Act, cast it as ‘ineffectual and unloved’ by contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> However, Brougham’s original bill was the subject of much protest and would have some of its clauses removed before coming before the Commons. As such I will refer to Brougham’s Bill and the 1843 Act as distinct entities. I will also show that on a few occasions, in the hands of activist officials and in the right circumstances, the 1843 Act was not entirely a dead letter.

This chapter does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of British slave-ownership after the 1843 Act or quantify the number of people held in bondage by British subjects. The latter objective is near impossible, though the Foreign Office did try to acquire estimates from overseas consuls in 1848. At that point consuls estimated

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, cc. 736-7.

<sup>3</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 40-65.

<sup>4</sup> C. Evans, ‘Brazilian Gold’, pp. 118-134.

3,500 British owned slaves in Brazil and the Havana consul named at least 32 British slave-owners in Cuba.<sup>5</sup> Whilst, these numbers represent a tiny proportion of slave-owners in Brazil and Cuba they still posed awkward questions about Britons' and the British government's commitment to anti-slavery. As we shall see in smaller Caribbean nations Britons made up a significant and influential part of the slave-owning population. British slave-ownership in the United States has left little historical evidence though emigration and commercial connections mean that Britons certainly acquired slave property in America.<sup>6</sup> In 1844 the British consul in Savannah inquired about the legality of slave-ownership by a British subject who had become naturalised American citizen, but he failed to name the individual.<sup>7</sup> As I will discuss in section two British financiers certainly had an economic stake in American slavery, but became less likely to acquire slave property after the "Panic of 1837". Given the lack of exact figures of British slave-owners overseas a different approach focusing on the few slave-owners who stuck their head above the parapet better serves my purpose. This chapter then will be split into three sections focused on inherited slave property, mortgages on slaves, and slaves owned by joint-stock mining companies. Each of these forms of slave property were partially legitimised by concessions made in the 1843 Act, and here I explore how this legitimacy was both constructed and contested in the decades that followed.

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<sup>5</sup> J. C. Westwood to Palmerston, 28 Dec 1848, J. Crawford to Palmerston, 31 Dec 1848, in *Correspondence with British Ministers and Agents in Foreign Countries, and with Foreign Ministers in England, on Slave Trade, 1848-49 (Class B)*, *PP*, 1128 (1849), p. 303; For an in depth discussion of this census see J. Mulhern, 'Britain, the British and Labour in Brazil, c. 1830-1888', Durham University PhD thesis, forthcoming 2017, chapter 4. Thank you to the author for the advance sight of his research.

<sup>6</sup> 230,800 Britons left for America emigrated in the period 1853-60 alone, see: Magee, Thompson, *Empire and Globalization*, p. 64. For evidence of two British emigrant slave-owners see C. Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1971), p.38, p.75, pp. 129-133.

<sup>7</sup> E. Molyneux, to Aberdeen, 2 Feb 1844, in 'Correspondence with Foreign Powers, not Parties to Treaties or Conventions giving Mutual Right of Search of Vessels suspected of Slave Trade', 1844 (Class D), *PP*, 635 (1844), p. 139.

The key concession of both Brougham's bill and the 1843 Act was the recognition of all extant slave property as legitimate. As such the 1843 Act can be conceived as the progeny of the Emancipation Act of 1833 in its attempts to reconcile condemnation of slavery with respect for property. In making a case designed to appeal to conservatives Brougham also invoked the £20 million in compensation that had been 'generously, but not more generously than justly' paid to West Indian slave-owners.<sup>8</sup> The apparent justness of this compensation highlighted a contradiction that cast a shadow over attempts to curtail British slave-owning. British emancipation by paying recompense to slave-owners had at once ended slavery and affirmed the right to property in human beings. This recognition of property rights in man had been a hard won victory for slave-owners in the battle over emancipation. As Draper has demonstrated owners of human beings were able to reposition themselves as 'proprietors' and 'land owners' first and foremost.<sup>9</sup> This recognition that it had been possible, and legal, for British subjects to own human beings meant that certain concessions had to be made. Brougham could not hope to immediately declare all British owned slave property illegitimate. Instead he conceded that any slave purchased before the passage of the bill would be considered legal - an allowance he claimed had been 'warmly opposed by other abolitionists.'<sup>10</sup> Brougham also conceded that 'a British subject might become possessed of slaves without any voluntary act of his own.'<sup>11</sup> This concession and the stress on voluntarily acquiring slave property echoes the laws against supplying the slave trade, which rested upon proving the intention of perpetrators. The sanctity of private property and the passive acquisition of slave property would become key pillars of the post-emancipation slave-owners' claim to legitimacy.

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<sup>8</sup> *Hansard*, 7 July 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 70, c. 736.

<sup>9</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>10</sup> *Hansard*, 7 July 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 70, c. 740.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

The ways in which British slave-owners legitimised their slave property can be understood in relation to defences of slavery offered prior to emancipation. Bankers, mining companies, and overseas plantation owners all stressed the necessity of slave property in their specific circumstances, despite being united in their professed opposition to slavery. Rather than pro-slavery the critiques of prohibitions on British slave-ownership can be categorised as ‘anti-abolitionist’ a term coined by Paula Dumas in her recent survey of pro-slavery opinion.<sup>12</sup> Whilst these anti-abolitionists all defended their specific form of slave property, their rhetoric drew on similar themes. First and foremost apologists stressed the necessity of slave property in each circumstance, often by invoking the absence of other forms of labour or property. Allied to this was the recurring claim that British slave-ownership was more benign than that of foreigners, be they Cuban, Brazilian, or anything else. Such claims rested on assumptions of British moral superiority, often shared by abolitionists, which had been forged during the late eighteenth century debate over the slave trade.<sup>13</sup> Property rights, necessity, and British moral superiority were all part of what Michael Taylor has described as the ‘intellectual toolkit’ of British slave-owners.<sup>14</sup> Deploying this toolkit to defend slave-ownership elsewhere rested on slave-owners ability to shape metropolitan knowledge about the slave economies of the Atlantic world.

Slave-ownership was not simply defended in the abstract. As David Lambert has argued for the pre-emancipation period pro-slavery, or anti-abolitionism, was also a material and social practice. Whilst post-emancipation slave-owners lacked an organised parliamentary presence like the West India interest they made use of the same tactics of petitioning and lobbying MPs that had been utilised by West Indian slave-owners. Britons also sought to restrict the information about how many slaves they owned or the existence of alternative sources of labour in Cuba, Brazil, or the

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<sup>12</sup> Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>13</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, p. 204.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, ‘Conservative Political Economy’, p. 975.

Caribbean. In doing so they practically undermined the critiques of abolitionists and government officials. By highlighting these practices and the individuals involved I propose that post-emancipation British slave-owners might be considered as part of the 'counter-revolutionary Atlantic' in their commitment to defending property rights and the right of compensation.<sup>15</sup> British slave-ownership was also shaped by the 1843 Act as British subjects found new ways to legally acquire slave property or maintain an unfree workforce. Through such action, Brougham's line between acceptable and unacceptable slave-ownership would be moved, altered, and at times erased.

#### Compensation and Counter-Revolution in the Caribbean

From its inception, the 1843 Act affirmed the legitimacy of acquiring slave property via inheritance or marriage agreement. In such instances enslaved people could be conceptualised as being forced upon unfortunate heirs through no wrong of their own. Brougham himself endorsed this position in 1845 stating that owners of slaves overseas 'should be made fully aware of the great delicacy of the predicament in which they, perhaps unconsciously, stood.'<sup>16</sup> These slave-owners resided both in Britain and a number of Caribbean colonies. In some cases, specifically in the Dutch and Danish West Indies, they made up a very significant proportion of the slave-owning population. The 'delicate predicament' adverted to by Brougham would raise awkward questions for the government from the 1840s onwards. This section explores British slave-ownership in Surinam and St. Croix and the ways in which slave-owners dealt with abolitionist critique and the looming threat of emancipation. British slave-owners defended their human property by positioning themselves as primarily being landowners and campaigning for a compensated emancipation. I argue that in some contexts British emancipation had a fundamentally conservative legacy, as ideas and practices employed in the struggle over British slavery were redeployed in new arenas.

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<sup>15</sup> D. Lambert, 'The Counter-Revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian Petitions and Proslavery Networks', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 6:3 (2005), pp. 405-420, pp. 406-7.

<sup>16</sup> *Hansard*, 20 July 1855, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 139, c. 1197.

Whilst the scale of British slave-ownership outside of the Empire is difficult to estimate its presence in certain sites can be effectively demonstrated. The Legacies of British Slave-ownership database (LBS), through its examination of wills and probate records has identified a number of recipients of compensation who also held slave property outside of the British Empire. Of particular interest here are British subjects who possessed or had links to slave property in the Dutch colony of Surinam. The LBS contains details of thirty-nine individuals who have links to slave property in Surinam.<sup>17</sup> Whilst this represents a tiny number of the 47,000 individuals in the database as a whole, or the 3,000 of primary interest, they nonetheless illustrate that British subjects owned slaves outside of the empire and, more importantly continued to do so post-emancipation.<sup>18</sup> As we shall see British slave-owners did represent a significant minority in Surinam and their actions as slave-owners both contradicted the image of anti-slavery Britain and their own representation as passive or involuntary owners of slave property.

The presence of British slave-owners in Surinam was due in part to the tumultuous conflict of the Napoleonic Wars. Britain had occupied Surinam between 1799 and 1802, and then again from 1804 to 1816. In this period trade was opened up to all British subjects, increasing the commercial possibilities of the colony.<sup>19</sup> Whilst Surinam was returned to the Dutch after the end of the war, its Nickerie district, named after a local river, was largely made up of English planters who had resided there since the late eighteenth century. These planters owned around 1,500 slaves between them. They successfully petitioned the English government for the right of free export and import of commodities to British colonies, a similar privilege having been granted to the Dutch

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<sup>17</sup> Legacies of British Slave-Ownership database (hereafter LBS).

[<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/>, accessed 12 Sep 2017] Thanks you to Dr. Nicholas Draper for drawing my attention to the existence of British slave-owners in Surinam.

<sup>18</sup> K. McClelland, 'Appendix 3: A note on the database' in C. Hall, N. Draper, *et al* (eds), *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> C. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and Surinam, 1791/5-1942* (Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1990), p. 170.

in neighbouring Berbice and Guiana.<sup>20</sup> This close geographic proximity and openness of trade appears to have facilitated movement into the Dutch property by British subjects from Crown colonies who had experienced compensated emancipation. Of the thirty-nine individuals with links to Surinam in LBS, nineteen had previously owned property in nearby colonies like Guiana, Berbice, and Demerara. At least some appear to have relocated to Surinam from the 1820s onwards potentially due to a concern that emancipation was on the horizon. For example, in 1836 Hugh McLeod moved, with his nephew and son-in-law Hugh Wright, from Demerara to Surinam, where he became a slave-owner.<sup>21</sup> As I will demonstrate British slave-owners appeared to have brought not only their capital to Surinam but also a commitment to compensated emancipation. By the time the 1843 Act had passed British slave-owners were well established in Surinam and a known quantity to government. In fact the mid-1840s witnessed a number of conflicts between the British community and consul Edward Schenley, who was particularly activist in his pursuit of anti-slavery. In 1845 Schenley informed Aberdeen of 'acts of cruelty' committed towards slaves on the Kent Estate belonging to Sir William Young, by an attorney who was also British.<sup>22</sup> The employment of British overseers was common in Surinam as an 1859 consular report attested absentee British slave-owners preferred other Britons to manage their estates 'seldom liking to have foreigners to do with them.'<sup>23</sup> Schenley's criticisms garnered protests from both the governor of Surinam and the British subjects resident there, but he remained confident that 'the dread of publicity & public opinion has at length commenced its powerful operation in favour of the poor negro'.<sup>24</sup> Schenley also raised concerns with the Foreign Office that some British subjects had illegally imported slaves during the 1820s accusing British subject Alexander Ferrier of contravening an 1818 treaty that

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 180-181.

<sup>21</sup> 'Hugh Macleod', LBS. [<http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/7594>, accessed 8 Dec 2016]

<sup>22</sup> E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 4 Jan 1845, TNA: FO 84-565.

<sup>23</sup> 'Report on the Consular District of Surinam', 30 Apr 1859, TNA: FO 37-376.

<sup>24</sup> E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 20 Jan 1845, TNA: FO 84-565.



had abolished the Dutch slave trade.<sup>25</sup> The consul also championed the rights of enslaved people who claimed to have been moved from British colonies by their owners to Surinam. Schenley argued that these individuals, such as the “mulatto John Cleaver” from St. Kitts, were free British subjects who had been re-enslaved through their relocation to Surinam.<sup>26</sup> Whilst the Earl of Aberdeen did remonstrate with the Dutch government over these cases, Schenley was advised that there was little that could be done from a legal standpoint. Schenley would ultimately purchase Cleaver and manumit him, as well as arranging his travel out of Surinam to avoid potential re-enslavement.<sup>27</sup> Thus it would appear some slave-owners moved people as well as capital in their attempts to avoid emancipation. Despite these controversies the vast majority of British-owned slaves in Surinam were perceived as having been legitimately acquired prior to the 1843 Act. However, for some abolitionists the existence of British slave-owners in Surinam provided an opportunity to set a moral example.

As discussed in previous chapters, the BFASS, who saw the existence of slave-owners overseas as a source of national embarrassment, believed in the power of public discussion and moral suasion. This strategy characterised their approach to the Surinam question. An 1844 editorial in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* reeled off a list of British sounding names gleaned from the ‘Surinam Almanack’. Whilst the BFASS’s use of such texts can be considered as evidence of the imperfect information available about Surinam many of the names identified, such as ‘Balfour’, ‘Carstairs’, and ‘Parry’, correspond to the slave-owners identified by LBS.<sup>28</sup> The *Reporter* estimated that British

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<sup>25</sup> E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 01 Feb 1845, TNA: FO 84-565; E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 14 May 1845, TNA: FO 84-565.

<sup>26</sup> E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 04 Jan 1845, TNA: FO 84-565.

<sup>27</sup> E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 17 Feb 1845, TNA: FO 84-565; E. Schenley to Aberdeen, 26 Aug 1845, TNA: FO 84-565.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Editorial’, *ASR*, 25 Dec 1844; ‘W. A. Carstairs’, LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146648665>, accessed 5 Aug 2017]; ‘James Balfour of Surinam’, LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146648519>, accessed 12 Sep 2017];

subjects held 71 estates and around 7000 slaves in Surinam at this point, a highly significant number given that the enslaved population of Surinam has been estimated at 53,072 in 1833 and 38,592 in 1855.<sup>29</sup> The revelation of large-scale British slave-ownership in Surinam came at a point when the BFASS had fixed their sights on the Netherlands as fertile ground for an abolitionist movement. The enthusiasm to foster a global abolitionist movement had seen prominent figures like G. W. Alexander, Elizabeth Fry, and Samuel Gurney travel to Holland in the 1840s. Whilst these missions led to the establishment of some small-scale anti-slavery societies British abolitionists misread Dutch society and were perceived as condescending to their audience.<sup>30</sup> British slave-owners might then offer an effective way to win over the Dutch to the abolitionist cause and as the *Reporter* noted they ‘possess[ed] an influence which might be most beneficially directed to slavery’s extinction.’ Later revelations that ‘one-sixth of the whole agricultural property of Surinam may be in ... English hands’ strengthened this conviction that British slave-owners might provide a grand example through emancipation.<sup>31</sup> To utilise the influence of British slave-owners, the BFASS attempted to delegitimise the property that had been protected by the Act of 1843.

The BFASS sought to act against Dutch slavery by appealing to the consciences of British subjects through a Christmas day address in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. This address set about problematizing the slave property of these British subjects first and foremost by asserting the humanity of the slaves telling them ‘you thus deprive human

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‘Thomas Butler Parry’, LBS. [<http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146646369>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>29</sup> ‘Editorial’, *ASR*, 25 Dec 1844; P. C. Emmer, E. van den Boogaart ‘Plantation Slavery in Surinam in the Last Decade before Emancipation: The Case of Catharina Sophia’ in P. C. Emmer (ed.) *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880: Trade, Slavery and Emancipation* (Ashgate: London, 1998), Table 8.1, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> Janse, ‘Holland as a Little England’, pp. 133-139.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Editorial’, *ASR*, 8 Jan 1845.

beings ... of their *personality*.<sup>32</sup> At the heart of this was a critique of the respectable slave-owner:

Many of you, no doubt, bear a fair reputation amongst men - many of you endeavour to reconcile your treatment of your slaves with your better feelings - many of you, especially non-resident proprietors, would shrink from the application of the whip by your own hands; and probably, to ease your consciences, send out instructions to your attorney and agents to be humane. But we tell you that they cannot be humane, and return you an income such as you may require at their hands.<sup>33</sup>

Here, the *Reporter* explicitly drew attention to the contradiction between respectability and the brutality of slavery. By focusing particularly on 'non-resident' proprietors they redeployed the rhetoric of the British emancipation campaign where absentee planters had been chastised for their inability to effectively ameliorate the treatment of slaves.<sup>34</sup> The address was a deliberate attempt to collapse the distance between those with a 'fair reputation' and their slaves, as well as the passive manner in which British subjects might have received their slave property and the violent expropriation of the slave trade. Given the importance of character as a form of social capital abolitionists would have hoped that attacks on the reputation of slave-owners might have proved effective in convincing Britons to reject slave-ownership.

This attempt to remove the moral legitimacy of slave-ownership was tied to an assertion that emancipation was also a rational economic choice. Here the *Reporter* turned to demography and information drawn from the *Surinam Almanack* and works on Dutch slavery by G. W. Alexander. The Address 'computed that the number of deaths

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<sup>32</sup> 'Address of the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society to British Subjects Holding Slaves in the Dutch Colony of Surinam', *ASR*, 25 Dec 1844. [Italics in original]

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 41-43.

surpasses the number of births at the rate of from three to five per cent annually.<sup>35</sup> This 'fearful fact' was raised to give an objective weight to the moral cause against slavery.<sup>36</sup> The Dutch government had itself accepted the inevitability of slavery coming to an end in 1842 and the end of the slave trade to Surinam had led to a decline in slave numbers, if not productivity.<sup>37</sup> The *Reporter* asserted that 'emancipation may save you if you set wisely, promptly and zealously about it.'<sup>38</sup> The BFASS then sought to offer British slaveholders a chance to get ahead of the curve and emancipate their slaves safe in the knowledge that they 'would be amply compensated by the satisfaction it would bring your own hearts.'<sup>39</sup>

The *Reporter* was correct to identify a desire for compensation among British slave-owners; however, the recompense they sought was far more material than moral. The Christmas Address prompted a reply that stressed the necessity of monetary compensation, following the examples of Britain's own colonies. In a letter printed in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* 'A Surinam Slaveholder and Subject of Great Britain' at once professed an opposition to slavery and a defence of his own slave-ownership. Seeking to rebut the economic case for emancipation, the author aired his concern that 'the resignation of slave property without compensation, by men, who, already too old to commence a new life, would thus consign themselves to the worst description of pauperism'.<sup>40</sup> This was paired with a condemnation of the institution of slavery as 'abhorrent to every feeling and principle of humanity'. In doing so the 'Surinam Slaveholder' mirrored the logic of the British Emancipation of 1833, at once rejecting slavery and asserting the legitimacy of slave property. Noting that Dutch slave-owners in British colonies were compensated after 1833, the 'Surinam Slaveholder' asked

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<sup>35</sup> 'Address', *ASR*, 25 Dec 1844.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Janse, 'Holland as a Little England', pp. 140-142; E. Horlings, 'An Economic Explanation of the Late Abolition of Slavery in Surinam' in G. Oostinide (ed) *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit*, p. 108.

<sup>38</sup> 'Address', *ASR*, 25 Dec 1844.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> 'Surinam - British Slaveholders', *ASR*, 23 July 1845.

'Shall Great Britain use her step-sons better than her native born children?'<sup>41</sup> Michael Taylor has argued that during the pre-emancipation period that 'historically-informed economic arguments [were] an essential constituent of pro-slavery apologia.'<sup>42</sup> For British slave-owners in Surinam West Indian emancipation became a powerful historical precedent to draw upon as the only economically, and morally, sound means of ending slavery. Historicism also allowed slave-owners to appeal to an imagined geography, which positioned the British model of emancipation as something that should be emulated across the rest of the Caribbean.

A secondary argument offered by the 'Surinam Slaveholder' was a representation of manumission as a folly prohibited by Surinam's stringent laws. Any slave freed 'would become in a short space of time, if not in name, in reality the slaves of the colonial Government.'<sup>43</sup> The claim that emancipation was against the interest of the slaves themselves was a common defence offered by British slave-owners but was modified to fit the location, as will be demonstrated in section three of this chapter. The Surinam Slaveholder conceded that 'coercive labour may be a milder term than slavery', but when it came to government labour 'a rose by any other name would smell as sweet: slavery by any other name would smell as foully.'<sup>44</sup> However, the main thrust remained the need for compensation, a fact that was conceptualised with specific reference to British Emancipation. Whilst such pleas were unlikely to engender much sympathy among the *Anti-Slavery Reporter's* audience they did speak to a central concern of Dutch emancipation.

Historians have long been intrigued by the fact that slavery in the Dutch empire ended thirty years after British emancipation in light of the perceived economic and political

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, 'Conservative Political Economy', pp. 987-988.

<sup>43</sup> 'Surinam - British Slaveholders', *ASR*, 23 July 1845.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

similarities between the Netherlands and England.<sup>45</sup> Maartje Janse has noted the desire for an orderly emancipation within the Netherlands that distrusted the activities of British abolitionists as potentially revolutionary.<sup>46</sup> In the Dutch context, compensation was understood as a constitutive part of the transition from slavery to freedom, and Erik Horlings has attributed the longevity of Dutch slavery to the poor finances of the metropolitan government and the consequent difficulties of raising a compensation package.<sup>47</sup> This preoccupation with compensation was captured by the 'Surinam Slaveholder' and would be a central part of the debate around British slave-owners in the colony.

The arguments made for compensation by British subjects can be conceptualised as part of an attempt to stave off colonial reform. This can be demonstrated by considering the rhetoric deployed in response to proposed reforms of Dutch colonial governance in 1851 and 1859. In 1851 the Dutch government considered reforms including a law emancipating children born to enslaved mothers thereafter. Unsurprisingly, there was widespread opposition from slave-owners. However, one complaint of particular interest came from the Amsterdam merchant firm Wittering Brothers, who protested to Sir Ralph Abercromby, the British ambassador at Den Haag, on behalf of their British clients. The substance of Wittering's protest was that '[British subjects] who are owners of slaves would be ruined if negro children would be free by their birth.'<sup>48</sup> Predictions of economic collapse in the face of emancipation had been a hallmark of the debate over slavery and, as Paula Dumas has noted, slavery apologetics rested on the assumption of the economic utility of slave labour or the slave trade.<sup>49</sup> The precedent of compensation would form the basis for continued anti-abolitionist action by British subjects in 1859. This time a bill for the abolition of slavery in the

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<sup>45</sup> S. Drescher, 'The Long Goodbye: Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective', *American Historical Review*, 99:1 (1994), pp. 44-69.

<sup>46</sup> Janse, 'Holland as a Little England', pp. 144-145.

<sup>47</sup> Horlings, 'An Economic Explanation,' pp. 112-113

<sup>48</sup> Wittering Brothers to R. Abercromby, 10 Oct 1852, TNA: FO 84-883.

<sup>49</sup> Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, p. 10; Taylor, 'Conservative Political Economy', p. 978.

Dutch empire was under consideration and another raft of protests was launched. This petition echoed the claims of Wittering Brothers and characterised abolition as ‘an almost complete confiscation of their property in Surinam.’<sup>50</sup> The 1859 petition expressed these concerns with added historical edge, arguing that ‘there is no example in any civilized state of a project so destructive of the rights of property as the one in question, ever been taken into serious consideration even during the anarchy of a revolution.’<sup>51</sup> Britain’s emancipation was represented as a counter-revolutionary measure whilst respect for property was portrayed as the hallmark of civilization. Rather than encouraging other states to adopt emancipation the principal of compensation could be invoked as a means of delaying reform.

The British government were aware of both the 1851 and 1859 protests by British subjects and it is worth considering how they represented their slave property in these texts. Wittering Brothers, in 1851, made an effort to represent their clients as ‘owners of plantations in the colony of Surinam’ or ‘owners of Estates and Negroes or Slaves.’<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the 1859 petition saw British slave-owners styled as ‘English colonist owners of or interested in plantations in Surinam.’<sup>53</sup> As noted in this chapter’s introduction, British slave-owners had often explicitly positioned themselves as landowners rather than proprietors of human beings. In a British context, the elision of enslaved people and land holdings corresponded with the view of land as a ‘unique form of property’ that ‘conferr[ed] a special status.’<sup>54</sup> As we have seen the BFASS contested this representation of landed respectability, as did the Foreign Office in their response to Wittering Brothers. The Earl of Malmesbury, the Foreign Secretary, gave short-shrift to these concerns and instructed Abercomby to inform the Dutch minister of foreign affairs ‘that H. M’s Government have no sympathy with British Subjects who own slaves

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<sup>50</sup> W. R. Ward to Malmesbury, 14 Feb 1859, TNA: CO 218-222.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Wittering Brothers Circular, 9 Oct 1852; Wittering Brothers to R. Abercromby, 10 Oct 1852, TNA: FO 84-883.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Davidoff, Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 19-20.

in Foreign Countries.’<sup>55</sup> Whilst the British rarely interfered with the internal slave systems of sovereign countries Malmesbury made clear that Britain privileged emancipation over its subjects’ desire for compensation and explicitly ruled out interference on their behalf. Abercromby expressed a similar view in a private note to Wittering Brothers where he explained that ‘slavery has ever been held as one of those extreme cases where the proprietary right may be cancelled as contravening a still higher right.’<sup>56</sup> This was a laudable sentiment. However, it also represented an act of historical amnesia as British emancipation and legislation like the 1843 Act had of course recognised property rights in man.

It is important to consider not only the rhetorical strategies of British slave-owners but the practical means by which they sought to legitimise their property. David Lambert’s work on pro-slavery petitioning in Jamaica and the Bahamas has stressed that the materiality of petitions were as important as the rhetoric they contained. Petitions gained legitimacy through both the texts that accompanied it and individuals who presented the petition which demonstrated ‘it had been created in an appropriate manner’.<sup>57</sup> Examining the practical means by which British slave-owners pursued compensation also reveals their liminal position. After the French emancipation of 1848, Dutch slave-owners became increasingly desperate to secure compensation and the sugar planters’ lobby petitioned the Dutch government over the issue a number of times. However, British subjects theoretically did not possess this privilege.<sup>58</sup> Wittering Brothers’ letter to Abercromby occurred in this context as they looked to gain government support on behalf of their clients including the Western Bank of Scotland

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<sup>55</sup> Malmesbury to R. Abercromby, 11 Nov 1852, TNA: FO 84-883.

<sup>56</sup> R. Abercromby to Wittering Brothers, 26 Oct 1852, TNA: FO 84-883.

<sup>57</sup> Lambert. ‘Counter-Revolutionary Atlantic’, p. 413.

<sup>58</sup> A. Van Stipriaan, ‘Surinam and the Abolition of Slavery’, in G. Oostinide (ed) *Fifty Years Later*, pp. 127-131.



and Sir John Young, the MP for Cavan and future Governor-General of Canada.<sup>59</sup> Upon further enquiry, Abercromby discovered that Wittering Brothers had taken the initiative in approaching the British and the ambassador made clear that there was little he could do if not approached by British subjects.<sup>60</sup> This was a failure on Wittering's part and demonstrates that the ways in which texts travelled was an important means of securing legitimacy and it may have contributed to the negative response from the British government. It is notable that in 1859 British subjects addressed the Second Chamber of the States directly with ambassador William Ward informing the Foreign Secretary of the presence of British signatories among the petitioners.<sup>61</sup> This second petition suggests British subjects in Surinam had gained political rights that gave their calls for compensation greater weight as they now moved through the correct channels.

The social aspect of anti-abolitionist protest by British slave-owners in Surinam also deserves some consideration. Six British subjects signed the 1859 petition. Three of them were absentees and this suggests close transatlantic collaboration among slave-owners in Surinam.<sup>62</sup> Among these absentees was George Nicholson, whose uncle had been compensated following British emancipation, and who may have received compensation himself for slaves owned in British Honduras.<sup>63</sup> Other Britons such as Thomas Green also had experience of the British compensation process and they may well have helped to promote the idea of compensation among fellow Dutch slave-

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<sup>59</sup> Wittering Brothers to R. Abercromby, 16 Oct 1852, TNA: FO 84-883; 'Sir John Young 1st Baron Lisgar', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146645295>, accessed 9 Dec 2016]

<sup>60</sup> R. Abercromby to Wittering Brothers, 17 Oct 1852, TNA: FO 84-883.

<sup>61</sup> W. R. Ward to Malmesbury, 14 Feb 1859, TNA: CO 218 222.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, Absentee slave-owners identified via the LBS were 'Charlotte Anne Howard formerly Gray (née Cort)', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146648593>, accessed 15 Dec 2016]; 'Gordon MacDonald of Surinam', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146648555>, accessed 10 Aug 2017]; 'George Nicholson of Whitehayes, Hampshire', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146648839>, accessed 10 Aug 2017]

<sup>63</sup> 'George Nicholson of Whitehayes, Hampshire', LBS.

owners.<sup>64</sup> The BFASS certainly feared this was the case and in response they sent a memorial to William III, King of the Netherlands, claiming that British slave-owners were 'following the example set by the West India proprietary ... during the agitation for the abolition of slavery'.<sup>65</sup> Showing acute awareness for how the legacy of emancipation could be used to undermine anti-slavery, the memorialists stressed that economic failure in British colonies was the result of 'planter misconduct' and that slave-owners should focus on offering 'proper inducement' to former slaves to secure their continued labour.<sup>66</sup> Whilst hard evidence of organisation amongst British slave-owners in Surinam cannot be found I will demonstrate throughout the rest of the chapter that British slave-owners did band together to lobby governments. In this context, personal or familial experience of the British compensation process may well have informed debates in Surinam.

From 1843 onwards slave-owners in Surinam had been portrayed in a very sympathetic light but by 1859 and the second protest the BFASS leadership had decided an example must be made. Louis Chamerovzow, the society's secretary, wrote to Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell, forwarding on evidence gleaned from a Surinam newspaper that a British subject, Hugh Wright, had purchased two plantations and the 234 slaves attached to them.<sup>67</sup> Chamerovzow was clearly concerned that the legitimacy attached to slave-ownership in Surinam should be challenged and his letter prompted Russell to take action. The Foreign Secretary's inquiries to D. C. Munro, British consul in Surinam at the time, provide a fuller picture of the character of Surinam slave-ownership. In an exchange later reprinted in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Munro confirmed that Wright was in fact a slave-owner on a huge scale and purchased

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<sup>64</sup> 'Thomas Green of Surinam', LBS. [<http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146646407>, accessed 10 Aug 2017]

<sup>65</sup> 'Memorial to H. M. William the 3<sup>rd</sup>', 6 Apr 1859, enclosed in L. Chamerovzow to W. R. Ward, 25 Apr 1859, TNA: FO 84-1091.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> L. Chamerovzow to Russell, 25 Apr 1859, in *Correspondence with British Ministers and Agents in Foreign Countries, and with Foreign Ministers in England, on Slave Trade, April 1859-March 1860* (Class B), *PP*, 2749-1 (1860), pp. 79-80.

'upwards of 1700 slaves' by 1859.<sup>68</sup> Hugh Wright had first acquired slave property in Surinam via inheritance from his uncle Hugh MacLeod in 1843 but had continued to purchase slaves, thereafter.<sup>69</sup> Munro, however leapt to Wright's defence stating 'that he is not purchasing slaves, but merely the properties on which they are attached'.<sup>70</sup> As we have seen, this elision of enslaved and landed property was a common strategy amongst slave-owners. The apology may well have been prompted by Munro's own slave-ownership as he was among the recipients of Dutch compensation in 1863.<sup>71</sup> Alongside this defence of Wright Munro provided a survey of British slave-owners in Surinam.<sup>72</sup> Munro also maintained the representation of Surinamese slave-owners as passively acquiring property. When discussing one of the petitioners he stressed how 'the greatest part of which has fallen into the hands of Mr. [Robert] Kirk by inheritance and transfer.'<sup>73</sup> Munro's correspondence with Russell represented an attempt to further legitimise slave-ownership in Surinam through the elision of their human property and landed estates.

Whilst Munro clearly hoped to legitimise slave-ownership in Surinam there was no doubt that individuals such as Hugh Wright were in contravention of the 1843 Act. However, Munro argued that Wright had believed he was acting as a Burgher of Surinam and that if any attempt at prosecution was made he would have 'recourse to naturalization as a Dutch subject.'<sup>74</sup> From the Foreign Office's perspective naturalised citizens were still liable to prosecution, but in practice they lay beyond the reach of the

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<sup>68</sup> D. C. Munro to Russell, 10 Oct 1859, TNA: FO 84-1091, reproduced in 'British Slaveholders in Surinam', 1 June 1860, *ASR*.

<sup>69</sup> D. C. Munro to Russell, 10 Oct 1859 TNA: FO 84-1091; 'Hugh Wright of Paramaribo, Surinam', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146646367>, accessed 14 Dec 2016]

<sup>70</sup> D. C. Munro to Russell, 10 Oct 1859, TNA: FO 84-1091.

<sup>71</sup> 'Duncan Cameron Munro', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146646597>, accessed 14 Dec 2016]

<sup>72</sup> D. C. Munro to Russell, 10 Oct 1859, TNA: FO 84-1091.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 'Robert Kirke of Burntisland and Surinam', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146648521>, accessed 15 Dec 2016]

<sup>74</sup> D. C. Munro to Russell, 10 Oct 1859, TNA: FO 84-1091.

law.<sup>75</sup> Wright's willingness to eschew his Britishness is evidence of how the political geography of the post-emancipation world had shifted pro-slavery practices. Prior to 1833 British slave-owners had represented themselves as loyal subjects, particularly through petitions to the Crown which were framed in terms of '[h]umility, faithfulness, affection and loyalty'.<sup>76</sup> Even the 'Surinam Slave-holder' who addressed the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* cast themselves as a 'loyal subject of Great Britain', but the value of this loyalty came into question when it threatened slave property. For Hugh Wright and other overseas slave-owners Britishness was only useful so long as it guaranteed their property rights.

Russell's intervention would lead Munro to post a notice of the 1843 Act in the colony's newspaper and fulfilling his duty he soon reported back that a British subject, Charlotte Gray, had purchased eighty five slaves in acquiring a cotton estate.<sup>77</sup> Charlotte Gray had first inherited her slave property after the death of her husband Thomas in 1856, which left her as the owner of plantation Burnside with Hope plantation being a neighbouring property.<sup>78</sup> Gray was resident in London at the time, a fact that made her liable to prosecution and Russell ordered the Attorney and Solicitor Generals to consider mounting a case. Ultimately, the Foreign Office concluded that though Gray's purchase of slaves was clearly illegal a prosecution would require the testimony of her attorney who had undertaken the purchase in Surinam.<sup>79</sup> Enforcement of the 1843 Act was always limited by physical geography as the British subjects involved were often literally beyond the reach of the law. As such even when the legitimacy of slave-ownership in Surinam had been eroded no example could be made.

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<sup>75</sup> Aberdeen to E. Molyneux, 21 Aug 1844, Correspondence, *PP*, 635, p. 141.

<sup>76</sup> Lambert, 'Counter-Revolutionary Atlantic', p. 411-412.

<sup>77</sup> Russell to D. C. Munro, 27 Jan 1860; D. C. Munro to Russell, 16 Feb 1860, TNA: FO 84-1119.

<sup>78</sup> 'Charlotte Anne Howard formerly Gray (née Cort)', LBS.

<sup>79</sup> 'Case as to Alleged Purchase of Slaves by Mrs Gray', 30 Aug 1860, TNA: Treasury Solicitors Papers 25-1115.

Surinam was not the only arena of British overseas slave-ownership in the Caribbean. British subjects also formed a significant proportion of slave-owners in the Danish West Indies. The Danish presence in the Caribbean received as little attention from contemporary authors as it has from historians.<sup>80</sup> This is despite the fact that emancipation in the islands was secured by a slave uprising in July 1848.<sup>81</sup> The *Manchester Times's* conclusion that the 'prosperity of the island is irretrievably ruined' was typical of the scant, and mostly negative coverage, this momentous event received in Britain.<sup>82</sup> However, some British subjects had a great deal at stake in the Danish islands, particularly in St. Croix, the only island large enough to support a plantation economy.<sup>83</sup> Thirty of the seventy-five estates of over 300 acres belonged to English speaking families and 26 individuals with links to St. Croix can be found within LBS.<sup>84</sup> British subjects likely represented an even more significant proportion of slave-ownership in St. Croix than they did in Surinam. Their presence in the island was the result of a similar occupation during the Napoleonic Wars and the Danish government's open support of foreign land ownership.<sup>85</sup> Whilst this British presence in St. Croix did receive occasional comment from abolitionists it generated nowhere near as much controversy as the Surinam case.<sup>86</sup> Despite being unheralded at the time, investors in St. Croix have left behind vital contextual evidence about how British slave-ownership functioned beyond the borders of anti-slavery Britain.

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<sup>80</sup> The most prominent work on the Danish West Indies remains a posthumous collection of essays by the Jamaican scholar Neville A. T. Hall which explore Danish West Indian society from foundation to post-emancipation. N. A. T. Hall, B. Higman (ed.) *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St Thomas, St John and St Croix* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1994); see also a special issue on slavery in the Danish West Indies of the *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 41:4 (2016); N. T. Jensen, *For the Health of the Enslaved: Slaves, Medicine, and Power in the Danish West Indies, 1803-1848* (Museum of Tusulanen Press, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Hall, 'The Victor Vanquished: Emancipation and its Aftermath' in N. A. T. Hall, B. Higman (ed.) *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, p. 208.

<sup>82</sup> *Manchester Times and Gazette*, 8 Aug 1848.

<sup>83</sup> Hall, 'Empire without Dominion: The Danish West Indies, 1671-1848' in N. A. T. Hall, B. Higman (ed.) *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>86</sup> 'Address of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society to British Shareholders in Foreign Mines in which Slave-Labour is Employed, and to Other Subjects or Natives of Great Britain who Hold or Hire Slaves in Foreign Countries.', *ASR*, 1 Jan 1847.

The Dyotts of Staffordshire, a family of country landowners and Tory MPs, were among the British slave-owners who had acquired their slave property in St. Croix via marriage.<sup>87</sup> The Dyotts gained a one-fourth share of the Betty's Hope estate through William Dyott's marriage to Eleanor Thompson and it would be passed to his son Richard upon his death in 1847.<sup>88</sup> Betty's Hope and its slave workforce then corresponded to the vision of involuntary slave-ownership imagined by Brougham in the 1843 Act. Whilst the Dyotts' acquisition of slaves was passive they kept in regular correspondence with the various attorneys who administered Betty's Hope.<sup>89</sup> These attorneys were drawn from the British community in St. Croix and were charged with employing plantation managers, organising sugar sales, and maintaining the estates.<sup>90</sup> As such their letters generally relate to mundane details of sugar prices and how weather might be affecting crops. The enslaved workforce makes few appearances except for comments on their health or behaviour. For example, H. A. Walker misguidedly reassured his employers that 'I have no apprehension of disaffection [among the slaves] here' only a week before emancipation.<sup>91</sup> Absentee slave-owners in Surinam would have relied on attorneys to administer and provide information about their property in the same way and the Dyott letters provide illustration of this relationship.

The Betty's Hope correspondence also demonstrates that slave-owners in Britain actively opposed emancipation. An 1846 proposal for emancipation was opposed by St. Croix slave-owners on the basis of inadequate compensation. Walker's letter to Richard Dyott on this subject refers to a meeting amongst slave-owners in London where they

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<sup>87</sup> H. M. Stephens, rev. R. T. Stearn, 'Dyott, William (1761–1847)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/8370>, accessed 13 Dec 2016]

<sup>88</sup> 'Marriage Settlement', Dyott Family Papers, Staffordshire County Record Office (hereafter DFP, SCRO): D661/2/11.

<sup>89</sup> See DFP, SCRO: D661; D3388.

<sup>90</sup> For more on the role of the attorney as representative for absentee owner see B. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005).

<sup>91</sup> H. A. Walker to R. Dyott, 26 June 1848, DFP, SCRO: D661.10.2.3.5.

'unanimously resolved' to propose a voluntary emancipation, but postponed for 16 years.<sup>92</sup> Discussion of compensation in private correspondence echoed the arguments made in the Surinam petitions. Edward Dewhurst, Dyott's attorney and a St. Croix slave-owner, portrayed emancipation as 'future disfranchisement of all our rights & property without compensation.'<sup>93</sup> When the enslaved people of St. Croix took emancipation into their own hands, British slave-owners in the island continued to organise and sought *post hoc* compensation. This became a running theme in the correspondence of the Dyotts' attorneys.<sup>94</sup> This correspondence provides evidence of slave-owner organisation lacking in the Surinam case and is suggestive of a network of slave-owners collectively asserting their property rights in the face of reform.

Slave-owner demands for compensation also spilled into the public sphere. Writing in *The Times* 'JUSTITIA' sought to wield the paper's 'very extensive influence [as] an appeal through its pages will have more weight than remonstrances [sic] or petitions from those aggrieved, addressed directly to the Legislature of Denmark.'<sup>95</sup> The representation of slavery in St. Croix, as put forth in this letter, made similar claims to those of Surinam slave-owners, stressing that not only was the end of slavery harmful to the formerly enslaved, but that 'proprietors are becoming every day more and more impoverished'. The 'unwarrantable' and 'unnecessary' slave revolt was cast in stark contrast to an orderly, compensated emancipation that supposedly benefited all involved.<sup>96</sup> Both public and private representations of slave-owning in St. Croix were suffused with this assertion of property rights in man and the natural corollary that compensation was necessary.

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<sup>92</sup> H. A. Walker to R. Dyott, 7 June 1846, DFP, SCRO: D661.10.2.3.5.

<sup>93</sup> E. Dewhurst to W. Dyott, 26 Sep 1840, DFP, SCRO: D661.10.2.3.3.

<sup>94</sup> H. A. Walker to R. Dyott, 27 Sep 1848, DFP, SCRO: D661. 10.2.3.5; F. Newton to R. Dyott, 12 May 1850, DFP, SCRO: D661. 10.2.3.8; F. Newton to R. Dyott, 23 Feb 1852, DFP, SCRO: D661.10.2.3.8.

<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 20 Oct 1848.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

The Surinam and St. Croix examples also further demonstrate how imagined and physical geographies helped maintain the legitimacy of slave-ownership in the face of abolitionist critique. Slave-owners at first appealed to an imagined geography that positioned the British state as guarantor of their property rights overseas by eliding slaves into land. When this approach failed individuals such as Hugh Wright repositioned themselves as falling outside of Britain's legal reach. Wright and other slave-owners could rely upon physical geography to prevent the British government from acquiring the material evidence to mount a prosecution.

When Dutch emancipation and its ten year apprenticeship period were announced in 1863 BFASS secretary Louis Chamerovzow was forced to admit that British compensation may have been a stumbling block to emancipation elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> The example of British slave-owners in Surinam and St. Croix is very suggestive of this fact. Both groups were keen to postpone emancipation and secure compensation. Ultimately, in both Surinam and St. Croix British slave-owners were compensated for their human property, though the Dyotts had to wait nearly a decade to receive their money.<sup>98</sup> In attempting to do so slave-owners organised both in the Caribbean and in Britain itself and potentially drew directly on the tactics and experience of British emancipation. Protests against emancipation by British slave-owners might be considered as part of the counter-revolutionary Atlantic as they explicitly opposed 'radical, reformist and abolitionist' politics.<sup>99</sup> The case of St. Croix in particular makes clear that slave-owners on both sides of the Atlantic came together to defend their human property. These slave-owners, who had been conceptualised as involuntary and unproblematic by Brougham's bill, proved to be active and determined in their campaign to prolong human bondage. Attempts to ward off emancipation in both Surinam and St. Croix rested on the assertion that a gradual, compensated process of

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<sup>97</sup> Janse, 'Holland as a Little England', pp. 149-150.

<sup>98</sup> F. Newton to R. Dyott, 28 June 1858, DFP, SCRO: D661.10.2.3.8.

<sup>99</sup> Lambert, 'The Counter-Revolutionary Atlantic', pp. 406-407.



emancipation was the only civilized way to bring slavery to an end. Slave-owners represented any divergence from this model as disastrous to both slave and master. Such claims rested on the belief that slave property had been legitimately acquired as recognised in the 1843 Act. However, not all British slave property in the Caribbean was acquired through inheritance or marriage as the economies of the region were also home to British commercial activity. The next section will explore the debates surrounding credit relations and slavery, a form of slave-ownership more controversial than that discussed above.

#### Human Collateral: Mortgages and Slavery

By the early 1840s the credit provided by British banks was vital to industrial expansion throughout the world. Merchant banks in particular helped finance slave-produced commodities such as sugar and cotton through shipping and the extension of credit. However, these chains of credit not only tied British banks to merchants overseas, but also the plantation system and its ruthless exploitation of slave labour. The distance between financier and slave-owner could collapse as economic crises and bankruptcies saw slaves transferred to balance the books. Brougham's bill of 1843 raised a concern among some bankers that their links to slave-owners might be transformed into irredeemable debts or, worse still, might land them before a judge. Previous discussion of the 1843 Act has mainly been concerned with its inability to curb the exploitation of slave labour by British owned mining companies in Brazil, however during Commons debate the issue of credit and mortgaging was a more prominent theme.<sup>100</sup> This section focuses on one banking firm, Baring Brothers, which both lobbied against the 1843 Act and acquired slave property in Cuba and St. Croix. As we shall see Barings and other merchants sought to represent mortgaging of slave property as a necessary, and natural, part of overseas commercial activity. The ambiguous conclusions of the Act when it came to mortgages is further evidence of the

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<sup>100</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 232.

ambivalence inherent in British attempts to reconcile commercial and anti-slavery goals.

Transatlantic debt and credit relations had long been a feature of British slave-ownership. S. D. Smith has argued that the mortgage was a key credit instrument as far back as the 1740s, rather than being characteristic of the decades before emancipation.<sup>101</sup> Richard Sheridan's study of the failure of West Indian firm Mannings and Anderdon provides an example of the long chain of credit linking metropole and colony and the role mortgaging played in the "Sugar Crisis" of the 1820s.<sup>102</sup> The importance of mortgages to the West Indian economy was certainly borne out by the compensation process tied to emancipation. Draper calculates that metropolitan merchants and bankers were beneficiaries of awards amounting to £3.76 million. Whilst not all of this compensation was the result of mortgages, it did make up a large proportion of the money paid to merchants who might have foreclosed on existing mortgages or made counter-claims against slave-owners to whom they had previously lent money.<sup>103</sup> Price has usefully termed this process as the 'ontogeny of debt'. The term 'ontogeny', borrowed from biological sciences, refers to the development and lifespan of an organism. The 'ontogeny of debt' ran as follows: planters who became indebted to merchants would, often having been sued by the merchant, look to clear their debt via mortgaging of their property.<sup>104</sup> This process was viewed by figures such as Adam Smith as a natural function of the Caribbean plantation economy and was proof of how metropolitan capital flowed to the West Indies.<sup>105</sup> Whilst S. D. Smith maintains that not all West Indian mortgages were the result of bankruptcy the debates

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<sup>101</sup> S. D. Smith, *Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1684-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 142.

<sup>102</sup> R. B. Sheridan, 'The West India Sugar Crisis and British Slave Emancipation, 1830 to 1833', *Journal of Economic History*, 21:2 (1961), pp. 539-551.

<sup>103</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 234-237.

<sup>104</sup> J. M. Price, 'Credit the Slave Trade and Plantation Economies', in B. L. Solow (ed) *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 324-325.

<sup>105</sup> Smith, *Family and Gentry*, pp. 139-141.

over the 1843 Act conceptualised of mortgaging in this way.<sup>106</sup> By the 1820s British merchants and bankers were increasingly extending credit beyond the British Empire and, in many cases, into slave economies. The potential for credit relations in Cuba, Brazil or elsewhere to transform into slave-ownership had to be reconciled with British commitments to anti-slavery.

The merchant-banking firm Baring Brothers provides an excellent entry point into understanding the role of mortgaged slave property. The firm had first-hand experience of mortgaging plantations both before and after British emancipation. Barings had begun life as a family merchant firm in the eighteenth century and had developed into a major financier of transatlantic trade and government loans by the 1830s.<sup>107</sup> Several senior partners of the bank appear among the LBS compensation awardees. These individuals include Alexander Baring, later Lord Ashburton, who would negotiate the 1842 treaty with the US known as the Webster-Ashburton treaty.<sup>108</sup> Whilst Ashburton left the firm in 1830s other senior partners were among the recipients of compensation, including his nephew Thomas Baring and the American Joshua Bates.<sup>109</sup> These two shared management of the bank from the late 1820s and Bates, who oversaw American and Caribbean business, is credited as the driving force behind Barings' expansion during a period in which the bank played a pivotal role in Anglo-American financial and political relations.<sup>110</sup> Ashburton's son-in-law and MP for

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, pp. 148-149.

<sup>107</sup> For a history of the firm see P. Ziegler, *The Sixth Great Power: Barings 1762-1929* (William Collins: London, 1988).

<sup>108</sup> J. Orbell, 'Baring, Alexander, first Baron Ashburton (1773-1848)', *ODNB* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/1380>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

'Alexander Baring', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/-1411131717>, accessed 5 Jan 2017]

<sup>109</sup> 'Thomas Baring', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/1014723079>, accessed 5 Jan 2017]; 'Joshua Bates', LBS. [<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/1326456588>, accessed 5 Jan 2017]; J. Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 21-81.

<sup>110</sup> J. Orbell, 'Baring, Thomas (1799-1873)', *ODNB* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/1385>, accessed 5 Sep 2016]; J. Orbell, 'Bates, Joshua (1788-1864)', *ODNB* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/1678>, accessed 5 Sep 2016]

Southampton Humphrey St John-Mildmay was another recipient of compensation. Both St John-Mildmay's son (also Humphrey) and grandson (Henry) would go on to be partners in Barings.<sup>111</sup> All of these claims were tied to a single, very large, mortgage on the property of Wolfert Katz, the single largest slave-owner in British Guiana. Whilst Barings never took actual possession of Katz's plantation, their pursuit of compensation demonstrated both familiarity and comfort with slave mortgages and a belief in the legitimacy of those property rights. In Cuba and St. Croix Barings would see the ontogeny of debt reach its conclusion as Barings acquired slave property. As I will demonstrate Ashburton, Bates, and Mildmay worked actively to try and legitimise this slave property during the debates over Brougham's bill.

Barings' acquisition of sugar estates, and more importantly slaves, in Cuba and St. Croix corresponds neatly with Price's ontogeny of debt. The extent of Barings' commercial interests in Cuba has received attention from Ines Roldan de Montaud who casts the bank as exemplary among 'the creators of the intricate circuit of commerce, money, and capital flows which shaped a single transatlantic economy.'<sup>112</sup> Barings' activity in Cuba dated back to 1814 when credit was extended to James Drake, a British merchant resident in Havana.<sup>113</sup> Whilst Barings extended credit to merchants rather than planters by facilitating the sugar trade it helped provide the capital that supported the revolution in Cuban sugar production throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup> It was this continued expansion of sugar production that created the conditions under which Barings would acquire their slave property.

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<sup>111</sup> 'Humphrey St John-Mildmay', LBS. [<http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/832232611>, accessed 5 Jan 2017]; Ziegler, *Sixth Great Power*, p. 93.

<sup>112</sup> I. Roldan de Montaud, 'Baring Brothers and the Cuban Plantation Economy, 1814-1870', in A. Leonard and D. Pretel (eds), *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge, 1650-1914* (Palgrave MacMillan: London, 2015), p. 238.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>114</sup> Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba*, pp. 12-17.

Barings' Cuban estates were the result of a partnership developed from the 1830s onwards with the Havana-based firm Mariategui, Knight, & Co. In 1829 Barings opened a £10,000 credit with the firm to support the export of Cuban sugar to North America, in 1831 a joint-exchange account for the same amount was opened and finally the firm was appointed as Barings' Cuban agents in 1834.<sup>115</sup> From 1836 the firm, now George Knight & Co, began to provide short term loans to the proprietors of sugar plantations to meet running costs. This extension of credit was accompanied by a 'deliberate strategy of taking over estates.'<sup>116</sup> However, an American trade crisis, the "Panic of 1837", and a subsequent global drop in sugar prices proved disastrous for Knight & Co. In response Barings looked to restrict credit to its agents at a time when the majority of Knight's assets were tied up in mortgaged plantation property. The various estates mortgaged by Knight required an inflow of capital to meet running costs causing Knight & Co to overextend credit lines both from Barings and other Cuban merchants, and the firm ceased payments in May of 1840.<sup>117</sup> Whilst Knight & Co had several creditors Barings was by far the worst hit with their credit having been extended to £70,000, amounting to around 10% of the company's capital at the time.<sup>118</sup> The liquidation proceedings determined to sell off the produce from the various estates to pay off Knight & Co.'s debts but by 1842 Barings' accounts were not settled and they agreed with the creditors to take over the mortgages of the estates, gaining full title and completing the ontogeny of debt.<sup>119</sup>

Barings' acquisition of slave property in St. Croix also appears to have followed the ontogeny of debt, though it was a long and arduous process. The first reference to the estates can be found in an 1825 letter from a Copenhagen based firm who were seeking a legal opinion on behalf of Barings relating to 'mortgage rights on the estates of Upper

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<sup>115</sup> Roldan de Montaud, 'Baring Brothers', pp. 244-245.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, G. Knight to Barings, 1 Jan 1836, Baring Brothers' Papers, The Baring Archive, London (hereafter BB, TBA): HC4.6.2.

<sup>117</sup> Roldan de Montaud, 'Baring Brothers', p. 246.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 248.

<sup>119</sup> Barings to Spalding, De Conick & Co, 14 Dec 1842, BB, TBA: Letter Book (hereafter LB)12.

Bethlehem and Fredensborg.<sup>120</sup> J. M. Heyliger & Brothers had taken out a mortgage bond on the property in 1816, but their right to do so was disputed by John Gray who argued that he also had mortgage rights to the estates. Determined to foreclose on the mortgage Barings began legal proceedings in July 1827.<sup>121</sup> Barings' attorney in St. Croix would have a great deal of trouble coming to an agreement with Gray over the properties, an issue that appeared to be complicated by a number of other debts that Heyliger's estates had accrued and the fact that Heyliger's heirs all laid some claim to the estates. Barings would finally secure the title to the estates in a decision from the Upper Court in Copenhagen in 1832 when their mortgage of £30,000 plus three years interest at five percent was given priority over Gray's claim.<sup>122</sup> The process of acquiring these St. Croix estates can be understood as loosely following the ontogeny of debt, where a bond became a transfer of title after a legal decision. However, the protracted nature of acquiring Upper Bethlehem and Fredensborg belied the representation of mortgaging as a passive way of securing slave property.

Barings' pursuit of the mortgage required legal counsel in Copenhagen and St. Croix, as well as hiring an attorney William Beech to oversee their properties. The expenses did not end there as various claims existed against the estates preceding their own amounting to £7000, though he argued the mortgage was still worth pursuing.<sup>123</sup> The Heyliger heirs still resided on the estate and Lord Ashburton was convinced by Beech to provide an annual allowance to support them.<sup>124</sup> All these decisions were made at a point when the British government was dismantling slavery in its Caribbean possessions. For all that effort Barings acquired two sugar estates with 272 slaves between them, 42 of whom were hired from a neighbouring property. According to Beech they were 'in a most ruinous state' and had decreased in value a great deal since

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<sup>120</sup> C. J. Black's Widow & Co to Barings, 19 Feb 1825, BB, TBA: HC5.5.5.1.

<sup>121</sup> Bilsted to Borch (trans), 14 July 1827, BB, TBA: HC5.5.5.1.

<sup>122</sup> C. J. Black's Widow & Co to Barings, 31 Mar 1832, BB, TBA: HC5.5.5.1.

<sup>123</sup> W. Beech to Barings, 5 June 1830, BB, TBA: HC5.5.5.1.

<sup>124</sup> W. Beech to Ashburton, 1 May 1837, BB, TBA: HC5.5.5.1.

Gray had them appraised in 1825.<sup>125</sup> What is clear is that Barings had expended a significant amount of time and money in acquiring the estates, a fact that somewhat undermines the image merchant bankers hoped to promote of themselves involuntarily acquiring slave property.

Barings' acquisition of slave property in Cuba and St. Croix was a means of settling large debts. Whilst this was undoubtedly construed by the firm's partners as a natural resolution the anti-slavery mood of the early 1840s clearly caused some concern. As Barings foreclosed on their Cuban mortgages they set about legitimising, both publicly and privately, their slave property. This private legitimisation began by seeking a legal opinion on whether they could in fact lawfully foreclose on mortgaged slave property. This process began in the spring of 1843 when Barings paid for two consultations from lawyer William Burge and Solicitor General William Webb Follett.<sup>126</sup> Burge was an interesting choice of consultant; he had been a lobbyist on behalf of Jamaican slave-owners, and so he was perhaps approached as a respected authority on colonial law.<sup>127</sup> Burge has been characterised as a prime example of colonial slavery apologists who were 'forced to condemn [slavery]' even as they attempted to stave off emancipation.<sup>128</sup> Barings' consultation with the former Attorney General for Jamaica is more evidence of continuities in pro-slavery argumentation, expertise, and networks after emancipation. It appears that Barings had been worried by the increasing publicity given to slave-ownership by the BFASS and figures like Brougham and this motivated their decision to seek legal advice. Roldan de Montaud mistakenly attributes Barings' nervousness over acquiring slave property to the 1843 Act. However this consultation pre-dated

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<sup>125</sup> W. Beech to C. Erichsen, 7 June 1832, BB, TBA: HC5.5.5.1.

<sup>126</sup> 'Case for the Joint Opinion of Mr Burge & Mr Sol. General', 8 Apr 1843, BB, TBA: LEG 27; Case for the Joint Opinion of Mr Burge & Mr Sol. General', 1 May 1843, BB, TBA: LEG 27.

<sup>127</sup> 'William Burge', LBS. [<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/13564>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>128</sup> W. Whyte, 'Burge, William (1786–1849)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/109602>, accessed 10 Aug 2017]

Brougham's announcement of his bill by several months.<sup>129</sup> The wording of the consultation also undermines this interpretation as it specifically refers to clauses in the 1824 Slave Trade Consolidation Act (Act 5 Geo: 4 c.113), a piece of legislation that Brougham and many other abolitionists believed had already made the acquisition of slaves by British subjects illegal.<sup>130</sup> Whilst the timing of the consultation indicates it was prompted by Barings' acquisition of Knight & Company's mortgages it appears likely that the firm hoped to legitimise the acquisition of slave property in similar circumstances; including that in St. Croix. This can be demonstrated by paying attention to the differences between the two legal opinions offered by Burge and Follett, the first of which rejected Barings' claims to slave property and the second which went in the firm's favour.

Barings' first legal enquiry was pitched in broad terms, specifically it enquired whether British subjects would be able to take over a mortgage made in a 'foreign West India island' by a 'Foreign mercantile house' as security for a debt.<sup>131</sup> However, this attempt to secure legal affirmation for their right to mortgage slave property met with disappointment. Burge and the Solicitor General offered an opinion that whilst they did not believe the 1824 Act intended to prevent such actions 'that we could not advise a Mercantile House in London to accept as a security for a debt due to it a mortgage upon an Estate in a Foreign West Indian Island of which slaves form a part.'<sup>132</sup> Barings returned to the drawing board, literally editing the first draft case to add greater specificity. The 'foreign West Indian island' now became Cuba and the 'Foreign Mercantile House' was now explicitly noted as the 'Havannah House'.<sup>133</sup> This specificity was clearly drawn from the George Knight & Co case, as was the additional detail that

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<sup>129</sup> Roldan de Montaud, 'Baring Brothers', p. 249.

<sup>130</sup> 'Case for the Joint Opinion of Mr Burge & Mr Sol. General', 8 Apr 1843, BB, TBA: LEG 27.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> 'Case for the Joint Opinion of Mr Burge & Mr Sol. General', 1 May 1843, BB, TBA: LEG 27.



the 'Havannah House is otherwise unable to pay.'<sup>134</sup> This second opinion affirmed Barings' right to foreclose on the mortgage, but only due to the vagaries of property laws in Cuba. Specifically, the fact that 'the mortgagee cannot of his own authority either take possession of or sell the mortgage property' rather the court in Cuba could order for the property to be sold.<sup>135</sup> Burge deemed it legal on these grounds to have the mortgage transferred to Barings and that the bank should be represented in Cuba by power of attorney, as such because Barings would not legally own the plantations in a strict sense they could not be liable for acquiring them.<sup>136</sup> Whilst this decision legitimised the acquisition of slave property it did so in a very narrow sense relating to the circumstances of the Knight & Co. case. The question of whether slave property could act as security remained ambiguous, so Brougham's bill would provide an opportunity for Barings, and others, to try to secure a firmer answer.

When Brougham presented his bill to prevent the purchase of slaves before the Lords in 1843 he was met with no opposition, but a note of caution was sounded by one Lord who remarked that 'there were a thousand chances by which property in slaves might come into a man's hands.'<sup>137</sup> This dissenting voice belonged to Lord Ashburton who stressed the passivity of acquiring slave property via commercial connections and urged that the bill 'be carefully looked at and examined by persons whose interests were likely to be affected by it.'<sup>138</sup> Here Ashburton repeated a familiar justification that acquiring slave property might be blamed on bad luck or 'chance'. His former position as head of the Board of Trade likely added a sheen of objectivity to his assertion that 'men of extensive connections' in Brazil and Cuba might find it impossible to 'pass their lives in such a country without being drawn into the commission of acts that might be

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> *Hansard*, 7 July 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 70, c. 742.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

construed into offences.<sup>139</sup> Ashburton here sought to naturalise the idea that commercial activity overseas might lead to slave ownership and argue that his concerns related to the protection of British commercial interests. Ashburton's pose as a disinterested critic belied his family firm's involvement in slave-ownership and resembles the role played by individuals with military or mercantile links to the West Indies who positioned themselves as neutral observers in the debate over West Indian emancipation.<sup>140</sup> As I will demonstrate Barings, like the St. Croix slave-owners, worked together with other merchants to attempt to secure the right to mortgage slave property.

When Brougham's Bill arrived before the Commons there remained some uncertainty around the issue of slaves acting as security for debts. This anxiety was expressed most clearly by Humphrey St John-Mildmay who declared that '[t]he bill ought to be called a bill to suppress the foreign colonial trade of the empire.'<sup>141</sup> St John-Mildmay of course did not speak as a neutral observer, though he positioned himself as offering a broad defence of mercantile activity. The Barings' partner argued that:

No man could enter into trade with any country between Virginia and Brazils, who did not run the risk of falling under the penalties of the bill, or seeing the Spaniard, Frenchmen, and others getting securities for their debts, and payments for their advances, which this bill would withhold from the English merchant.<sup>142</sup>

Mildmay here stressed the importance of recovering debts, and at the same time he placed British merchants in opposition to the foreign merchants who would be more eager to provide credit than the British subjects disempowered by the law. By advertent to foreign competition Mildmay also made clear that he saw the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>141</sup> *Hansard*, 18 Aug 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 71, c. 936.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

government's role as protecting the property rights and interests of British merchants. These sentiments were echoed by the Glasgow MP John Dennistoun who raised the spectre of 'Portuguese and Spanish capitalists, who would have no restraint upon them from realising upon the sale of slave estates the advances of money'.<sup>143</sup> Dennistoun here played on the implicit suggestion that British commerce brought a civilizing benefit not possessed by subjects of other nations. Dennistoun's objections were likely linked to his own commercial dealings as both a cotton merchant and spinner engaged in trade, and therefore credit relations, with American slave-owners.<sup>144</sup> By raising the threat to British trade in general, MPs could protect their own interests and attempt to naturalise certain forms of slave property as part and parcel of credit relations.

The objections to Brougham's bill voiced by Ashburton and Mildmay in parliament can be viewed as part of a concerted effort by Barings to legitimise mortgages on slave property. Among the series of petitions sent to parliament protesting Brougham's bill was one addressed from the 'Merchants of London'.<sup>145</sup> This petition appears to correspond with one from the 'Merchants of London engaged in the Foreign Trade of the Country' currently held by the Baring archive.<sup>146</sup> It would appear that Barings drafted the petition as it bears annotations and corrections, potentially made by the firm's lawyer's given the document's presence among the bank's legal papers. The wording of the petition is key as it demonstrates an attempt to normalise acquisition of slave property as a basic element of 'ordinary commercial operations with countries where slavery prevails'.<sup>147</sup> The petitioners also appealed to the primacy of property

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, c. 952.

<sup>144</sup> J. Maclehoose, *Memoirs and Portraits of 100 Glasgow Men who have died during the last thirty years, and in their lives did much to make the city what it now is* (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1886), pp. 100-102. [<http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/mlemen/mlemen026.htm>, accessed 27 Sep 2017]

<sup>145</sup> *Hansard*, 18 Aug 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 71, c. 934.

<sup>146</sup> 'To the Honourable House of Commons', Undated, BB, TBA: LEG 28.1, The Baring Archive (London). Also contained in this file is a copy of the 1843 Act as finally passed on 24 Aug 1843.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

rights and the 'recovery of debts ... which cannot be collected in any other manner.'<sup>148</sup> Merchants represented themselves as being obligated by their involvement in the credit economy to take security of debts and on certain occasions that property happened to be slaves. In such a representation slave-ownership resulting from credit relations was not something that detracted from the character of merchants, rather it constituted a key part of their claim to respectability.

Debates over the status of mortgaged slave property took place in the context of the "Panic of 1837", an American financial crisis with global repercussions. Liverpool's American Chamber of Commerce, made up of merchants mostly involved in the US cotton trade, referenced the "Panic" in a petition protesting the 1843 Bill.<sup>149</sup> The "Panic of 1837" had occurred in the wake of president Andrew Jackson's rejection of the charter of the Second Bank of the United States, leading to the withdrawal of credit from several state banks among which Southern states were particularly hard hit.<sup>150</sup> This crisis had clearly effected those involved in the cotton trade and the Chamber argued their members had been 'obliged to take securities of this kind in a very large amount & many were as yet unrealised.'<sup>151</sup> This language of obligation echoed that of the London merchants' petition and it would appear that the shadow of 1837 loomed over all discussions of mortgaged slave property. Sexton has argued that the repudiation of debts by Southern states led to a wariness in investing directly in slave property, citing an 1839 investment manual that argued for the morally degrading effect of slavery on Southern financial institutions.<sup>152</sup> Liverpool cotton merchants were anxious to secure themselves against future financial crises, though after 1837 British

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, p. 210, p. 223.

<sup>150</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 26-31.

<sup>151</sup> Liverpool American Chamber of Commerce, Minutebook, 9 Aug 1843, Liverpool Central Library, (hereafter LCL): 380 AME.

<sup>152</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 69-73; A. Trotter, *Observations on the Financial Position and Credit of such of the States of the North American Union as have Contracted Public Debts, Comprising an Account of the Consideration of the Probable Effects of Such Application upon the General Wealth and Property of the Country* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1839), pp. 63-71.

financial involvement in the South was increasingly conducted through banks, including Barings, based in the North.<sup>153</sup> This perhaps helps to explain the lack of evidence of British slave-ownership in the United States, though the Chamber's protest clearly indicates that British merchants wanted the option to mortgage slave property. The Chamber's memorial deployed similar logic to London Merchants in defending the right to secure debts on slave property. Specifically the petitioners stressed the normality of the practice whilst arguing it 'deprived' British merchants of a key protection in doing business overseas. Whilst extant records of British mortgages on American slave property are lacking, they clearly existed and the Liverpool merchants were as keen as their London counterparts to represent slave-ownership of this kind as involuntary. Like St John-Mildmay they also raised the spectre of the 'foreign creditor [who will] sweep away all before his eyes'.<sup>154</sup> The protests of the American Chamber of Commerce and Barings demonstrate the anxiety British merchants felt towards the Brougham's Bill; an anxiety that was represented as damaging to British commercial interests.

The concerns of various British merchants and banks over mortgaging reflected a lack of clarity in the redrafted version of Brougham's bill when it appeared before the Commons. The bill now protected any 'bona fide' slave property that may have been acquired 'through operation of law'.<sup>155</sup> During the Commons debate Viscount Sandon asked '[c]ould a British subject take as security for money lent, an estate with the slaves on it within Maryland, Virginia, or other slave-owning provinces?'<sup>156</sup> Sandon's examples were telling, since as MP for Liverpool he had been lobbied by the American

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<sup>153</sup> Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>154</sup> Liverpool American Chamber of Commerce, Minutebooks, 9 Aug 1843, LCL: 380 AME.

<sup>155</sup> Slave trade suppression. A bill, [as amended by the committee, and as proposed to be amended on report] intituled, an act for the more effectual suppression of the slave trade, *PP*, 132 (1843), p. 5.

<sup>156</sup> *Hansard*, 18 Aug 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 71, c. 950.

Chamber of Commerce to raise the issue in parliament.<sup>157</sup> In addressing this ambiguity Sandon drew forth other speakers who appeared to accept the assertion that securing debts on slaves was a natural part of mercantile business. Lord Stanley asked if merchants involuntarily acquiring slave property would be allowed to 'divest themselves of it by sale?'<sup>158</sup> Robert Peel closed the debate by asserting that the Bill 'ought to give the British creditor in these countries all that was necessary to secure him an equal probability of the recovery of his debts as a foreigner'.<sup>159</sup> The assertions of passivity and the threat of foreign competition raised by merchants had won favour with some in Parliament. However, there were discordant voices such as Sir Thomas Wilde, the Bill's main proponent in the Commons. Whilst Wilde accepted the right to secure debts on slave property he also was determined not to 'not to give a colour to a fraudulent transfer of the slaves of one man to another in violation of the act.'<sup>160</sup> Parliament appeared to have been convinced of the normality of mortgaging slave property, but there MPs retained lingering fears that any loopholes might be exploited. The Commons debate over mortgaging of slave property then can be seen as yet another example of the ambivalence of commerce discussed in my third chapter.

Whilst the 1843 Act did not end Barings' slave-ownership it may well have influenced the management of their estates. By 1852 Adot, Spalding, & Co, the attorneys charged with administering the Arroyo estate were pressuring the firm over a perceived labour shortage. In 1851 the estate had produced 3,400 boxes of sugar and, hoping to up production to 4,500 boxes, the attorneys asked Barings to 'authorise us to supply the Arroyo with more hands', specifically through the purchase of slaves or hiring of Chinese indentured labourers.<sup>161</sup> The 1843 Act had of course prohibited the purchase of slaves by British subjects and it would appear Barings adhered to this. Adot,

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<sup>157</sup> Liverpool American Chamber of Commerce, Minutebooks, 9 Aug 1843, LCL: 380 AME.

<sup>158</sup> *Hansard*, 18 Aug 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 71, c. 944.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, c. 952.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, c. 951.

<sup>161</sup> Adot, Spalding & Co to Barings, 26 Feb 1852, BBP, TBA: HC 4.6.10.

Spalding & Co. complained across a series of letters over the difficulty in finding slave labour for hire, citing high prices and the reluctance of Cuban planters to hire out their slaves for short periods of time. Hiring of slaves was still legal under the 1843 Act, but having 'advertised for them in the Newspapers, and ... employed brokers' Barings' attorneys failed to secure the forty labourers they desired.<sup>162</sup> At this point there were 189 slaves at Arroyo, of which 132 were described as 'working negroes'.<sup>163</sup> The struggle to add labourers to the workforce may well have resulted from Barings' refusal to contravene the law, a reluctance which - as we have seen - did not extend to other British slave-owners. However, the bank did sell its share in one Cuban sugar estate, Santa Maria, in a move of ambiguous legality.<sup>164</sup> After the passage of the 1843 Act Barings' slave-ownership appeared to function without controversy, perhaps because it did not come to the attention of the British government. However, in other contexts mortgaging and slavery remained controversial.

Whilst Barings quietly presided over their slave property in the Caribbean disputes were emerging over mortgages and slavery in Brazil. Joseph Mulhern's work on *escrituras*, public debt contracts held in Rio de Janeiro notary office records, has demonstrated that British subjects acted as both creditors and debtors in mortgages where slaves formed part of the collateral.<sup>165</sup> These mortgages were often, as in Cuba and the United States, a result of the extension of credit by British merchants and banks. Of course British slave-ownership only proved controversial when revealed by government or anti-slavery campaigners. Slave-secured mortgages mostly fell outside of Britain's anti-slavery gaze until in 1846 the Foreign Office would be made aware of two instances of slaves being used as collateral. Firstly, there was the case of Richard Rogers a British subject in Paraiba who intended to clear a debt by transferring a

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<sup>162</sup> Adot, Spalding & Co to Barings, 29 Oct 1852, BBP, TBA: HC 4.6.10.

<sup>163</sup> Adot, Spalding & Co to Barings, 5 Aug 1852, BBP, TBA HC 4.6.10.

<sup>164</sup> Storey, Spalding & Co to Barings, 8 Apr 1851, BBP, TBA: HC 4.6.10.

<sup>165</sup> Mulhern, 'Britain, the British and Labour in Brazil', ch. 4.

female slave to a Mr Gibson in Pernambucano. Consul Newcomen, in Paraiba, who reported the case noted he had ‘not the slightest doubt’ that other British subjects had engaged in similar transactions.<sup>166</sup> In Pernambucano itself, Consul Cowper had identified a number of advertisements for slave auctions as part of liquidation proceedings.<sup>167</sup> According to Cowper British merchants viewed this as a legitimate part of the debt relations, and this was a belief also held by merchants in Britain and some members of parliament.

Both Brazilian cases passed through the usual procedure of being forwarded to the crown law officers who concluded that the transfer or sale of slaves to clear debts was in contravention of the 1843 Act. This conclusion appeared to unambiguously establish that foreclosing on slave mortgages was illegal under British law and Foreign Secretary Palmerston would send a circular to British consuls in 1847 asserting that fact.<sup>168</sup> Mulhern rightly attributes Palmerston’s interest in Brazilian slave mortgages to his determination to end the slave trade, noting the lack of official interest in similar reports from consuls in non-slave trading states such as Venezuela.<sup>169</sup> The offensiveness of the Brazilian cases may also have been related to the transfer or sale of slaves rather than landed property with slaves attached. Slave-ownership through both mortgaging and inheritance had often elided slaves and other forms of property whereas the Richard Rodgers case involved a single slave being transferred. In either case the fact that mortgages in Brazil, rather than Barings’ longstanding activity in Cuba, became a point of controversy demonstrates once again the uneven nature of Britain’s anti-slavery concern. Barings were perhaps far enough removed from their slave property to escape attention; they did not appear among the various British slave-owners reported to the Foreign Office by Consul Joseph Crawford in an 1848

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<sup>166</sup> Mr Newcomen to Aberdeen, 24 Jan 1846, in *Correspondence with Foreign Powers on Slave Trade, 1846 (Class B)*, *PP*, 855 (1846), p. 279.

<sup>167</sup> Mr Cowper to Aberdeen, 2 June 1846, in *Correspondence*, *PP*, 855, p. 300.

<sup>168</sup> Palmerston to Newcomen, 24 June 1846, in *Correspondence*, *PP*, 855, p. 280.

<sup>169</sup> Mulhern, ‘Britain, the British, and Labour in Brazil’, chapter 4.



dispatch.<sup>170</sup> Slave-owning via mortgage may have in many cases escaped attention as sugar estates were administered by Cuban firms. Roldan de Montaud even suggests that Barings' estates were held in the names of frontmen, a claim which I have been unable to corroborate.<sup>171</sup>

Owners of both mortgaged and inherited slave property defended their possessions on similar terms. Whilst the legality of slave mortgages remained ambiguous after the 1843 Act, interested parties such as Barings made forceful arguments for their legitimacy. The protestation that merchants operating in Cuba or Brazil had to take slaves as security for debts bears a similarity to the claims that slave-owners in Surinam or St. Croix had to be compensated. Both assertions rested on the understanding that human beings were a legitimate form of property in these states and recognition of that fact was a pre-requisite of doing business there. Both forms of slave property could also be viewed as corresponding to British slave-ownership before emancipation as slaves had regularly fulfilled the role of both collateral and inheritance in the British West Indies. My final section deals with a novel form of slave-ownership, that of joint-stock mining companies. Whilst joint-stock slave-ownership differed greatly from those discussed above its adherents used similar strategies and rhetoric to secure legitimacy in the wake of Brougham's bill.

#### Limiting Liability: Corporate Slave-Ownership

The most innovative aspect of Brougham's bill in its original form was its attempt to wrestle with slave-ownership by British joint-stock companies. Unlike the inheritance or mortgage of human property the corporate slave owner had not been a feature of Britain's Caribbean economy. The 1843 Act emerged at a time when the British government were attempting to come to terms with economic responsibility in joint-stock ventures, following the proliferation of these companies in the 1820s.

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<sup>170</sup> J. Crawford to Palmerston, 31 Dec 1848, in Correspondence, *PP*, 1128, p. 303.

<sup>171</sup> Roldan de Montaud, 'Baring Brothers', p. 250.

Brougham's original draft proposed a model for corporate responsibility, specifically attempting to prevent joint-stock mining companies from acquiring further slaves. The mining companies opposed this move via lobbying and petitioning. They succeeded in legitimising slave-ownership and secured the right to hire slaves from 1843 onwards. This form of slave property would be used, and abused, by joint-stock mining companies up until the end of the nineteenth century.

A joint-stock company can be most simply understood as a company whose ownership is split between a large numbers of shareholders. Joint-stock ventures began to proliferate in Britain during the nineteenth century. Prior to this period the majority of businesses had been family ventures or small-scale partnerships between individual merchants, manufacturers, or bankers.<sup>172</sup> Joint-stock companies were generally related to ventures that required a large amount of capital raised through sale of shares, and then calls upon those shares. The 1820s would see an investment boom, partly inspired by the wave of newly independent Latin American states, which looked to the City of London for finance. Alongside shares in government loans, investors were offered the ability to buy into a raft of mining companies that looked to reap the benefits of the supposedly mineral rich states.<sup>173</sup> Between 1824 and 1825 British businessmen promoted companies with nominal capital amounting to £44 million.<sup>174</sup> Among these mining companies were a number in Brazil and Cuba, and as such the majority of their labour force was made up of slaves. These slave-owning mining companies were unusual not only in their use of slave labour outside of the plantation environment, but also in the way that ownership of slaves was spread across potentially hundreds of shareholders. In this section I will explore how Brougham's bill attempted to deal with the novel fact of the corporate slave-owner and how, in opposing the bill, mining

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<sup>172</sup> R. Harris, *Industrializing English Law: Entrepreneurship and Business Organization, 1720-1844*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 212.

<sup>173</sup> F. G. Dawson, *The First Latin American Debt Crisis: The City of London and the 1822-25 Loan Bubble* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>174</sup> Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, pp. 106-107.

companies secured the legitimacy of their slave-owning and the right to acquire more slaves via hiring.

The majority of companies in Britain were governed by partnership law under which partners, even those not involved in management, were financially and legally liable for all contracts made. James Taylor argues that this arrangement was seen as morally superior to corporate law; in which the company itself was granted legal personality and individuals could transfer in and out at will.<sup>175</sup> The extension of limited liability and incorporation to joint-stock companies was subject to much debate and in the first half of the nineteenth century and these privileges could only be granted by government. Prominent figures such as the political economist J. R. McCulloch argued that such protections prevented individuals from learning from financial mistakes and led to 'shirking responsibility'.<sup>176</sup> When Brougham addressed the responsibility of joint-stock mining companies not to purchase slaves he also made assertions on whether, and how, companies might function as moral entities. Brougham's solution was to ground the moral in the economic by insisting that the treasurers of Brazilian and Cuban mining companies should 'enter into a bond in the Penal sum of Five thousand Pounds' not to purchase, hire, or employ slaves.<sup>177</sup> Here Brougham offered a striking recognition of the joint-stock companies' legal personality, whilst extending the prohibition on slave purchase and hire to 'agents acting in the name of or on behalf of such Company'.<sup>178</sup> At a point when political opinion on limited liability for companies was still split, Brougham recognised that the punishment of imprisonment or transportation could not be dished out to every company shareholder. Instead penalties would target investors' pockets to instil morality.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, pp. 24-25.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>177</sup> 'A bill, intituled, an act for the more effectual suppression of the slave trade', *PP*, 497 (1843), p. 4.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Brougham's attempt to moralise joint-stock ventures did not end with a prohibition on the purchase or hire of slaves as his Bill also included measures to hold companies to account. Joint-stock companies were to provide 'Half-yearly a Register of all persons employed by them as labourers or servants in their respective operations abroad.' Contained in this register were to be details of 'the name, age, sex, colour, condition and employment, length of service, wages and place of nativity' of everyone employed by the company.<sup>179</sup> This measure was clearly aimed at ensuring companies had not broken the law by adding to their enslaved workforce, as well as providing evidence of whether enslaved workers were being treated humanely. Information provided through select committees and the reports of missionaries had been vital to the war of representation over slavery in the British Caribbean, now Brougham's bill looked to shift the impetus of providing this information onto the companies themselves.<sup>180</sup> This clause appears to have recognised the fact that slave-owners might attempt to limit the information available about their enterprises as a means of avoiding abolitionist or government critique. In 1844 a select committee headed by William Gladstone recommended all companies should register with the Board of Trade 'to prevent the establishment of fraudulent companies, and to protect the interests of the shareholders and of the public' and Brougham's proposal chimed with such thinking.<sup>181</sup> Concern over the reliability of company directors was rife in the joint-stock economy, particularly after a number of financial crashes in the 1820s and 1830s. Brougham's bill appeared to assert that if shareholders should be protected from dishonest directors then so should the slaves of mining companies. The registration clause showed a keen awareness of the moral and practical quandaries posed by corporate slave-ownership. Brazil-based mining companies opposed Brougham's attempts to wrestle with corporate responsibility. The St. John d'El Rey Mining Company (SJDR) and Imperial

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>180</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 108.

<sup>181</sup> Harris, *Industrializing English Law*, p. 281.

Brazilian Mining Association (IBMA) petitioned both the Foreign Office and parliament to protest the bill. The internal dynamics of both of these companies will be discussed in my next chapter, but for now it is important to note they worked in concert to oppose Brougham's bill. George Keogh, secretary of the SJDR, wrote to his opposite number at the IBMA proposing 'that a deputation of the Brazilian Mining Companies should meet together for the purpose of considering the measures to be taken to oppose the Bill'.<sup>182</sup> As we shall see this co-operation was borne out in the rhetoric deployed in defence of slave-ownership by both companies in their petitions. The SJDR also approached a number of prominent politicians on an individual basis. Chairman John Diston Powles met with Lord Ashburton, Gladstone, and Lord Dalhousie (all of whom headed the Board of Trade at some point) to express their objection to prohibitions against hiring of slaves.<sup>183</sup> The SJDR would also reach outside of the mining industry with A. W. Powles, the company's main mercantile partner and relative of its chairman, attending the Liverpool American Chamber of Commerce's discussions of the 1843 Act.<sup>184</sup> This is yet more evidence of collaboration and networking among individuals and firms interested in the recognition of slave property. Brougham's bill was clearly an object of serious concern for mining companies who worked in concert to register their opposition in a number of different forums.

The primary assertion of the petitions produced by British mining companies was that their existing slave property had been acquired legally and that the purchase or hire of slaves did not give impetus to the slave trade. The SJDR's claim that '[t]hey have no connexion, directly or indirectly with the traffic in importing Negroes - a traffic, to which they are as much opposed as a person can be' was repeated across all the

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<sup>182</sup> G. D. Keogh to G. Thomas, 5 June 1843, St. John d'El Rey Mining Company Papers, Latin American Studies Library, University of Texas, Austin (hereafter SJDR, BLUT): LB 4.

<sup>183</sup> J. D. Powles to Ashburton 10 July 1843; G. D. Keogh to J. Donaldson, 20 July 1843; J. D. Powles to W. Gladstone, 31 July 1843; SJDR, BLUT: LB4.

<sup>184</sup> Liverpool American Chamber of Commerce, Minutebooks, 9 Aug 1843, LCL: 380 AME.

petitions.<sup>185</sup> Here the mining companies showed a keen awareness that the government's primary concern was ending the slave trade, rather than interfering with the internal politics of slave societies. This distancing from the slave trade was also a means of asserting the legitimacy of their slave property. As for slave-owners in Surinam it was important to avoid accusations that any slave property had been acquired illegally through the transatlantic trade. The IBMA for example noted that it purchased 'Gongo Soco together with all the negroes attached to it, who, in this country, as well as in our West India colonies at that time, formed a necessary appendage to the estates.'<sup>186</sup> Once again slave property was elided with the purchase of land and key to both companies' defence was that ownership, and purchase, of slaves had not been outlawed by Britain or Brazil prior to 1843.

The private correspondence of the SJDR however casts serious doubt on protestations of innocence over connections to the slave trade. The early years of the company appear to have witnessed attempts to utilise free labour but company representatives quickly arrived at the conclusion that 'we shall do little or nothing without slaves.'<sup>187</sup> The SJDR would contract with Rio-based merchants Messrs William Harrison & Co., commending them for the 'capital purchase' of 16 slaves in 1830.<sup>188</sup> Lawrence Bergard's demographic study of slavery in Minas Gerais during the nineteenth century demonstrates that there was an increase in African born slaves in the region in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>189</sup> It is almost certain that slaves in both the IBMA and SJDR mines would have been victims of the slave trade. In fact SJDR staff would privately

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<sup>185</sup> 'To the Right Honourable Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament Assembled, 'The Humble Petition of the Directors of the St. John del Rey Mining Company', Enclosed in J. Walker to Aberdeen, 16 June 1843, TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>186</sup> 'Lord Brougham's Suppression of Slavery Bill', Enclosed in J. Walker to Aberdeen, 16 June 1843, TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>187</sup> 'Report to Directors', 6 July 1830, SJDR, BLUT: LB1.

<sup>188</sup> C. Herring Jr to Messrs William Harrison & Co., 31 Dec 1830, SJDR, BLUT: LB1.

<sup>189</sup> L. W. Bergard, *Slavery and the Demographic and Economic History of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1720-1888*, pp. 124-126. See also D. C. Libby, 'Proto-Industrialisation in a Slave Society: The Case of Minas Gerais', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 23:1 (1991), pp. 1-35. Libby argues Minas remained one of the major destinations for newly imported slaves until termination of the Brazilian slave trade in 1850.

acknowledge that the slaves they purchased had recently arrived in Brazil, callously noting 'they are to all intents and purposes no better than mere animal machines during some years after their arrival in this country'.<sup>190</sup> Here then we see a disjoint between the private discussions within the company and their public reputation.

Purchase of slaves illegally imported into Brazil would be a crime under the 1824 Act and as such the dubious origin of slaves at British mining companies was concealed in protests to the government. Both companies stressed the relative insignificance of British slave-ownership by comparing the estimated 2,000 British-owned slaves to the 2,000,000 Brazilian slaves in total.<sup>191</sup> Mining companies attempted to both legitimise their extant slave property and assert that interference with their business did little or nothing to curb the slave trade. As the IBMA's petition put it '[t]he true way of beneficially dealing with this question is – *to enforce the existing treaties.*'<sup>192</sup>

Allied to this assertion of the legitimacy of slave property was the defence of necessity. Drawing parallels with the case of merchants and financiers one petition stressed that whether in Brazil, Cuba or the United States 'Negroes form a considerable portion of the *Property* of the country.'<sup>193</sup> As we have seen the assertion that human collateral and slave labour were necessary evils when doing business abroad were common themes in protests against the 1843 Act. In the case of Brazil it was said that 'nineteen-twentieths of the labouring classes are Negroes', in this telling it was demography rather than avarice that led British companies into using unfree labour.<sup>194</sup> Such rhetoric relied upon an imagined geography that split the world into a binary between free and enslaved labour. Under such conditions a prohibition against slave labour amounted to a prohibition against commerce. Again, the private records of the SJDR

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<sup>190</sup> 'Report to Directors', 1 Jan 1831, SJDR, BLUT: LB1.

<sup>191</sup> 'SJDR petition', TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>192</sup> 'Petition to the House of Lords against Some of the Provisions of the Bill "for the more effectual Suppression of the Slave Trade."', Enclosed in J. Walker to Aberdeen, 16 June 1843, TNA: FO 84-501. (Italics in original)

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

complicate this representation. As noted, the company did attempt to utilise free labourers and whilst reports to the directors were rife with complaints regarding free Brazilian labourers, few related to numbers. In fact Charles Herring Jr., head of operations in Brazil, noted 'you may perhaps remark immediately that when I have so many free labourers what do I want with more slaves?'<sup>195</sup> His justification was that slaves, as opposed to free labourers, could be compelled to work underground in the mines. Herring had previously complained that 'every person here entertains the greatest horror of descending the shaft or of entering the mines of San Joze', but that slaves 'work more steadily and where you like them to work.'<sup>196</sup> Free labourers, then, might not have been as scarce as the company petitions suggested, but they were judged not fit for purpose. In stressing the need for slave labour Herring told his directors "I beg pardon of the ultra-philanthropists but it is important to thoroughly deal with the truth."<sup>197</sup> The version of the truth presented by the petitioners however wrote out the presence of free labourers at all.

Both mining companies also stressed the benefits their enterprises brought to Britain as a whole. The SJDR, IBMA, and other mining companies claimed to both open up markets for British manufactures and provide employment for Englishmen through the miners hired to provide expertise in Brazil.<sup>198</sup> Such assertions had been associated with Latin American mining ventures since the 1820s and had featured prominently in a number of prospectuses during the mining speculation boom.<sup>199</sup> The IBMA boasted that it had raised 310,000 lbs of gold between 1825 and 1842, which bar deductions for export duties had been sent back to England. Imports of gold bullion and coin underpinned Britain's currency through the gold standard.<sup>200</sup> From this perspective mining companies not only lined investors' pockets, but also the nation's as a whole.

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<sup>195</sup> 'Report to Directors', 1 Jan 1831, SJDR, BLUT: LB1.

<sup>196</sup> 'Report to Directors', 21 Sep 1830. SJDR, BLUT: LB1.

<sup>197</sup> 'Report to Directors', 1 Jan 1831, SJDR, BLUT: LB1.

<sup>198</sup> 'SJDR Petition', TNA: FO 84-501

<sup>199</sup> Dawson, *Latin American Debt*, p. 72.

<sup>200</sup> 'Petition to the House of Lords', TNA: FO 84-501.



However, these claims inflated the proportion of British gold resulting from slave labour and relied upon the out-dated perception of Brazil as the leading global producer of gold. Whilst this had been true in the eighteenth century, Russia had supplanted Brazil by the 1820s and would provide the vast majority of British stocks until the California Gold Rush of 1851.<sup>201</sup> Whilst these claims of public utility were exaggerated, they were a necessary part of detoxifying a tolerance of slave labour in anti-slavery Britain.

Brazilian mining companies claimed to not only bestow benefits upon Britain, but also on the slaves they owned. As the SJDR petition put it, '[t]o prevent the Negroes who are in Brazil from being under the care of British masters is not ... the way to benefit those Negroes.'<sup>202</sup> Claims that slave-ownership could be exercised in a benevolent manner had long been part of the British anti-abolitionist repertoire, but had shifted post-emancipation. Now British slave-owners were 'doing all in their power to extend civilizing influence around them' and through providing 'every rational comfort' for their slave workforces were setting a positive example for Brazilian slave owners.<sup>203</sup> Foreign slave-owners and their apparent lack of civilization compared to Britons played an important role in justifying continued slave-ownership, as did the Brazilian government who it was claimed would not allow emancipation to take place. If British companies were forced to emancipate their slaves the Brazilian government would step in and 'apportion the Negroes to adjoining estates.'<sup>204</sup> Re-enslavement and kidnapping did occur within Minas Gerais and the status of free blacks within Brazil was clearly precarious.<sup>205</sup> However, as we have seen similar claims were been made by

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<sup>201</sup> T. L. Alborn, 'Before the Gold Rush: Mining and Informal Empire in Britain, 1818-1848', paper given at North American British Studies Conference 2016 for more see Alborn's forthcoming monograph on Britain and gold. Thank you to Professor Alborn for allowing me access to his unpublished work.

<sup>202</sup> 'SJDR petition', TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>203</sup> 'Petition to the House of Lords', TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>204</sup> 'SJDR petition', TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>205</sup> S. Chalhoub, 'The Precariousness of Freedom in a Slave Society (Brazil in the Nineteenth Century)', *International Review of Social History*, 56:3 (2011), pp. 405-439; J. Bieber Freitas

British slave-owners in Surinam and the spectre of crueller foreign slave-owners appears to have been generic to post-emancipation defences of slave-ownership.

Mining companies also called for the gradual emancipation favoured by other British slave-owners. Unlike slave-owners in Surinam they couched these arguments in explicitly radicalised terms with one petition claiming that 'free Blacks in Brazil are the least moral, the least sober, and the least industrious class of the population.'<sup>206</sup> Such claims echoed the pro-slavery rhetoric aired before West Indian emancipation which as Catherine Hall notes had revolved around 'the disputed figure of the African'.<sup>207</sup>

Depictions of black people as lacking in morals and work ethic had long been part of the discussion surrounding slavery and race within a British context and mining companies were happy to redeploy these arguments. British slave-owners could prepare these individuals for emancipation, but any pre-emptive moves toward freedom would 'depriv[e them] of masters and of homes'.<sup>208</sup> This logic rested on the assumption that the British slave-owner, with his moral opposition to slavery, was the best hope for enslaved people outside of the British Empire.

In justifying their slave-ownership in a broad sense mining companies deployed rhetoric similar to other Britons interested in slave property. Claims of legality, necessity and respect for property were also made by British slave-owners in Surinam, St. Croix and those interested in slave mortgages. As we shall see in the next chapter many of these defences had first been developed by mining companies in response to shareholder pressure for emancipation, then redeployed against Brougham's bill. The 1843 petitions however also took specific umbrage against the clauses directed at policing mining companies, specifically the £5,000 penalty for acquiring slaves. One petition wilfully misinterpreted the penalty as being levied on company treasurers as

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'Slavery and Social Life: Attempts to Reduce Free People to Slavery in the Sertao Mineiro, Brazil, 1851-1871', *Latin American Studies*, 26 (1999), p. 597-616.

<sup>206</sup> 'Petition to the House of Lords', TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>207</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p.108, pp. 349-354.

<sup>208</sup> 'SJDR petition', TNA: FO 84-501.

individuals, exploiting the lack of clarity over corporate responsibility in general. At the same time they stressed that in times of crisis, for example a flood that ‘deranges the machinery and works’. In such an emergency prohibitions on hiring slaves would have to be ignored as labour would be desperately needed to save the mine or, as the petitioner pithily noted, ‘the provisions of an Act of Parliament cannot be attended to when mischief and danger are afloat.’<sup>209</sup> Here, as in chapter three, we may see how anti-slavery concerns were represented as impractical and fanciful in the face of the realities of commerce. Allied to this was a clear belief that the moral responsibility for actions in Brazil could not travel back to Britain.

The concerted protests and lobbying by mining companies succeeded in legitimising their extant slave property and their continued right to use slave labour. Whilst the Bill that appeared before the Commons maintained the prohibition on purchase of slaves, it had been stripped of the registration and treasurer’s bond clauses. More importantly, the mining companies’ right to hire slaves from other slave-owners had been protected, allowing for a continued acquisition of slave labour. Sir Thomas Wilde, whilst supporting the bill, raised concerns that this concession would lead to ‘hiring of slaves for thirty and for fifty years, and this evasion would be as great an evil as slavery.’<sup>210</sup> Wilde’s words proved prophetic as British mining companies moved to meet their labour needs through large scale hiring of slave labourers from neighbouring plantations and other mining concerns.

Whilst Chris Evans has argued that the 1843 Act was ‘ineffectual and unloved’ it did cause brief consternation for the SJDR.<sup>211</sup> Following its passage the company proceeded cautiously, seeking multiple legal opinions on the legality of hiring slaves in both Brazil and England, as well as cautioning employees from taking slaves as security for money

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<sup>209</sup> ‘Petition to the House of Lords’, TNA: FO 84-501.

<sup>210</sup> *Hansard*, 18 Aug 1843, 3<sup>rd</sup> series vol. 71, c.952.

<sup>211</sup> Evans, ‘Brazilian Gold’, p. 120.

advanced.<sup>212</sup> The company also petitioned the Board of Trade reiterating the arguments of necessity made against the 1843 Act to secure approval for slave hiring.<sup>213</sup> However, once confident in the law the SJDR aggressively pursued slave hiring and by 1861 had rented 200 slaves from fifty or so slave-owners.<sup>214</sup> In 1845 the SJDR agreed a particularly large hiring scheme as they took on the 385 slaves of the recently shuttered Cata Branca Company for an initial period of fourteen years, after which the slaves and their children were to be emancipated. Matt Childs has explored how the company refused to emancipate these slaves in 1859 and were only forced to do so following negative attention garnered from Brazilian abolitionists in the 1870s.<sup>215</sup> In the case of the SJDR, at least, the continued exploitation of slave labour rested as much on dishonesty as it did on legitimacy conferred by the 1843 Act.

Not all Brazilian mining companies would have the longevity of the SJDR, which traded well into the twentieth century, and the 1843 Act would raise awkward questions for other less successful British ventures. The IBMA was struck by a flood and consequent mine collapse in 1856 which led to the company ceasing operations.<sup>216</sup> Traditionally, the winding up of a company would result in the sale of all its property and in the case of the IBMA this would include the hundreds of slaves working the mine. This potential sale of slaves received press attention in the *Daily News* where an anonymous correspondent adverted to the 1843 Act and urged the paper 'to prevent such an atrocity, should it really be contemplated.'<sup>217</sup> Here the thought that British subjects should profit from the sale of men, women, and especially children was unpalatable. The company only abandoned the sale of its slave property when advised by the British

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<sup>212</sup> J. D. Powles to C. Herring Jr., 6 Mar 1844; J. D. Powles to C. Herring Jr., 7 Aug 1844, SJDR, BLUT: LB 4.

<sup>213</sup> J. D. Powles to Board of Trade, 28 May 1844, SJDR, BLUT: LB4.

<sup>214</sup> Eakin, *British Enterprise*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>215</sup> Childs, 'British Slaveholder and Brazilian Abolition', pp. 729-731.

<sup>216</sup> Eakin, *British Enterprise*, p. 19.

<sup>217</sup> *Daily News*, 8 May 1857.

consul in Rio that such an act would lead to prosecution.<sup>218</sup> The IBMA case eventually resulted in vindication of the 1843 Act as Paulo Santos, who had originally contracted to purchase, attempted to use the English courts to force through the sale. With Lord Brougham in attendance, Justice Willes ruled that the proposed sale did in fact contravene the 1843 Act. What is more he drew on the prosecution of Pedro Zulueta in 1842 to argue British purchase of slaves had been illegal since at least 1824.<sup>219</sup> This represented a hardening of legal opinion and a challenge towards the supposed legitimate forms of slave-ownership practiced by British subjects. This decision demonstrates the surprising longevity of the 1843 Act and that in the right circumstances anti-slavery victories, however minor might be achieved.

The fall out of the IBMA decision appeared to influence the ways in which mining companies in slave societies sold themselves to prospective shareholders. The East del Rey Mining Company, a company promoted in late 1861, claimed it would 'engage labourers by the ordinary system of contract carried out in the Brazils'<sup>220</sup> This followed an advert circulated by BFASS, emboldened by the IBMA decision and the Foreign Office's rebuke of Surinamese slave-owners, which called on any new mining companies to 'carefully guard themselves against any transaction which may involve them in slave-dealing or slave-holding.'<sup>221</sup> December would see the formation of the Monte Aureos Company, promoted by SJDR chairman John Hockin, whose prospectus would explicitly state that 'no slaves will be held by the Company or their servants', a claim that was lauded as a victory by the BFASS.<sup>222</sup> Both the East del Rey and Montes Aureos drew on the example of the SJDR as evidence for the profits that could be made from Brazilian gold mining, despite the fact that the company had thrived through its exploitation of slave labour. Claims about the necessity of slave labour were

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<sup>218</sup> *Mining Journal*, 2 July 1859.

<sup>219</sup> *Daily News*, 11 July 1859, see chapter three for more on Zulueta.

<sup>220</sup> *Mining Journal*, 'The East Del Rey Mining Company', 21 Sep 1861.

<sup>221</sup> *Mining Journal*, 'British Mining Companies in Brazil', 14 Sep 1861.

<sup>222</sup> *Daily News*, 19 Dec 1861; 'British Mining Companies and Slaveholding', *ASR*, 1 Feb 1862.

transformed into reassurances that 'there are plenty of free blacks and Indians in the neighbourhood to ensure plenty of labour at a moderate price.'<sup>223</sup> Given the continued use of slave labour by the SJDR right up until emancipation it seems likely that this shift in advertising reflected a loss of confidence in slavery's legitimacy among British investors rather than the realities of the Brazilian labour market.

### Conclusion

The 1843 Act can be understood as a compromise between British abolitionists, government, and slave-owners. Brougham's recognition of existing slave property in his original bill laid the foundation for debates over the legitimacy of British slave-ownership for several decades. As we have seen, British slave-owners of three distinct types developed defences of slavery or critiques of emancipation either in response to, or drawing on, the 1843 Act. Whilst it is clear that many British subjects continued to acquire slaves after 1843 there were rare occasions when the Act appeared to curb the purchase or sale of slave by British companies, specifically Barings' apparent refusal to sanction more slave purchases or the cancellation of slave sales by the IBMA. The 1843 Act then may well not have been entirely a dead letter, but its concessions could be subverted and exploited.

More broadly, this chapter has used the 1843 Act to paint a picture of the intellectual toolkit of Britain's post-emancipation slave-owners. Caribbean planters, merchant bankers and gold mines were different types of slave-owner, but can be drawn together through the claims they made about slavery. Whilst each type of slave-ownership required its own idiosyncratic defence certain themes were universal. Among these was the legitimacy of the slave as property, which often required the elision of human being and landholdings, mortgage contracts, or company shares. This legitimacy rested upon the necessity of slave labour or property in the various overseas theatres in

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<sup>223</sup> *Mining Journal*, 'The Montes Aureos Gold Mine', 21 Dec 1861.

which British commerce operated. Allied to these claims of necessity was the frequent invocation of a foreign other. This other might be the Surinamese government, a Spanish merchant, or Brazilian planter. In each case a foreign slave-owner, supposedly less moral or civilized than their British counterpart, was always raised as the consequence of emancipation. The rhetoric used to defend slave-ownership and the practical means through which slave property was legitimised provide further insights into the workings of British economic culture. Plantation owners, merchant bankers, and joint-stock company directors worked in concert to detoxify their human property. They did so not only by crafting imagined geographies that represented slavery as essential to the economies of various Atlantic world societies, but also through limiting access to information about how slaves were acquired.

British slave-owners operating across various contexts drew on the legacy of the 1833 Emancipation Act to argue explicitly or tacitly for a gradual or compensated emancipation that would allegedly benefit both slave and slave-owner. As with the merchants in the previous chapter, British merchants appealed to economic rationality by representing manumission or non-compensated emancipation as precipitous and implausible. Through positioning themselves as authorities on the economies in which they were invested in human property British slave-owners gained some legitimacy and breathing space from a government formally committed to anti-slavery but hesitant to interfere with commerce. However, for some of these companies the government was not the only audience who needed to be won over. As my next chapter will demonstrate, joint-stock mining companies found among their own shareholders expression of anti-slavery critique that also had to be addressed and placated.

## Chapter V: Slavery and Joint-Stock Politics

British slave-ownership suffered a slow death. As we have seen the emancipation legislation of 1833 was far from the end of it. The slowest death of all was to be found outside the boundaries of empire in the slave economies of Cuba and Brazil. It was through investment in these countries that British subjects still possessed slaves for decades after emancipation. Whilst Britain trumpeted its anti-slavery credentials in both domestic and foreign policy metropolitan investors reaped the benefits of unfree labour. This chapter will explore British slave ownership in the post-emancipation period by focusing on two British owned joint-stock mining companies operating in Brazil; the Saint John d'El Rey Mining Company (SJDR) and Imperial Brazilian Mining Association (IBMA). In doing so I will explore how both critiques and defences of slavery were used, and transformed, in what Tim Alborn has called 'joint-stock politics'. This refers to the fact that joint-stock companies must be seen as political entities that need to maintain 'a semblance of legitimacy to survive.'<sup>1</sup> In looking to attain this legitimacy joint-stock companies in Brazil also had to legitimise their use of slave labour.

The SJDR has already been the object of considerable study due to both its longevity and the role it played in one of the key episodes of Brazilian abolition. Founded in 1830 by the prominent London merchant John Diston Powles, the SJDR would prove to be one of the most successful mining concerns in Brazil. The company traded well into the twentieth century when the business historian Marshall Eakin would chronicle its history, including its reliance upon slave labour.<sup>2</sup> Eakin's work is firmly positioned as a traditional business history built around the labour practices, technological advances and government lobbying of the company. Matt Childs has explored the management of slaves at the company's Morro Velho mine; he shows how ritual, discipline and reward were used to control what was the largest unfree workforce in the region of Minas

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<sup>1</sup> Alborn, *Conceiving Companies*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Eakin, *British Enterprise in Brazil*, pp. 22-23.



Geraiis.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere Childs has demonstrated how the SJDR's status as a British company provided an opening for Brazilian abolitionists during a controversy over the illegal hiring of slaves in the late 1870s.<sup>4</sup> These articles, alongside Eakin's work, valuably explain how a slave-owning British company operated and how its relationship to the slave workforce and the Brazilian government were coloured by the British commitment to anti-slavery. What they lack is an engagement with how slave-ownership was reconciled with the company's shareholders in the metropole. This chapter will address this gap by investigating how a slave enterprise such as SJDR was represented, and rationalised, within anti-slavery Britain.

Chris Evans has provided a more metropolitan perspective on mining companies and slavery in an article on the parliamentary debates surrounding the 1843 Slave Trade Suppression Act.<sup>5</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter this legislation, aimed at stemming the flow of British capital into the slave trade, prohibited the purchase of slaves by British subjects outside of the Empire. Evans provides an important snapshot of British mining companies in a moment of crisis his main contention is that the debates around Brougham's bill demonstrated the limits of Britain's anti-slavery commitments.<sup>6</sup> My own reading of the final 1843 Act differs in viewing it as yet another example of the ambivalence of British commerce rather than anti-slavery's weakness. However, in this chapter I intend to focus more on the companies' relationships with their shareholders, rather than with the government and anti-slavery campaigners. Although Evans does advert to the protests against slave-ownership by IBMA shareholders he does not fully explore the unique challenges presented by joint-stock ownership of slaves in anti-slavery Britain. If, as Evans claims, Brazilian and Cuban mines raised questions over 'the nature of corporate responsibility [and] the possibility

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<sup>3</sup> Childs, 'Master-Slave', pp. 43-72.

<sup>4</sup> Childs, 'British Slaveholder and Brazilian Abolition', p. 737.

<sup>5</sup> Evans, 'Brazilian Gold', pp. 118-134.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of ethical investment' then this chapter seeks to provide answers.<sup>7</sup> It will do so by exploring how the IBMA and SJDR addressed their controversial slave-ownership and justified it to their shareholders and, ultimately, the wider world.

Recent scholarship on the joint-stock company has demonstrated the highly contested nature of these economic entities throughout the nineteenth century. The traditional narrative of joint-stock proliferation as a rational response to an increasingly capital-hungry economy has been 'reproblematiz[ed]' by historians such as James Taylor who, by drawing on literary and journalistic sources, has noted the constant scepticism directed toward joint-stock ventures by the Victorian public.<sup>8</sup> Much of this scepticism revolved around the uneven relationship between shareholders and company directors. Representations of this relationship vacillated between fears of unwitting investors duped by unscrupulous directors and harsh critiques of unthinking speculators who were no better than gamblers.<sup>9</sup> These debates crystallised around the issue of limited liability, whether investors should bear economic responsibility for the debts of a company. However, there were wider concerns over directors misleading shareholders through over-promising, embellishment, and sometimes dishonesty. Like all other joint-stocks the SJDR and IBMA had to cultivate and maintain shareholder confidence, what set these companies apart was that as well as legitimising high expenditure they also had to legitimise, and therefore justify, their reliance on slave labour.

Joint-stock companies pursued legitimacy, and just as importantly continued investment, through a number of different means which mostly took the form of publications. Both the SJDR and IBMA produced reports generally following an annual or half-yearly meeting between directors and shareholders. As Alborn has noted companies had a public of shareholders, customers and workers and the annual

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Alborn, *Conceiving Companies*, p. 89, p. 185

reports were key to communicating with this public.<sup>10</sup> Mining companies looked to stress their innovation and use of new technologies that justified the large amount of capital joint-stocks raised.<sup>11</sup> The reports produced by mining companies quickly fell into a generic pattern of reporting on the progress of works, the amount of ore extracted, and crucially the expected dividend. The structure of the reports would traditionally take the form of a main body statement, penned by the company secretary or chairman, followed by an appendix of statistics and reports produced by the superintendent, mining captains and surgeons. These reports, of course, sought to represent the company in the most reassuring light possible. Therefore, what they did and did not say about the companies' unfree workforces can reveal a great deal about how slave-owning was justified in early Victorian Britain. The first section of this chapter will analyse how the annual reports of both companies variously addressed, elided and rationalised reliance on slave labour, and how these interventions related to broader anti-slavery ideology and economic culture. The annual reports of joint-stock companies are approached as texts that sought to establish the reputation of company directors and win the trust of investors. I demonstrate how in constructing this reputation annual reports had to take account of anti-slavery, further demonstrating the role played by moral concerns within the British economy.

Of course the annual reports of the SJDR and IBMA did not exist in a vacuum, rather they existed in a constant dialogue with a variety of other sources from which shareholders and the wider public could garner information on the companies. The nineteenth century for example saw the emergence and professionalization of financial journalism. As Mary Poovey has noted from the 1820s onwards increasing column inches were devoted to sections with names such as 'Money, Market, and City intelligence', which were 'entertaining, generally provided reliable information, and

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, pp. 34-36.

were sometimes sharply critical.<sup>12</sup> As ventures with a large number of city investors mining concerns could, and did, bear the brunt of these sharp critiques. Potential investors scrutinised expenditure, profit and labour management. All of these could be understood in terms of reliance on slave labour. Furthermore the mining industry had its own specialised press, most notably the weekly *Mining Journal*. This journal has been described as the publication of mining capital, rather than labour, and as such it matched many of the concerns of city columnists. The *Mining Journal's* specialisation also meant it provided a forum for both directors and shareholders to have their say through the regular publication of official reports and correspondence.<sup>13</sup> The financial and mining press, alongside the annual reports, provided fodder for the BFASS. The abolitionists mined any IBMA and SJDR publication for evidence of slavery's cruelty. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* periodically commented upon on, and condemned, the slave-owning of the IBMA and SJDR up until Brazilian emancipation in 1888. By examining these various publications in concert it will be possible to see how mining companies sought to negate any critique of slavery.

The voices that remain frustratingly silent within this story are regrettably those of the enslaved themselves. The one remarkable instance of a former SJDR slave directly addressing a British audience came when a free man named Augustino appeared before an 1849 select committee on the slave trade. Speaking through an interpreter, Charles Herring Jr. (former superintendent of the SJDR), the ex-miner recounted the harrowing tale of his kidnap and transportation from West Africa. Alas, the committee failed to ask anything about his time in Brazil itself.<sup>14</sup> The various sources mentioned above stuck to discussing slaves in the aggregate, and whilst claims were frequently

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<sup>12</sup> M. Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), pp. 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> M. Taunton, 'Mining Journal', in L. Brake, M. Demoor (eds), *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (Gent: Academia Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Evidence given on 24 May 1849 in S. Wilberforce, Select Committee of House of Lords to consider best Means for Final Extinction of African Slave Trade, Report, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, Index, *PP*, 53 (1850), pp. 162-163.

made about their relative ‘contentedness’ the enslaved perspective remains an elusive counterweight to the claims made by directors, shareholders and metropolitan abolitionists. Childs’s aforementioned article does explore the general experience of SJDR slaves; their labour, leisure and resistance. Less work has been done on the IBMA, though the geological writings of Jory Henwood, a Cornish mining captain at the company’s Gongo Soco mine, can be read to reveal the agency and resistance of these enslaved people.<sup>15</sup> These accounts, although useful in contextualising and scrutinising the claims of both companies, ultimately fall outside this chapter’s focus. Rather, my intention is to explore how both companies represented slavery in their mines. As with many depictions of non-white society outside of Britain, these representations were often divorced from reality.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter is broken into three distinct sections. Firstly, I will analyse the annual reports of the SJDR and IBMA to demonstrate the degree of reluctance that characterised discussion of slavery by the companies. For the most part they sought to minimise, or even excise, reference to their slave workforce. However, as will be shown moments of crisis or controversy could drag the companies into more explicit discussion, and defence of bonded labour. To demonstrate this I will focus on two revealing episodes. Firstly, I will explore the attempt by IBMA shareholders to bring about the emancipation of the company’s slaves in 1841. Secondly, I will focus on a late 1849 controversy surrounding the treatment of the SJDR slave workforce. The former crisis related to the legitimacy of any form of slave ownership, the latter related to how the cruelties of slave ownership could be mitigated. Both cases show how debates over

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<sup>15</sup> J. Henwood, *Transactions of the Royal Cornwall Geological Society*, 8:1 (1871); The main body of this piece is a work on the geology of the IBMA’s Gongo Soco mine, however its footnotes contain an extensive discussion of slavery at the mine including a quantification of ‘misbehaviour’, which could be read as resistance. Henwood’s entry in the *ODNB* suggests this discussion of slavery dated back to a private pamphlet produced upon his return from Brazil in the 1850s. D. Crook, ‘Henwood, (William) Jory (1805–1875)’, *ODNB* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/12997>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>16</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 20-21.

slavery became enmeshed with internal struggles over the legitimacy and profitability of the companies themselves. In doing so I demonstrate the complexity of anti-slavery belief and action in Britain post-emancipation. For those engaged in the joint-stock economy at least the opposition to slavery could pertain as much to money as it could to morals. By addressing the role of anti-slavery within the joint-stock company this chapter reveals that economic culture could shape the internal governance of companies, as well as the relationship between the state and the market.

#### Reading Slavery in Company Annual Reports

The Directors in their preceding Reports have abstained from making particular allusion to their Negro establishment, but it has been an object of the greatest solicitude, from the moment they were apprised of their being owners of negroes, to endeavour to ameliorate and soften their condition.<sup>17</sup>

The above excerpt comes from an annual report published by the IBMA in 1830 and represents the first time the company, somewhat sheepishly, addressed its ownership of slaves. Previous reports had, as Evans notes, 'coily' elided reliance on slavery by referring to the mine's workforce through terms such as 'labourers'.<sup>18</sup> This admission on the behalf of the company contained many of the themes that would run throughout the annual reports of both the IBMA and SJDR. I contend that the annual reports of the IBMA and SJDR must be first and foremost understood as attempts to cultivate confidence and continued investment among shareholders. As such representations of slavery within them were coloured not only by abolitionist campaigns, but also by specific anxieties relating to their position as joint-stock companies.

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<sup>17</sup> IBMA Annual Report, (hereafter AR) 1830, (vol. 1) p. 14. Can be found at the British Library: Shelfmark 08247.g.14.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, 'Brazilian Gold', p. 121, IBMA AR 1829, p. 8.

In this section I will explore the annual reports of the two mining companies separately, drawing out similarities and divergences in their representation of their enslaved workforce. I will begin with the IBMA as this company was founded several years before the SJDR and was in fact one of the pioneers of British mining in Brazil. As Evans notes, the IBMA was formed in 1824 and sought to take advantage of '[t]he new Brazilian constitution ... which allowed the crown to grant mineral concessions to foreigners.'<sup>19</sup> Among the company's directors were men such as Isaac Goldsmid, who had experience dealing on gold bullion and also in financing loans to the Brazilian government.<sup>20</sup> The IBMA then clearly formed part of wider shift towards Latin America by British mining capital which was discussed briefly in the previous chapter.

The attraction of Brazil as a site for the deployment of British capital and expertise lay not only in its new openness to foreign investment, but also in a wider discourse of the economic potential of Latin America. An increase in travel writing that stressed the economic potential of South America accompanied the mining boom of the 1820s. Mary Louise Pratt has highlighted a common theme across such works on the Spanish Americas that painted the local population as incapable of exploiting the continent's bountiful resources.<sup>21</sup> Striking similarities can be found in the claims made by the promoters of the IBMA. An advert aimed at drumming up shareholders in *The Times* claimed 'that the inhabitants of Brazil generally, are alike destitute of capital and industry and ignorant of the principles of mineralogy; all which defects the conductors of this Association will be able to supply.'<sup>22</sup> The IBMA promised innovation and profits that would be garnered by applying new mining methods unknown to the 'uninstructed natives'.<sup>23</sup> In pitching the vision of how Brazilian gold mining would be transformed the advert made no mention of a slave workforce, nor did the official

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<sup>19</sup> Evans, 'Brazilian Gold', p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121

<sup>21</sup> M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 145, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 8 Dec 1824.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

prospectus.<sup>24</sup> What is important is how the IBMA sought to sell itself as an exciting potential investment that could bring success through the export of British capital and ingenuity. This chimed with both literary representations of Latin American potential and the promotion of other mining ventures in Mexico and Peru.<sup>25</sup> Yet, again imagined geographies facilitated the deployment of British capital through a depiction of Brazil as a safe and potentially awarding arena for investment. Slavery was not what attracted the IBMA to Brazil, rather as we shall see it was a fact that had to be reconciled once works began.

The somewhat sheepish admission of slave-ownership by the IBMA must be understood in the context of the late 1820s and early 1830s as British slave owners in the Caribbean had become increasingly assailed by abolitionist attacks. The IBMA directors' admission of slave-ownership can be read alongside contemporary debates around slavery, emancipation and amelioration in the West Indies. The passivity of the directors' assertion that 'they were apprised' of owning slaves signals a desire to distance themselves as much as possible from the ownership, and perhaps more importantly the purchase of slaves. Parallels can easily be drawn with the claims by the tendency of West Indian slave-owners to stress inheritance rather than purchase of slaves when seeking compensation for emancipation.<sup>26</sup> In a Britain increasingly hostile to slavery the active acquisition of slaves would be hard to defend, especially given Britain's commitment to suppression of the slave trade. Interestingly both the IBMA and SJDR annual reports are careful in their refusal to discuss how slaves were acquired. Though as discussed in the previous chapter the letterbooks of the SJDR clearly indicate that agents were hired to purchase from the slave markets of Rio.<sup>27</sup> The organisation of the joint-stock company allowed the insulation of shareholders, and to

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<sup>24</sup> The Imperial Brazilian Mining Association Prospectus, 7 Dec 1824, British Library, 8223.e.10.(61.)

<sup>25</sup> Dawson, *Latin American Debt*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>27</sup> SJDR to Messrs Harrison & Co., 25 Nov 1835, SJDR, BLUT: LB1.



a certain extent the directors, from the realities of life at the mines. Again similarities might be drawn with the trend that Nicholas Draper has identified of absentee plantation owners using distance to insulate themselves from the negative connotations of slavery.<sup>28</sup> This distance was even greater in the case of the IBMA and SJDR whose slaves dwelled outside of the empire and could conceivably have been purchased without the knowledge of shareholders. This distance was of course physical as well as metaphorical and information about the workings of the mine was limited even further by the relatively slow pace of transatlantic communication in the 1830s and 1840s.

If the separation of management and ownership allowed company directors to insulate themselves from slave-ownership it also raised issues relating to accountability. Although Victorian corporations have generally been viewed as depersonalised distant entities Aeron Hunt has demonstrated the deeply personal nature of Victorian business culture.<sup>29</sup> The annual reports of both the IBMA and SJDR are prime examples of this, because every statement within these texts is attributed to an individual director or employee. Hunt has noted that Victorian business writing has argued that the attachment of names to such texts was intended to 'conjure the *idea* of personal responsibility'.<sup>30</sup> The idea of who had the right to speak on behalf of companies was a key point of contention in both controversies discussed below and was part of the struggle over directorial legitimacy. In establishing this personal responsibility annual reports also purported to collapse the physical and metaphorical distance between shareholders and the workings of the mine.

The directors of the IBMA were keen to distance themselves from the acquisition of slaves, but they were at times drawn into a more positive defence of their bonded workforce. For example the assertion in the 1830 report that '[t]hey are well clothed

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<sup>28</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>29</sup> Hunt, *Personal Business*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97-98.

and well fed', made clear that the Directors had not abandoned their duty of care to their human property, an accusation often levied at absentee plantation owners.<sup>31</sup> However this statement was also clearly intended to reassure shareholders over the security of their property as the directors lauded the 'system of order, regularity, and cleanliness has been established amongst them, which has conducted as much to their health as to their tranquillity and happiness.' As important as the happiness of the enslaved was their apparent 'order, regularity, and ... tranquillity.' By stressing these facets of life at Gongo Soco the directors likely sought to assuage fears relating to the perceived instability of slavery. This perception had been forged through a combination of resistance amongst West Indian slaves and abolitionist publicity about the revolts. Instances of slave resistance such as the Demerara revolt of 1823 had confirmed to many Britons that slave societies were particularly susceptible to outbreaks of violence.<sup>32</sup> Fears of unrest also related directly to debates over the efficiency of slave labour versus free. Instability was of course anathema to investors, as such the IBMA director's comments on slavery must be understood as first and foremost about maintaining the confidence and support of shareholders.

The picture of stability and order painted by the directors of the IBMA spoke not only to concerns about slavery, but about the riskiness of joint-stock ventures in general. As discussed previously the IBMA was borne out of the joint-stock boom of the mid 1820s, and when this boom turned to bust joint-stock companies were placed under increasing scrutiny. Taylor notes that propagandists defending mining companies sought to represent them as more stable investments, not susceptible to the periodic crises of other forms of speculation. Annual reports should be considered alongside works produced by propagandists hired by mining companies who wrote representing

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<sup>31</sup> IBMA, AR 1830 (vol. 1), p. 15, Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 41-3.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 85, pp. 105-106.

Latin American mining as a stable, reliable investment.<sup>33</sup> Read in this way the IBMA's repeated stress on how well disciplined and behaved the company's slave workforce was can be understood less as a defence of slavery and more as a way to maintain investor confidence.<sup>34</sup> The focus on order matched the role that the directors ascribed to themselves in the company's early reports in which they asserted their desire to provide a 'steady and persevering hand' to guide shareholders.<sup>35</sup> The potential for unrest among slaves here was just another risk that had to be mitigated in the mind of potential investors.

The desire to provide a steady hand also lay at the heart of the annual reports of the SJDR, a company whose early years were characterised by missteps and false starts. The SJDR was founded in April of 1830 and was headed by a London merchant and investor in a number of mining ventures, John Diston Powles. Charles Herring Jr., future superintendent of the mine at Morro Velho, also sat on the board having fulfilled a similar role in Powles's mining ventures of the mid-1820s.<sup>36</sup> Like the directors of the IBMA these men were not attracted to the Brazil because of slavery, but because of the country's perceived economic potential. The annual reports of the SJDR had the same goal of those of the IBMA in representing it as a serious venture not subject to the abuses of most joint-stocks. To this end the company's second annual report contained a promise to 'have no inefficient or incompetent persons in their service, and to watch, with the most scrupulous care, every part of the expenditure.'<sup>37</sup> Such statements recognised the anxiety surrounding proprietor-employee relationships, which suffused Victorian economic culture.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, pp. 112-113

<sup>34</sup> IBMA, AR 1837, pp. 24-25.

<sup>35</sup> IBMA, AR 1826 (vol. 3), p.105.

<sup>36</sup> Eakin, *British Enterprise*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>37</sup> SJDR, AR, 1832, SJDR, BLUT: p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Hunt, *Personal Business*, pp. 33-68.

The annual reports of the SJDR, like the IBMA, were first and foremost an exercise in expectation management. This was particularly important in the SJDR's first few years as their first mine in Sao Joao had to be abandoned and the move to Morro Velho was accompanied by great expenditure.<sup>39</sup> In this context the company's reports were mostly focused on providing updates on the progress at the mines and explaining why further expense was needed. This expectation management often related to the company's ability, or inability, to pay a dividend. In years where returns for shareholders were not possible reports would be loaded with reassuring statements that 'the foundations had been laid therein for a more prosperous futurity.'<sup>40</sup> The slave workforce of the company was, as with the IBMA, very much a secondary concern to assuring shareholders that their investment would eventually be rewarded.

The SJDR overcame these initial stumbling blocks since the lode at the Morro Velho mine proved to be incredibly rich in ore. Marshall Eakin has plotted how from the 1830s onwards the SJDR would expand its operation and swell its profits to the point that it became the heart of the economy of Minas Gerais. With this expansion came an increased demand for slave labour and the number of slaves owned or hired by the mine came to dwarf that of the IBMA. The slave workforce was recorded in a similar way to the IBMA, divided into categories based upon gender and age. However, the SJDR went even further by also calculating its 'Effective Force' by subtracting the 'Aged and Infirm' slaves, as they were labelled, from its calculations.<sup>41</sup> This reflected the directors' avowed focus on efficiency and should also colour claims about pastoral care for the enslaved. The value and importance of the SJDR workforce ultimately rested on its ability to contribute to the productivity of the mine. Even this practice was seemingly abandoned from 1847. From this point onwards it was the reports of medical officers contained within the appendix of the annual report that would give the

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<sup>39</sup> Eakin, *British Enterprise*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> SJDR, AR 1842, SJDR, BLUT: p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> SJDR, 1839, SJDR, BLUT: p. 37

clearest idea of slave numbers by listing the number who had been treated for illness or died over the past year. Again this can be seen to link explicitly to expenditure and efficiency concerns as deaths meant loss of capital and a need to purchase or hire more labour.

Whilst the slave population of Gongo Soco and Morro Velho were not the primary focus of the annual reports reference they did at times play a part in the picture companies wanted to present to shareholders and the wider world. Mining companies sought to represent themselves as technological innovators utilising British capital to transform Latin America. Authors such as Disraeli contrasted this picture with domestic companies making use of new technologies on a small scale as a way of justifying the companies' large expenditure.<sup>42</sup> Annual reports from both companies were liable to talk of the improvement and advancement of not only the mining property but also of the slave workforce. Several IBMA reports commented on efforts to 'improve' the moral character and health of the slave workforce, specifically with relation to a system of rewards and promotions instituted in 1833 by Superintendent Captain Thomas Skerrett.<sup>43</sup> Such representations not only chimed with the transformative role mining companies claimed for themselves, but also related to debates surrounding amelioration in the West Indies. Ameliorationist discourse can be understood as claims made by slave owners intended to 'demonstrate progress and material benefits of slavery for the slaves'.<sup>44</sup> Discussions of how the conditions of slavery were ameliorated by company practice could act as a buttress against anti-slavery critiques, but they ultimately reverted back to profitability. Skerret's system at Gongo Soco was explicitly intended to 'get rid of a race of men the most profligate and unprofitable.'<sup>45</sup> In this way

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<sup>42</sup> Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> IBMA, AR 1833 (vol. 2), p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> P. Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> IBMA, AR 1833 (vol. 2), p. 8.

a performance of paternalism dovetailed perfectly with assuring investors of the potential for profit.

The majority of reports from both the IBMA and SJDR referred to the slave population in a minimal and abstract way. They were represented through tables and numbers, always considered as a form of capital or as a form of labour. This was because the slave workforce stood at the periphery of the company's key concern, which was to maintain investor confidence in the mines and their ability to bring a profit.

Discussions of slave life or labour conditions often related to this central goal. The orderly behaviour of slaves mirrored the desire for joint-stock mines to be stable and reliable. The following two sections will explore how both companies would be drawn into a more explicit discussion and defence of their reliance on slave labour.

#### The IBMA and Shareholder Anti-Slavery

At a London meeting hall in the spring of 1841 a bad tempered debate took place over the question of slavery and emancipation. This meeting was remarkable because it took place neither in parliament nor among the abolitionists of Exeter Hall, but between shareholders and directors of the Imperial Brazilian Mining Association. Seven shareholders had called an extraordinary general meeting with the goal of bringing about the emancipation of the company's 500 slaves.<sup>46</sup> The call for emancipation was met with a forceful defence by the directors at odds with their usual tight-lipped stance on the company's slave workforce. This clash between a group of shareholders and company directors reveals the ambiguous position of the corporate slave-owner. In this section I explore how the call to emancipate slaves represented a firm assertion of moral responsibility on the part of some shareholders, as well as a direct challenge to the directors' claims about the benign and orderly nature of slavery at Gongo Soco. In doing so the IBMA shareholders gave expression to wider anxieties

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<sup>46</sup> 'Imperial Brazilian Mining Company', *ASR*, 2 June 1841.

surrounding investor-director relationships in joint-stock companies. In response to this shareholder scrutiny over slave labour the IBMA directors articulated a defence of slavery that redeployed much of the pro-slavery rhetoric of the pre-emancipation period. Ultimately, the company succeeded in defending their right to own human property as only seven shareholders voted for emancipation.

The early 1840s were turbulent years for both the IBMA and SJDR. During this period they were subject to similar scrutiny aimed at British merchants as the British government sought to reconcile the countervailing commitments of commercial expansion and anti-slavery. Chris Evans argues that the failure of the 1843 Act demonstrated the limits of abolitionist influence in the face of 'transnational mining capital['s] brute power that was not to be tamed.'<sup>47</sup> By putting greater focus on the joint-stock ownership of mining companies I problematise Evans's conclusion and argue that joint-stock ventures were uniquely susceptible to anti-slavery critique and that they had to defend slave-ownership to multiple audiences, including their own shareholders. The IBMA Emancipation controversy of 1841 can in many ways be understood as providing the both the impetus for Brougham's Bill and an arena in which slave-owning companies were able to hone their defence of human property.

The attempt by seven IBMA shareholders to take decisive action against company slave-ownership was announced via advertisements in the press including *The Times* and *Morning Chronicle*.<sup>48</sup> This call to their fellow investors to pressure the company to emancipate its slaves was predicated on the claim that they had 'unknowingly in the first instance become shareholders in a Mining Company which employs slave labour.'<sup>49</sup> The image of the 'unthinking-shareholder' represented an explicit attempt to distance themselves from the purchase of slaves. Draper's work on the emancipation process has revealed the variety of ways that metropolitan Britons became owners of

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<sup>47</sup> Evans, 'Brazilian Gold', p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 5 Mar 1841; *The Times*, 5 May 1841.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

West Indian plantations. These 'paths to ownership' included inheritance or repayment of debts and were often represented as a passive form of ownership where individuals just happened to possess property in humans.<sup>50</sup> As demonstrated in section one of this chapter, the IBMA directors attempted to use this defence to distance themselves from the purchase of slaves. The seven shareholders sought to exploit this passivity in an interesting way. By assuming that shareholders were unaware that mining companies owned slaves abolitionists at once absolved them of moral responsibility and thrust another obligation upon them.<sup>51</sup> This was a clear attempt to exploit the ambiguity of the position of the shareholder as someone interested in the ownership of a company, but not involved in its management. To understand the implications for slave-ownership it is important to take a step back and consider wider debates over the role and responsibilities of shareholders in joint-stock companies.

Joint-stock mining companies, as noted in the previous section, consistently represented themselves as trustworthy and attentive to the needs of investors. However, this relationship was far from a one-way street and the role of the shareholder itself was openly scrutinised in the nineteenth century. Many commentators represented joint-stock organisation as a shift away from economic relationships built on mutual trust and good character, the latter being vital to credit relations in the nineteenth-century.<sup>52</sup> What could possibly undermine a person's character more than allowing their money to be used in the purchase of slaves? The anti-slavery convention of 1840 was littered with pejorative references to 'sleeping-partners' who divested themselves of moral responsibility whilst reaping profits.<sup>53</sup> Shareholding in slave-owning companies might be conceived as the ultimate example of speculating as a form of plunder at someone else's expense, a criticism often levelled

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<sup>50</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 59-62.

<sup>51</sup> 'English Slave Holders', *ASR*, 7 Apr 1840.

<sup>52</sup> Finn, *Character of Credit*, p. 19; Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> BFASS, *General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 265.



at investors.<sup>54</sup> For some capitalists the suggestion that they might be profiting from slavery, and therefore corrupting themselves was one that had to be challenged publicly. For example, Joseph Gurney wrote to *The Times* to assert that he owned no shares in the IBMA, claiming 'no one who knows me could possibly believe such a calumny'.<sup>55</sup> Gurney's business as a banker made him a prime candidate for investing in joint-stocks, but his Quaker faith, familial connections to abolitionists, as well as his own active participation in anti-slavery campaigns made the imputation of owning a share in slaves particularly galling.<sup>56</sup> Those who did own shares in slave-owning companies however, stood open to the charge that they were the worst type of speculators happily to idly profit as moral transgressions were committed in their name.

Victorian entrepreneurs were keenly aware of the interrelationship of business interests and personal character. Therefore the identity of the seven signatories does hint that this asserted ignorance could potentially have been a means of avoiding public embarrassment about slave-ownership. Listed among the signatories were members of the Bristol-based Fry family of chocolate manufacturing fame. Like Joseph Gurney, the Frys were Quakers and the eldest son Richard was involved in organised anti-slavery.<sup>57</sup> Their plea of ignorance was quickly transformed into a striking assertion of shareholder obligation as the circular stressed 'the responsibility which devolves upon us and upon all who have interest in companies similarly situated.'<sup>58</sup> Most shareholders in joint-stock companies possessed some form of supervisory power such as the ability to call meetings and appoint directors. The general meeting served a particularly important role and has been described as the 'principal conduit of

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<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *Creating Capitalism*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 16 June 1841.

<sup>56</sup> E. H. Milligan, 'Gurney, Joseph John (1788-1847)'. *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/11771>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>57</sup> D. J. Hall, 'Fry, Francis (1803-1886)', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/10209>, accessed 12 Sep 2017]

<sup>58</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 5 Mar 1841; *The Times*, 5 May 1841.

proprietary power'.<sup>59</sup> Victorians held serious doubts over whether corporations could act virtuously, potentially here lay the answer as individual shareholders might bend the company to their moral will.<sup>60</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* certainly endorsed this perspective as it applauded the circular and stressed the 'solemn duty' of shareholders to oppose slave labour.<sup>61</sup> For a brief moment it seemed that joint-stock ownership might allow anti-slavery to reach where the government could not.

The intersection of anti-slavery and joint-stock politics in the IBMA case becomes especially clear by examining how the controversy played out in the pages of the *Mining Journal*. Henry Tuckett, one of the seven requisitionists, utilised the journal's correspondence pages to call for emancipation and also to criticise the directors for withholding the deed of settlement and a list of shareholders from him.<sup>62</sup> Tuckett's desire to see the deed of settlement spoke as much to the question of shareholder rights as it did to the question of emancipation. Deeds of settlement can be understood as the constitutions of unincorporated companies like the IBMA as they set out the rights and responsibilities of shareholders.<sup>63</sup> There was a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the availability of information to shareholders but the *Mining Journal* firmly sided with Tuckett, attacking the conduct of the directors as 'highly discreditable'.<sup>64</sup> Tuckett's use of the *Mining Journal* to criticise the IBMA's evasiveness demonstrates how calls for emancipation intersected with questions of directorial accountability. The *Mining Journal's* support was in line with a critical stance it had previously taken on lack of attendance by shareholders at meetings.<sup>65</sup> The IBMA case

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<sup>59</sup> R. Pearson, 'Shareholder Democracies? English Stock Companies and the Politics of Corporate Governance during the Industrial Revolution', *English Historical Review*, 117:473 (2002), pp. 840-866, p. 853.

<sup>60</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 136-138.

<sup>61</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 5 Mar 1841.

<sup>62</sup> 'Employment of Slaves by the Imperial Brazilian Mining Company', *Mining Journal*, 6 Mar 1841.

<sup>63</sup> M. Freeman, R. Pearson, J. Taylor, *Shareholder Democracies? Corporate Governance in Britain and Ireland Before 1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 20 Mar 1841.

<sup>65</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 27 Feb 1840.

represented shareholders actively engaging with corporate governance and their recourse to the press can be seen as a form of shareholder agency complimentary to the attendance of general meetings.<sup>66</sup> Intriguingly, the *Mining Journal's* intervention in the emancipation debate did not stop at corporate governance and its comments on the moral and economic implications of joint-stock slave ownership deserve further consideration.

From the beginning of the IBMA controversy the *Mining Journal* was firm in its support for the emancipation of the company's slaves. This anti-slavery stance preceded the original call for emancipation as the journal's editors had previously commented on the wider accusations of joint-stock slave owning. For example an editorial on the anti-slavery convention of 1840 used the fact that £1.5 million had been invested in Cuban and Brazilian mining to estimate that 'we should find that no less than 3,000 Englishmen ... are intimately connected with the abominable system.'<sup>67</sup> This statement set the tone for the *Journal's* coverage of the IBMA controversy, characterised as it was by a moral condemnation of slavery inflected by the vagaries of the joint-stock venture. Throughout the early months of 1841 the correspondence columns contained letters both for and against emancipation, each with an appended comment from the *Mining Journal* opposing slave-ownership. This opposition was in many ways unremarkable and was expressed in terms of morality or as a 'question of national character'.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly the *Mining Journal's* coverage lacked any economic critique despite the ongoing debate over the relative efficiency of slave labour versus free, which had been part of the struggle over West Indian Emancipation.<sup>69</sup> In fact the *Mining Journal* accepted many of the economic defences of slavery. One letter defending forced labour on the grounds of the paucity of free labourers in Brazil was met with the admission

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<sup>66</sup> Freeman, Pearson, Taylor, *Shareholder Democracies*, pp. 211-239.

<sup>67</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 27 June 1840.

<sup>68</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 17 Apr 1841.

<sup>69</sup> Drescher, *Mighty Experiment*, pp. 121-143.

that this was an issue but that the question of emancipation was 'not, in fact a monetary question'.<sup>70</sup> Even more strikingly the *Mining Journal* admitted that the Brazilian slave labourer might be better off than his European counterpart.<sup>71</sup> Morality and national character then trumped economic or welfare concerns.

The *Mining Journal's* opposition to slavery appeared to reflect broader anxieties over Britain's national character and moral example. However these were filtered through an understanding of the joint-stock company. The most strenuous objection to the IBMA was that its slaves represented a form of stock. Slaves were an investment and therefore '[t]he health of the slave is considered more with reference to his cost, and the value set upon him in case of a sale being effected.'<sup>72</sup> Joint-stock companies were portrayed as having an interest in continuing the slave trade out of a desire to maintain their share price. This clearly jarred with the government's commitment to ending the slave trade. Worse still even if the IBMA and other companies treated their slaves humanely the workforce's character as an asset meant that any bankruptcy would lead to slaves being sold.<sup>73</sup> Even if British slave-ownership was ameliorated the nature of the joint-stock company put the slaves at risk of ending up in the hands of the supposedly less-civilized Brazilians. Here was a similar ambivalence over a British commerce sullied by slavery as that which characterised the debates over West African merchants explored in chapter three. If the joint-stock company was a uniquely troubling form of slave-ownership it also it also provided a unique chance to set an example. In an editorial the week before the IBMA meeting the *Mining Journal* proclaimed that emancipation if secured would 'have a more moral influence and effect than half-a-dozen anti-slavery meetings at Exeter Hall.'<sup>74</sup> The editor hoped that the

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<sup>70</sup> 'Employment of Slave Labour by British Mining Companies', *Mining Journal*, 8 May 1841.

<sup>71</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 20 Mar 1841.

<sup>72</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 8 May 1841.

<sup>73</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 20 Mar 1841.

<sup>74</sup> 'Editorial', *Mining Journal*, 8 May 1841.

joint-stock company through its shareholders could reaffirm the moral superiority of British commerce. Alas, these hopes were unfounded.

If the image of the 'unthinking shareholder' provided a unique opening for anti-slavery critique it was not a position that went unchallenged. At the EGM the company directors noted with some venom that '[the requisitionists] state the fact [of slave ownership] as if it had only just now presented itself to their notice'.<sup>75</sup> The directors pointed out that the number of slaves had been listed in nearly every report since 1830 and this was certainly true. As Alborn has noted, joint-stock banks fed information to shareholders through annual reports so as to create a pool of individuals from which future directors could be elected.<sup>76</sup> If the IBMA intended the same then the events of 1841 surely disappointed them. Calls for emancipation seemed to undermine the audience that was imagined for annual reports of a diligent shareholder reassured by the directors soothing predictions. By pointing to the annual reports the directors could at least curb any criticism that they had deliberately misled investors and there had not been 'any concealments.'<sup>77</sup> Other shareholders were also hostile to unthinking shareholders. Richard Fry's claim before the meeting that he had been totally ignorant of all mining in Brazil when his father passed shares onto him at the age of 21, was met with an acidic response from one shareholder who quipped 'I did suppose that the Society of Friends, who were very anxious to acquire knowledge, must have read some history of Brazil'.<sup>78</sup> The requisitionists were also mocked over their continued shareholding. For example George Thomas's admission that company dividends had been paid to his bankers (then donated to BFASS) was met with laughs of derision.<sup>79</sup> This back and forth over awareness of slave-ownership can be understood as an articulation of the broader question of when shareholders had the right to challenge

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<sup>75</sup> IBMA, AR1841, pp. 16-17.

<sup>76</sup> Alborn, *Conceiving Companies*, p. 104.

<sup>77</sup> IBMA, AR 1841, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> 'Imperial Brazilian Mining Company', *ASR*, 2 June 1841.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116

directors. By adopting the role of the unthinking shareholder Thomas and Fry arguably undermined their claim to possess accurate knowledge about the workings of the mine and slavery in Brazil.

The EGM of May 1841 bears further consideration as reports of it read like the struggle over slavery and emancipation writ small. The usual attacks on slavery as inhumane, cruel and wasteful were articulated through the language of directorial accountability. This was mostly the doing of George Thomas, who led the way in pleading the case of emancipation to board and shareholders. Thomas represented himself as a type of 'unthinking shareholder' by noting that he had become aware of slave ownership in 1833 and had since then pressured the company over issues of emancipation and amelioration.<sup>80</sup> His sudden call for emancipation in 1841 was explicitly represented in terms of a loss of faith in the directors of the company and specifically in their abandonment of a policy of gradual emancipation upon the appointment of George Duval as the mine's superintendent. In Thomas's telling the directors were guilty of 'retrograde motion' in abandoning this policy.<sup>81</sup> The term 'retrograde' not only connoted moral backsliding on the part of the directors, but also undercut the narrative of progressive improvement that was central to the IBMA's annual reports. Thomas's critique then brought together anti-slavery and an attempt to reassert the accountability of company directors to their shareholders.

George Thomas's critique openly drew upon, and must be understood in the context of, a rash of bad publicity the IBMA had attracted from late 1840 onwards. This began with the publication of allegations of mistreatment of slaves by a former employee F. A. Kentish. In a pamphlet entitled 'An Introductory Letter Addressed to Sir T. F. Buxton', which was also sent to Colonial Secretary Lord John Russell, the former IBMA clerk claimed to lay bare the 'Frightful Horrors of Modern Slavery' at the company's Gongo

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

Soco mine.<sup>82</sup> The term 'Modern Slavery' was keenly chosen to pierce the image of modernity and technological progress asserted by mining companies. Rather, their establishment in Brazil had led to a 'system of atrocious cruelty *far surpassing anything ever known in the West Indies*.'<sup>83</sup> In explaining this cruelty Kentish lingered particularly on how when punishing their slaves the company allowed '*female slaves to be indiscriminately, and severely flogged*' with a 'cat-o'-nine tails.'<sup>84</sup> These gruesome images drew freely from abolitionist attacks on the flogging of slave women in the British West Indies. As Henrice Altink argues violence towards women was a particular taboo and was seen to have a morally degenerative effect on enslaved men and children.<sup>85</sup> At the same time imagery of punishment and torture represented a challenge to the picture of order and stability painted by the IBMA's annual reports.

Following the publication of Kentish's accusations the IBMA leapt into action in attempting to refute his claims. This process began with a letter from the company solicitors J. C. & Freshfields to the BFASS and a further correspondence published in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*.<sup>86</sup> This action was indicative of two characteristics of joint-stock companies. Firstly, it showed the importance of solicitors in conducting the public affairs of the company, a tendency Alborn has also identified in joint-stock railways.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, the decision to approach the BFASS showed a clear recognition that company publications did not exist in a vacuum. Current shareholders and potential investors might be swayed by allegations in the anti-slavery press; as such they had to be met head on. The IBMA's response was intent on removing Kentish's credibility attributing his 'gross and scandalous libel' to the company's refusal to grant him 'a most exorbitant

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<sup>82</sup> 'British Slave Holders Imperial Brazilian Mining Association', *ASR*, 21, 7 Oct 1840.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* (Italics in original)

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> H. Altink, *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), pp. 133-145.

<sup>86</sup> 'British Slave-Holders. – Imperial Brazilian Mining Association', *ASR*, 22, 21 Oct 1840.

<sup>87</sup> Alborn, *Conceiving Companies*, p. 181.

and unfounded pecuniary claim' upon his return to Brazil.<sup>88</sup> Evidencing this claim was an appended letter from Kentish to the IBMA in which he threatened to expose their slave labour practices if not paid. Such an approach served not only to discredit Kentish, but also to flip around the charges of 'avarice' the former clerk had levelled at the association.<sup>89</sup> The problem for the IBMA was that Kentish's accusations and the responses to them drew attention to a shift in management of the company's slave workforce and the EGM provided an opportunity for more direct scrutiny of the directors.

The 1841 EGM brought together various critiques levelled at the IBMA in the *Mining Journal*, Kentish's pamphlet, and the abolitionist press and laid them before the shareholders at large. George Thomas and Richard Fry's speeches were not only in favour of emancipation, but also of director accountability and shareholder activism. Thomas went one further than the *Mining Journal* in holding up Antigua as an example of how free labour could efficiently replace that of the slave.<sup>90</sup> Antigua was the one British island to immediately abolish slavery in 1833, foregoing the apprenticeship period, and had recorded a small increase in sugar production.<sup>91</sup> Thomas exaggerated Antigua's triumph before the meeting to demonstrate that not only was emancipation morally right it was also 'sound policy'.<sup>92</sup> Fry on the other hand invoked the Golden Rule arguing 'it is always the best policy ... to do to others as we would be done by, and that will secure us prosperity.'<sup>93</sup> These anti-slavery proclamations were expressed through the profit driven language of the joint-stock venture. In this representation slave ownership was not only morally dubious it was also economically irresponsible. In addressing the call for emancipation then the IBMA directors also had to defend their own competence and the legitimacy of the company.

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<sup>88</sup> 'British Slave-Holders. – Imperial Brazilian Mining Association', *ASR*, 22, 21 Oct 1840.

<sup>89</sup> 'British Slave Holders Imperial Brazilian Mining Association', *ASR*, 21, 7 Oct 1840.

<sup>90</sup> 'Imperial Brazilian Mining Company', *ASR*, 2 June 1841.

<sup>91</sup> Drescher, *Mighty Experiment*, p. 149.

<sup>92</sup> 'Imperial Brazilian Mining Company', *ASR*, 2 June 1841.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.



At the emergency general meeting the directors took the chance to defend their ownership and treatment of slaves and won a resounding victory. Of those present at the meeting only seven voted for the emancipation motion.<sup>94</sup> Whilst those who voted in favour of maintaining the slave workforce were evidently motivated by economic self-interest, the rhetoric of the IBMA is worth examining for two reasons. Firstly, the company had to reconcile its slave-owning with broader anti-slavery vision in Britain. Secondly, it had to convince shareholders that slavery was the most profitable labour available at a time when the company was undergoing economic strife. 1841 had been a year of 'continued small produce, coupled with heavy expenditure'.<sup>95</sup> The IBMA's defence consisted of two parts, an address by Chairman Joshua Walker that was reprinted as part of the annual report of 1841, and a number of floor speeches at the EGM. The defences offered for slave-owning by the IBMA are perhaps most accurately described as 'anti-abolitionist' or 'ameliorationist' rather than 'pro-slavery'. Paula Dumas's recent survey of British defences of slavery distinguishes between these three categories in terms of whether authors were defending slavery as an institution, critiquing abolitionist schemes, or arguing for the benefits brought to the enslaved by their captivity.<sup>96</sup> To a point this rhetoric was present in the regular annual reports of both the IBMA and SJDR, but it was expressed most vigorously in times of crisis like 1841.

The IBMA director's statement on slavery in May 1841 began with an echo of their first statement on slavery in 1830. Yet again they asserted a commitment to 'ameliorate' the condition of their slaves and linked this process to a vision of gradual emancipation.

The directors asserted that in 1834 they agreed to emancipate all children upon reaching the age of 21 and that measures had been implemented for 'securing the boon

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<sup>94</sup> IBMA, AR 1841, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, pp. 1-6.

of emancipation to the rising generation.<sup>97</sup> These lofty aims were tempered by the directors admitting that attempts to emancipate adults had been unsuccessful; as such it would be foolhardy to emancipate the slaves right now.<sup>98</sup> Dumas has identified similar rhetoric amongst West Indian anti-abolitionists who claimed to share the ultimate goal of ending slavery but in a manner that brought a better life for slaves and prosperity for planters.<sup>99</sup> These arguments required a certain representation of the IBMA slaves as works in progress. They were in fact as ordered and disciplined as the annual reports claimed, but if immediately freed they would die of 'drunkenness' and 'want'.<sup>100</sup> Emancipation was represented as a desirable end point, but one just out of grasp. Any attempt to bring it about ahead of time would have disastrous consequences for both the slaves and the company's bottom line. These claims represent the flipside of George Thomas's calls for emancipation on economic and humanitarian grounds.

The central assertions of the IBMA's defence of slave ownership was the necessity of slavery to labour in Brazil and that they sought to bring about a moral transformation in their slaves. As discussed in section one British mining companies stressed the unique benefits their capital and expertise brought to Brazilian mining. This was no different when it came to slavery and Brazilian slave ownership served as a useful counterpoint for both companies in defending slave owning. Speaking before the EGM company director Isaac Goldsmid claimed emancipation would 'destroy the moral effect which we anticipated the commencement of its establishment.' In this telling the IBMA was founded with the goal of setting 'a bright example' to Brazilians.<sup>101</sup> This was the politics of moral suasion turned on its head. British slave owning could convince the Brazilians to emancipate. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* was quick to pour scorn on this claim mocking the notion that '[m]ining companies are formed for preaching ... not for

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<sup>97</sup> IBMA, AR 1841, p. 23.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, p. 161.

<sup>100</sup> IBMA, AR 1841, p. 44.

<sup>101</sup> 'Imperial Brazilian Mining Company', *ASR*, 2 June 1841

profit.<sup>102</sup> Those at the meeting however appeared reassured by these claims, one shareholder noted that those slaves who had been emancipated had ‘turned out badly.’<sup>103</sup> Allied to this assertion that the IBMA acted as a positive influence on Brazilian slave owners was the oft-repeated claim that emancipation would simply lead to re-enslavement by less humane masters. This line of argument bears striking similarities to pre-abolition arguments that British slave traders were a safer bet for slaves than foreign rivals.<sup>104</sup>

The West Indies also stood as a point of comparison. In a letter appended to the 1841 annual report an anonymous correspondent claimed that Brazilian slaves, having been brutalised by the slave trade, were ‘barely weaned from the savage propensities and habits of their childhood.’ West Indian slaves on the other hand had been ‘accustomed to British habits, wants, and feelings, ... and able to exercise, the rights of man, without detriment to themselves.’<sup>105</sup> Such arguments spoke to the diachronic understanding of human variation espoused by many Victorians that explicitly tied moral and mental development to social organization.<sup>106</sup> Ironically, this lack of appropriate ‘habits, wants, and feelings’ had been central to the West Indian defence of slavery identified by Michael Taylor.<sup>107</sup> These claims directly undercut those of George Thomas and the directors succeeded in convincing those present that they were reliable guardians of the interest of both proprietors and slave labourers.

Perhaps the biggest success of the IBMA’s apology came in minimising any possible link to the slave trade. The illegal sale and purchase of slaves was entirely at odds with the British state’s commitment to ending the slave trade and the directors made sure to echo that sentiment. In their statement before the EGM they stressed ‘that traffic ... is

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Editorial, *ASR*, 19 June 1841.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Imperial Brazilian Mining Company’, *ASR*, 2 June 1841.

<sup>104</sup> Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>105</sup> IBMA, AR 1841, p. 115.

<sup>106</sup> Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, p. 6.

<sup>107</sup> Taylor, ‘Conservative Political Economy’, p. 977.

not less abhorrent to their feelings than it can be to those of its most zealous opponents.<sup>108</sup> Following this condemnation the slave trade was quickly dismissed as a topic as the directors focused on stressing the benefits that enslavement brought to the workers at Gongo Soco. As discussed in the previous chapter, the demography of Minas Gerais in this period makes it likely that at least some of the slaves purchased by the IBMA would have been victims of the illegal slave trade.

Ultimately, the IBMA directors overwhelmingly succeeded in convincing shareholders to accept their vision for the company and the continuation of slavery at Gongo Soco. The *Morning Chronicle* reported the failure of the emancipation motion in a scathing fashion attributing it to personal greed and the hope of shareholders that the government 'would grant them a liberal compensation' for their slaves. The paper did however lavish praise on the 'Seven Champions' and expressed hope that other mining shareholders would follow their example.<sup>109</sup> This praise however should be qualified. At least some of the requisitionists remained actively involved with the company. Most strikingly George Thomas, who had been most vocal in his support for emancipation, went on to serve as the company's secretary in the late 1840s.<sup>110</sup> This somewhat surprising development makes more sense when one considers the nature of Thomas's calls for emancipation. His fears that the company was moving in 'retrograde motion' and that slave labour was inefficient were as much about company management as the welfare of the enslaved population. Both Evans and Temperley have found evidence of shareholders selling shares or attempting to donate dividends to the BFASS, but neither Henry Tuckett nor the Frys appear to have been among this number.<sup>111</sup> The requisitionists then appear to have represented a group who could be reassured and won over by the directors' defence of slavery. However, the public forum that joint-

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<sup>108</sup> IBMA, AR 1841, p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 15 May 1841.

<sup>110</sup> G. Thomas to J. Strutt, 7 June 1847, Strut Family Papers, Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock: D3772/E32/122.

<sup>111</sup> The BFASS rejected this money due to its association with slavery see Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p.232, ff. 41; Evans, 'Brazilian Gold', p. 124, ff. 28.

stock companies provided for such discussions allowed them to garner wider anti-slavery attention both inside and outside the abolitionist movement. For a brief moment it appeared that shareholder activism might offer a practical, and *laissez-faire*, solution to the problem of British slave-ownership.

The IBMA emancipation controversy might at first glance appear to only have briefly shaken up one firm but its aftershocks would reverberate across the broader anti-slavery landscape. The SJDR annual report of 1841 was much more forthcoming about the company's slaves than previous years stressing that '[e]very means is taken to preserve them in habits of order, moral discipline and comfort.'<sup>112</sup> This statement seems likely to have been prompted by the increased scrutiny of Brazilian mining prompted by the IBMA case. Elsewhere, abolitionists having been thwarted in their support of emancipation at the firm level turned to the government once again.

Following the IBMA's EGM the BFASS mounted a series of petitions to the government and anti-slavery parliamentarians like Lord Brougham.<sup>113</sup> These petitions would form the basis of Brougham's aforementioned 1843 Act, which as noted in the previous chapter both the SJDR and IBMA strenuously opposed. The EGM of 1841 appears to have proved an effective training ground for honing defences of slave labour and the companies' right to rely on slave labour was guaranteed by the heavily amended version of Brougham's bill that passed through the Commons.

The attempted emancipation of IBMA slaves speaks to the unique nature of slave-ownership in the form of a joint-stock company. The separation of management and ownership, particularly prevalent in a company whose daily operations took place across the Atlantic, provided a distancing from the realities of slave ownership.

However, the politics of the joint-company and the attention of a mining press

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<sup>112</sup> SJDR, AR 1841, SJDR, BLUT: p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> 'On British Officers acting as Agents to Slave-holding Mining Companies', 1 June 1841, PASS, WLO: MSS.Brit.20E2-19, J. Scoble to Lord Brougham, 10 June 1842, Lord Brougham Papers, TNA: BPB-2084.

provided as environment in which to push for emancipation. Many of the arguments made for and against slave owning bore the hallmarks of the earlier struggle over West Indian slavery. However, this rhetoric was adapted to fit the context of the joint-stock company. Profitability and order were central to both slavery's advocates and detractors. Furthermore, the question of emancipation was framed in terms of the reliability of the IBMA's directors and their honesty to investors. These were concerns common in the joint-stock economy, but given an extra moral edge by slavery. It would appear that dual anxieties about joint-stock companies and slavery made foreign mining ventures particularly vulnerable to anti-slavery critique. Ultimately, the IBMA succeeded in legitimising its slave ownership by reassuring shareholders that the company was making moral, as well as economic, progress. Elements of pre-emancipation, ameliorationist rhetoric were deployed and adapted specifically for a joint-stock context. Such a defence rested on maintaining confidence in the methods employed to manage and maintain an orderly and healthy slave workforce. As the next section will demonstrate such claims did not go uncontested, even when the right to joint-stock slave-ownership had been guaranteed.

#### The SJDR Mortality Crisis

The nineteenth general meeting of the Saint John d'El Rey Mining Company appeared to be a celebratory occasion for those in attendance. The company directors laid out the profits and losses of the last twelve months before the shareholders, concluding that 'the past year, has been one of continued success.'<sup>114</sup> This was surely a relief to the proprietors of the company, which had already abandoned one mine in Brazil. Productivity and profitability appeared to be on the up. However, there was one sour note. The directors felt the need to address 'very erroneous statements' in the press about the treatment of their slave population.<sup>115</sup> These statements emanated from a

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<sup>114</sup> SJDR, AR 1849, SJDR, BLUT: p. 7.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

number of publications, notably the *Mining Journal* and *Morning Post*, which had recently taken an interest in the affairs of the SJDR and its management of slave labour. This interest had prompted a more open defence of slavery than was common for the company. Listing the supposed benefits that their unwanted reliance on slavery brought to those who laboured in their mines the directors concluded that ‘in no part of the world can a body of working people be found in a state of greater comfort and contentedness.’<sup>116</sup> This bold defence, and the critiques that provoked it, were the result of a controversy surrounding the troubling number of deaths among slaves at Morro Velho. The mortality crisis, as I shall refer to it, reveals how anti-slavery could be used to articulate broader concerns about joint-stock company management among shareholders. In doing so I complicate the suggestion that abolitionists provoked inquiry into mining companies. Rather, they appear to have played a supporting role in a struggle over corporate governance.

The SJDR has received much greater scholarly attention than the IBMA, most notably in the works of Eakin and Childs. The former’s company history does not directly engage with the mortality crisis of 1849 in any great detail, however it does provide vital information on labour practices and life at the mine. Childs on the other hand directly addressed the events of 1849, specifically press attacks on the SJDR and the company’s response of an internal inquiry, in a ground-breaking article on the relationship between masters and slaves at Morro Velho. In this article Childs masterfully explores the system of ‘rewards, and privileges [used] by slave-owners to discipline and fashion labour’ as well as the ways in which slaves could exploit and resist this system.<sup>117</sup> Childs contends that the relationship between master and slave at Morro Velho was modified by public opinion. This assertion is in part grounded on the coverage that mortality and accusations of overworking slaves received across the press in 1849.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> Childs, ‘Master-Servant’, p. 5.

Childs explains this press interest as a response to former SJDR superintendent Charles Herring Jr. testifying before the 1849 Select Committee on the Slave Trade.<sup>118</sup> As I will demonstrate this assumption is based on a faulty chronology, which falsely inflates the importance of abolitionists in scrutinising the SJDR. In fact anti-slavery is better conceived as a weapon used in an internal struggle between the SJDR directors, shareholders, and employees. Profitability and the company's long-term prospects ultimately characterised this struggle much more than any concern for slaves.

Approaching the mortality crisis as a form of joint-stock politics requires a critical engagement with the texts through which this struggle was mediated. I have already established that company directors used general meetings, and the reports they generated, to maintain investor confidence and undermine criticism. These meetings could also be sites for challenges of directorial policy and, as in the case of the IBMA in 1841; these challenges could have an anti-slavery character. This section shifts more focus to the role of the financial press, specifically the *Mining Journal* and the city column of the *Morning Post*. Specifically I focus on their role as 'a key intermediary of reputation in the nineteenth-century market place.'<sup>119</sup> Whilst some scholars are sceptical of the Victorian press's ability to genuinely hold companies to account it is clear that interlocutors in the debate over mortality at Morro Velho made use of the press to make moral claims for and against the company's management. Columnists in a number of publications were willing to moralise over the SJDR's treatment of slaves and what it meant for profits. In doing so they conform to Poovey's description of attempting to use financial journalism as 'an instrument that could actually make business and investment as safe and ethical as [they] proclaimed it to be.'<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> J. Taylor, 'Privacy, Publicity, and Reputation', *Business History Review*, 87:4 (2013), pp. 679-701, p. 679.

<sup>120</sup> Poovey, 'Writing about Finance in Victorian England' p. 25.



The first hint of controversy comes with an April letter to the *Mining Journal* from an individual resident in Minas Gerais about the status of mining companies in general. The key remarks made are on the large number of slaves being hired cheaply by the SJDR and the fact that 'the mortality among the black race is terrific'. Specifically, eight slaves were said to have died over the previous fortnight. This shocking mortality rate was not attributed to poor conditions at the mine, but rather 'rumour gives out that some of them are overworked.' This overworking amounted to a critical mismanagement of labour and was the result of a feud between the mine's superintendent and the company surgeon. The SJDR's slaves were paying the price and 'dying like rotten sheep'. Perhaps most damning of all for a joint-stock company like the SJDR was not the accusation of mistreatment of its enslaved workforce, but the anonymous author's conclusion that 'under more capable management, it would be a safer investment than it is at present.'<sup>121</sup> This letter pre-dated both the SJDR annual meeting and Herring's testimony before the select committee, both of which occurred in May.<sup>122</sup> The letter not only disproves Childs's chronology, but also complicates his picture of the role of anti-slavery. The *Mining Journal's* correspondent was not an abolitionist and in fact lavished praise on the IBMA's brand of slave ownership because the enslaved had 'learnt to labour like Englishmen.'<sup>123</sup> Here was a more commercial than moral critique that amounted to the following: the SJDR was working its slaves to death and this made them a risky prospect for investors.

To understand the accusations of overwork that were levelled at the SJDR it is important to take a step back and examine how the mine itself functioned. Slaves laboured in a variety of different roles at Morro Velho with one of the many divisions of labour being between that done above and below ground. Work above ground included transporting ore, building structures, and various other roles that supplemented the

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<sup>121</sup> 'The Brazilian Mining Companies', *Mining Journal*, 14 Apr 1849.

<sup>122</sup> Report of the Select Committee, 1850, p. 164.

<sup>123</sup> 'The Brazilian Mining Companies', *Mining Journal*, 14 Apr 1849.

process of mining for gold below the earth's surface. Eakin estimates that around a third of the company's workforce laboured underground.<sup>124</sup> The mortality crisis and accusations of overworking pertained specifically to the role of borer, a form of manual labour key to the functioning of the mine. Borers were responsible for 'the punishing job of drilling and blasting holes' in the underground rock from where ore was extracted. It was a two-man job:

[O]ne man would hold an iron borer while the other drove it into the rock with an eight-pound sledgehammer. Between blows (up to thirty per minute) the holder adeptly rotated the iron borer for greater effectiveness.<sup>125</sup>

The SJDR would move towards mechanisation by the 1870s, but in 1849 hand boring performed by slaves was still central to the company's success. At the end of tiring shifts in dark, humid conditions 'borers filled two or three holes with dynamite and then blasted the rock.' This process produced smoke and nitric acid making the role of borer both unpleasant and dangerous.<sup>126</sup> It was among these slave labourers that mortality at Morro Velho proved to be the highest.

The genesis of concerns over mortality at Morro Velho actually stretched back well before 1849. The board wrote to Superintendent Charles Herring Jr., as early as 1844, to express their 'extreme concern' at the 'loss of 17 Negroes out of 542 in 7 months'.<sup>127</sup> The board's concern was so great that they had consulted with other mining companies, including the IBMA, over the health of their slaves. These enquiries revealed that slaves at Morro Velho worked longer hours, twelve compared to eight, than slaves at any other mine.<sup>128</sup> These concerns over management of labour were effectively concealed from shareholders and the public at the time but would continue

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<sup>124</sup> Eakin, *British Enterprise*, p. 123.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>127</sup> G. D. Keogh to C. Herring Jr., 6 Nov 1844, SJDR, BLUT: LB4.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

to rumble on at Morro Velho itself. A disagreement between the company surgeon Robert Monach and Herring over the health of the slave workforce had led to the former's replacement by the board in early 1845.<sup>129</sup> The disagreement was so bitter that after backing Herring the board felt the need to assure Monach that 'the superintendent has made no attack on you.'<sup>130</sup> Such measures demonstrated a keen awareness that private disputes could blow up into public controversy. The IBMA's experience with disgruntled employees surely acted as a cautionary tale and though they succeeded in silencing Monach immediately his dismissal would eventually come back to bite them. This conflict, and the continuation of Herring's approach to boring by his successor George Keogh, sowed the seeds for the crisis of 1849. However, the annual reports of the mid 1840s effectively silenced any internal critique.

The practice of twelve hour boring was maintained at Morro Velho from 1847 onwards, but now was performed by slave labourers in exchange for overtime pay. This arrangement amounted to eight hours of unpaid labour and four extra hours worked through choice. Of course the relationship between the coerced hours and waged hours is a complicated one, ultimately the slaves at the SJDR were not free to labour as they pleased. However, Childs is right to recognise the agency of slaves at Morro Velho who worked overtime and amassed earnings, some of which could be used to later purchase manumission.<sup>131</sup> The accounts produced in 1849 showed that £1, 467 19s. 2d. had been paid in overtime and rewards.<sup>132</sup> These rewards were not given out of the good of the directors' hearts. More likely, the promise of overtime was a way to meet the increased need for labour at a point when the purchase of more slaves had prohibited by the 1843 Act. What is clear is that by 1849 borers at Morro Velho were still working twelve hours shifts and mortality remained a concern. It was

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<sup>129</sup> J. D. Powles to C. Herring Jr., 5 Mar 1845, SJDR, BLUT: LB4.

<sup>130</sup> G. D. Keogh to R. Monach, 14 Nov 1845, SJDR, BLUT: LB4.

<sup>131</sup> Childs, 'Master-Servant', p. 15.

<sup>132</sup> SJDR, AR 1849, SJDR, BLUT: p. 10.

at this point that these issues would be laid open to full public, and more importantly, shareholder scrutiny.

Critics of the SJDR seized upon reports of overworking and slave mortality as evidence of the particular cruelty of joint-stock slavery. Writing in the Money Market and City News column of the *Morning Post* a correspondent under the name 'Philo-Africanus' explicitly pointed the finger at 'London capitalists.'<sup>133</sup> At the heart of this critique lay the accusation that slaves were treated as entirely disposable and were worked to death to meet the company's labour needs. The profit-motive was to blame here as the company was guilty of 'weighing the lives of blacks against gold, the balance in value being the difference in dividends to the whites at home.'<sup>134</sup> The insertion of this letter in a financial advice column, and its reprint in the *Mining Journal*, represented a clear attempt to moralise investment and flag up damaging managerial practices. Philo-Africanus's response was also remarkable in that it drew on the published reports of the SJDR itself to argue that the company's voracious labour hunger contributed directly to the death of slaves. More remarkable still was the explicit links drawn between the 1843 Act and slave mortality. The SJDR's wanton destruction of life was attributed to the fact that they could no longer purchase slaves and had to rent labourers from neighbouring slave owners. Shorn of the self-interested desire to care for one's own property the company management stood accused of callously working hired slaves to death. This critique tapped into longstanding anxieties over the separation of management and ownership in joint-stock companies. Adam Smith had theorised that managers were more likely to be reckless than owners due to a lack of personal investment in the property.<sup>135</sup> This principle could easily be extended to the use of someone else's property. Such beliefs motivated Philo-Africanus's suggestion

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<sup>133</sup> *The Morning Post*, 21 Apr 1849.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Freeman, Pearson, Taylor, *Shareholder Democracies*, p. 78.

that the prohibition on slave purchasing should be lifted so as to produce a more humane slave-ownership.<sup>136</sup>

The SJDR's own reports added weight to these attacks. A letter from 'A Constant Reader' to Lord Brougham, published by the *Morning Post*, referenced the reports of the SJDR and cited page numbers as he constructed his critique. The letter's author cross-referenced the number of slaves working at Morro Velho (1,100), with the number of deaths (59) to calculate an 'awful mortality' rate of '5½ per cent.' Even more glaring was the number of deaths among the 'young, strong and able' borers, of which 8.2 % had died.<sup>137</sup> The fact that a document produced by a mining company for the purpose of reassuring shareholders could be turned into an instrument of anti-slavery critique raises interesting questions about the transmission of these texts. The presence of IBMA annual reports among the papers of the Strutt family of Derbyshire suggests that mining companies at the very least transmitted reports to shareholders who lived outside of London to inform them of what was said at general meetings.<sup>138</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that the SJDR took similar steps. Elsewhere brief summaries of company reports made up a large part of the *Mining Journal* often under the title 'Foreign Mines'. City intelligence columns, such as that in the *Morning Post*, might also contain summaries and direct quotes from these texts. However, the detailed page references suggest 'A Constant Reader' physically possessed the annual report and had flicked through its pages plucking facts to sharpen their incisive critique. Whether this author was a shareholder or had contact with a proprietor of the SJDR cannot be known, but it is clear that texts produced by the company passed into the hands of critics. Ironically, it was the SJDR's commitment to a degree of

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<sup>136</sup> *The Morning Post*, 21 Apr 1849.

<sup>137</sup> *The Morning Post*, 14 May 1849; SJDR, AR 1849, SJDR, BLUT: pp. 10, 19, 22, 38, 41, 45.

<sup>138</sup> IBMA, AR 1852, Strutt Family Papers, Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock: D3772/E32/122.

transparency that provided ammunition for its critics, given many unincorporated companies' were highly restrictive of the information given out to shareholders.<sup>139</sup>

The same annual report provided ammunition for 'J.F.', an anonymous correspondent from Islington, who undertook a comparison of the company's accounts from 1847 and 1848. Key to this analysis was not only the mortality rates at the mine, but also the data provided on productivity and hours worked. In 'J.F.'s' reading the huge leap in ore broken from 40, 859 tons in 1847 to 61, 672 could only be explained by coercing more work from the slaves. The equation was simple. 'This is an increase of labour, and consequent increase of deaths among the miners, to which I do not believe *freemen* would be liable.'<sup>140</sup> This attack was not simply humanitarian in nature. Rather it had as its target the SJDR's management, whose foolhardy pursuit of profit plunged the company into a demographic death spiral. Whilst the annual reports had sought, as always, to reassure investors of a brighter future for the company 'J.F.' saw a gloomier vision. Slave-owners would surely refuse to hire out their property to a company where they were so likely to die. Here the blame was apportioned directly to the 'infirm and nearly blind old man' in charge of Morro Velho who was led astray by his subordinates. 'J.F.' ended his letter with a particularly bleak warning:

I prophecy that he will not be able to keep his stamps supplied with stone, that the ore will further fall off in value through working the lodes too wide, that the expenditure will be augmented, and the returns, and consequently the profits sensibly diminished.<sup>141</sup>

The gloomy prognosis offered by 'J.F.' bears further consideration as it represented a condemnation of slavery on economic rather than purely moral grounds. The institution of slavery allowed men to be overworked in pursuit of profit. It fostered

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<sup>139</sup> Freeman, Pearson, Taylor, *Shareholder Democracies*, p. 213.

<sup>140</sup> 'Employment of Slave Labour in Foreign Mines', *Mining Journal*, 30 June 1849.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

over-ambition and not the frugality and temperance that joint-stock companies aspired to. The message here was that slavery, whilst useful for reaping short-term profit, would founder in the long run. Demographic arguments over the efficiency of slave labour had been part of anti-slavery rhetoric from the late eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century population decline in the West Indies had been seen as a key indicator of slavery's cruelty.<sup>142</sup> Belief in the superiority of free labour had taken something of a battering following British emancipation and the consequent economic collapse of West Indian sugar.<sup>143</sup> Mining however was a different industry with a finite product and labour supply. In this context, rarely discussed by historians, slave labour's efficiency could clearly be challenged. This critique was mounted in economic and demographic terms, but there may also have been a degree of moralising at work. For example, James William Gilbert, founder of a joint-stock bank, believed that companies could act as moral agents and that financial failure was a just earthly punishment.<sup>144</sup> Similar logic may have lay behind the doom mongering of the SJDR's critic, even if it was expressed in terms of economic logic.

The ruthless exploitation facilitated by a captive workforce could ultimately prove disastrous for the company's bottom line. This was 'J.F's' grim warning and it certainly caught the attention of some observers. Writing again in the *Mining Journal* 'A Shareholder' expressed fears that if 'J.F's' claims were true then the company was guilty of presenting fraudulent accounts. Specifically the allegation that 'the slaves are dying 20 in three months', if true the author contended then 'the sum of 700l should be deducted from [the accounts]'.<sup>145</sup> Another correspondent, Verax, wrote a number of letters echoing concerns about over ambition on the part of the SJDR management.<sup>146</sup>

The veracity of joint-stock company accounts in the nineteenth century were highly

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<sup>142</sup> Drescher, *Mighty Experiment*, pp. 39-49.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 158-160.

<sup>144</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 136-138.

<sup>145</sup> 'St. John Del Rey Mining Company', *Mining Journal*, 7 July 1849.

<sup>146</sup> 'St. John Del Rey Mining Company', *Mining Journal*, 14 July 1849, 'Mining Journal and St. John Del Rey Mining Company', *Mining Journal*, 28 July 1849.

contentious. The SJDR, like many other companies, had its accounts audited by shareholders who had to meet a qualification of owning at least twenty shares.<sup>147</sup> The responses by supposed shareholders are somewhat chilling in their focus on the issue of directorial responsibility and the future prospects of the company. The morality of slavery was not really questioned by either author, profit and loss were the real issues at stake here. As in the case of the IBMA, the question of slavery appeared to also enable more scrutiny of the director-proprietor relationship.

The broader questions over directorial accountability raised by the mortality crisis at Morro Velho were addressed most explicitly in the city column of the *Morning Post*. The column of July 30th saw the publication of a letter signed 'Anti-Slavery' which levelled accusations of outright deceit at the company directors. '[W]e do not know whether the profits are real or unreal' complained the correspondent. 'How long will shareholders be duped?' This scepticism at directorial honesty was tied to a call to 'be content with smaller profits, and even, if necessary give up our works.'<sup>148</sup> This was a firm condemnation that pandered to the worst representations of company directors. The *Morning Post's* editorial comment on the letter suggested that anxiety over the reliability of accounts and information may have been particularly acute in the overseas mining sector. 'Management overseas is never to be trusted' was its rather damning conclusion. Overseas mining remains an under researched aspect of the joint-stock economy so the representativeness of the *Morning Post's* scepticism is hard to judge. However the physical distance between investors and the mine appeared to undermine the trust relationships necessary for joint-stock companies to function. What is clear is that they were unequivocal in their opposition of foreign mining signing off with another bleak warning that:

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<sup>147</sup> 'St John d'El Rey Stock Pamphlet', 1831, SJDR, BLUT: Box 217/F3; Freeman, Pearson, Taylor, *Shareholder Democracies*, pp. 216-219.

<sup>148</sup> *Morning Post*, 30 July 1849.



Treasure is raised only to be abstracted by unfaithful servants, and in vain do shareholders in mining companies look for the golden results that were present to their imaginations when they became so.<sup>149</sup>

The various articles and letters discussed above demonstrate how critiques of the SJDR's management could crystallise around the issue of slavery. Authors adopted names like 'Anti-Slavery' or 'Philo-Africanus' and condemned bonded labour, but the substance of their attacks was centred on the management of the company itself. These ranged from an attack on directorial dishonesty to, in the case of the *Morning Post*, scepticism of foreign mining as a whole. The fact that these letters were placed specifically in the financial press also suggests a determination to grab the interest of a readership of investors and directors. Whilst the anti-slavery press did reprint and comment on many of the articles I would argue that the mortality crisis represented joint-stock politics expressed through a language of anti-slavery.

The SJDR directors were clearly sensitive to the nature of the critique aimed at them. Responding in the *Morning Post* to 'Anti-Slavery's' letter the company made the following contentions; that the large loss of life was due to an epidemic and that the slaves of the mine worked overtime out of choice. Allied to this was a reaffirmation of the company's paternalistic approach to slave-ownership. Overtime was represented as an 'indulgence to them to give them the opportunity of acquiring something of their own'.<sup>150</sup> In many ways this represented a striking assertion of enslaved agency. The decision to work overtime was one taken freely and enthusiastically by the company's workforce. In fact such was their enthusiasm that the directors had put in place a number of restraints and qualifications itemised in the *Morning Post*. Only 'first-class blacks' were to be allowed to work overtime and the surgeon had to approve those

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> *Morning Post*, 11 Aug 1849.

who overtime work.<sup>151</sup> By publishing this criteria the SJDR directors sought to dismiss accusations of misleading shareholders whilst maintaining that their relationship to the company's slaves was more one of stewardship than ownership. The mine's managers allowed overtime to encourage improvement among its workforce. Bar the unfortunate epidemic life at Morro Velho was happy, ordered, and productive.

The serene picture painted by the directors in the *Morning Post* elided a fractious conflict at Morro Velho that had played a role in sparking press outrage. The company presented a united front to the public that elided internal clashes over mortality at the mines. The SJDR's attempt to meet these criticisms and ensure investors of Directorial competence took a body blow when internal ruptures broke through to the surface. A circular was printed in the *Mining Journal* that reiterated the company's commitment to 'seeking to improve the moral condition of the negroes'.<sup>152</sup> In many ways the circular was an unremarkable reassertion of the rhetoric of prudence, improvement and reliability that characterised all SJDR publications, though it did notably attempt to undermine the accusations of overworking by claiming that the mortality figures had been exaggerated. Like all company publications the circular bore the signature of William Routh, company secretary whose name stood for the corporation as a whole. This fiction of unanimity was exploded a month later when Routh, in a circular addressed to shareholders, disputing the defences of the board and supporting accusations of overworking. Specifically, Routh took aim at company chairman J. D. Powles who was presented as a dictatorial figure who 'kept [shareholders] in ignorance of the state of the company's affairs.'<sup>153</sup> Routh's circular is clear evidence that the mortality crisis was not simply the result of abolitionist scrutiny of the SJDR; rather broader anti-slavery sentiments magnified and bought publicity to fissures within the company itself.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> 'St. John Del Rey Mining Company', *Mining Journal*, 22 Sep 1849.

<sup>153</sup> 'St. John Del Rey Mines – To The Shareholders', *Mining Journal*, 20 Oct 1849.

William Routh's circular prompted more airing of dirty laundry as Robert Monach took to the press to further castigate the company directors. The former surgeon referred to the twelve-hour shifts of underground borers as a 'murderous system'. Directorial incompetence was not only leading to deaths but had also 'burdened [the establishment] with a number of living, but useless individuals.'<sup>154</sup> Yet again, the focus was on efficiency and the company's prospects rather than the rights and wrongs of slavery. Monach's letter and Routh's circular did receive coverage in the anti-slavery press. However, this only further demonstrates how anti-slavery might be weaponised as part of internal disputes.<sup>155</sup> The attractiveness of anti-slavery critique may well have lain not only in the extra publicity garnered, but also the belief that extraordinary measures might be taken to remedy problems. The evidence for this was of course West Indian emancipation and legislation like the Suppression Act of 1843. These precedents of government intervening, or attempting to intervene, in issues of private property may well have inspired the extraordinary 'petition' produced by William Routh. This petition was addressed to House of Commons and printed in the *Mining Journal*, *Daily News* and *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. The petition called for the government to take the unusual step of intervening in the management of the SJDR. Her Majesty's minister at Rio should be empowered to impose limits both on the hiring of slaves and hours worked at the mine.<sup>156</sup> This radical extension of government powers was justified on the basis of the wellbeing of the enslaved workforce, yet there was no suggestion of emancipation. Rather the government should enforce a system of efficient and sustainable labour management. This fanciful petition was never likely to prompt a serious governmental response and is perhaps best understood as a further attempt to embarrass and undermine Routh's rivals on the board.

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<sup>154</sup> 'St. John Del Rey Mining Company', *Mining Journal*, 10 Nov 1849.

<sup>155</sup> 'Slave Holding Mining Companies', *ASR*, 1 Nov 1849.

<sup>156</sup> 'St. John Del Rey Company', *Mining Journal*, 10 Nov 1849.

The SJDR directors then stood accused, in a manner similar to the IBMA in 1841, of misleading shareholders. Whilst these accusations had attracted anti-slavery moralising from the press the central impulse came from concern over management of the firm. Condemnations from the *Anti-slavery Reporter* were likely much less distressing than the exposure of internal strife to shareholders and potential investors. The company responded to the accusations levelled at it through a performance of openness and self-reflection. This consisted of an internal inquiry by Thomas Walker, a physician, hired to 'to enter into a full investigation of all the circumstances attending the condition of the Negroes'.<sup>157</sup> Walker's authority came from his status as a supposedly objective observer and the fact that he witnessed life at Morro Velho through 'ocular demonstration'.<sup>158</sup> Walker was to be a surrogate for the shareholders and bridge the oceanic gap between them and the mine. His visit resulted in a circular addressed to the company's proprietors that sought to not only refute accusations of overworking, but also provide a positive defence of slave labour at Morro Velho. This included an explanation of the increased boring capability of the mine, which was attributed to technological development; a claim that chimed with the company's broader message of advancement. The SJDR sounded a conciliatory note on this point stating 'everything in life is susceptible of improvement' and welcoming suggestions on how to better deal with the enslaved workforce.<sup>159</sup> Such statements were clearly intended to undercut the dictatorial picture of the board painted by Routh's letters. The circular's intention was to present a picture of the company as open and willing to accept scrutiny.

The SJDR's commitment to improvement was of course also intended to apply to the slaves at Morro Velho itself. Within Walker's circular (also presented at the 1851

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<sup>157</sup> SJDR, AR, 1850, SJDR, BLUT: p. 9.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> 'Circular to the Proprietors of the St. John d'El Rey Mining Company', 1850, SJDR, BLUT: Box 134/F1.

meeting) and the annual report of 1850 the SJDR directors firmly reasserted both their opposition to slavery, and their right to slave labour. 'It is no fault of the Company's that such is the social condition of Brazil' claimed the directors. The need to reassert their personal opposition to slavery does show that the SJDR did feel that it still had to answer abolitionist questions. However, most references to the company's slaves appear more calculated to quell fears about management of the mine. The directors were committed to:

[I]mprove the moral condition of the Negroes; they provide them with good food, good clothing, and other comforts; they encourage a spirit of industry amongst them, by dividing them into classes, and encouraging the most deserving; they endeavour to teach them the difference between right and wrong, by means of religion and instruction in worship; they cause their children to be brought up in the mechanical arts.<sup>160</sup>

These claims were in many ways unremarkable in that they were simple reassertions of the ameliorationist representations discussed in sections one and two. What is notable is that many of the privileges extended to the slave population, such as gardens and livestock, were motivated out of a desire for more efficient work. When proposing such measures the board directly referenced how they hoped to follow the example of 'the best managed estates in the West Indies'.<sup>161</sup> References to such inspirations were of course absent from company publications, though the West Indies did provide one useful comparison point for the SJDR as the gradual emancipation was held up as a positive example to follow.<sup>162</sup> The claims the SJDR made about its slave workforce should be read in light of their need to maintain confidence in the company's long-term profitability. Even this caution against immediate emancipation can be read as assuring shareholders that the company labour force would remain intact.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>161</sup> G. D. Keogh to C. Herring Jr., 6 Nov 1844, SJDR, BLUT: LB4.

<sup>162</sup> 'SJDR Circular', 1850, SJDR, BLUT: Box 134/F1, p. 53.

Thomas Walker's inquiry and the general meetings are most usefully understood as attempts by the board to limit criticism. Company publications were obviously intended to reassure shareholders, but the problem of negative press coverage remained. One potential solution to this problem was recourse to law. After William Routh's aired his public spat with the board the mortality crisis began to garner wider publicity including articles in the *Liverpool Mercury* and *The Observer*. The latter called for 'the powers of the Government and the machinery of the law' to take action against the company and accused the directors of 'base hypocrisy'.<sup>163</sup> The directors appeared to have bristled at these accusations and following an unfruitful correspondence with the paper's editor they moved towards legal action. The SJDR counsel recommended bringing a libel suit against *The Observer* to tackle the 'calumnious assertions' made against the company.<sup>164</sup> Nineteenth-century libel laws were famously draconian. Taylor notes those found guilty of libel could face up to two years imprisonment.<sup>165</sup> The SJDR's response to the mortality crisis then combined a performance of openness for shareholders and an attempt to silence external critics.

The mortality crisis was a challenge that the directors of the SJDR effectively met. Although abolitionist critiques continued throughout 1850 coverage in the financial press fizzled out. William Routh appears to have left the company following his clash with the board, silencing the company's major internal critic. Thomas Walker having provided the valuable service of reassuring shareholders, would return to Morro Velho and be appointed superintendent in 1855.<sup>166</sup> In the decades that followed a decreasing amount of attention was paid within the company's annual reports to the company's slave population. From the 1850s onwards discussion was increasingly relegated to appendices and medical statistics. This was consistent with a shift to greater secrecy at

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<sup>163</sup> *The Observer*, 21 Oct 1849.

<sup>164</sup> 'Minute Book No. 2', 9 Nov 1849, SJDR, BLUT.

<sup>165</sup> Taylor, 'Privacy, Publicity, and Reputation', p. 693.

<sup>166</sup> SJDR, AR 1855, SJDR, BLUT: p. 55.

general meetings of joint-stock companies.<sup>167</sup> For many companies this was a result of not wanting to risk losing competitive advantage and the marginalisation of the company's slaves from the 1850s onwards perhaps indicated an awareness of the damage the issue could cause the company.

Life and work at Morro Velho were a key point of contention throughout the mortality crisis. Childs has used the texts generated in the controversy, in conjunction with other accounts, to paint a compelling picture of the slave experience at the mine. Here I have contextualised this picture by demonstrating that company accounts of life at the mine were prompted not by abolitionists, but by shareholders and potential investors. As such they should be read as attempts to maintain and inspire economic confidence in the company's directors. At the same time I have explored how the mortality crisis revealed an intriguing brand of anti-slavery critique where investors focused on slavery as a means of giving their anxieties over company management a moral edge.

### Conclusion

The above case studies in sections two and three, could not have occurred without the context of a Britain culturally and politically committed to anti-slavery. However, none of these cases saw the impetus come solely from abolitionists. Instead anti-slavery language and ideas could be utilised by other actors to complement non-humanitarian priorities. This chapter in particular has focused on how the various participants in the joint-stock economy, whether they be shareholders, directors or the press utilised slavery. Debates over the legitimacy of slave-ownership or the treatment of slaves often cloaked anxieties over company management and future profitability. The blending of economic and moral concerns within debates over corporate slave-ownership provides further evidence of the historically contingent nature of economic decisions. Company directors had to establish their reputation as reliable managers of

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<sup>167</sup> Freeman, Pearson, Taylor, *Shareholder Democracies*, p. 239.

other people's investments and this required constant demonstration that they were knowledgeable about what was happening at the mines. Anti-slavery critiques could and did translate into questions about the economic competency of those in charge. These concerns were often expressed in spatialised terms as both shareholders and the financial press identified the difficulty of acquiring accurate information about mining overseas.

In the case of the SJDR and IBMA the ability to answer questions over slavery was part and parcel of the broader process of legitimising the companies. This may also go some way to explaining the seemingly uneven nature of abolitionist attention. This can be best demonstrated by a brief consideration of Cuban copper mines. The presence of British-owned mines in Cuba was well known to abolitionists and had been addressed within David Turnbull's *Travels in the West*, which recounted a visit to a copper mine operated by British vice-consul John Hardy Jr.<sup>168</sup> This mine located at El Cobre belonged to the Company of Proprietors of the Royal Copper Mines of Cobre, which had been founded by Hardy in 1830 and floated on the London stock exchange in 1835. As Chris Evans notes the Cobre Company offered 12,000 shares on the stock exchange more than half of which were owned by Charles Pascoe Grenfell.<sup>169</sup> In 1836 another copper company, the Royal Santiago Mining Company, was formed with Isaac Goldsmid of the IBMA listed among the company directors. Both companies relied upon large unfree workforces to function. There were nearly 500 enslaved workers at El Cobre and an 1841 census counted 249 slaves at the Royal Santiago mine.<sup>170</sup> As such both mines were comparable in size to the IBMA and SJDR.

Despite the fact that these companies were contemporaries of the Brazilian gold mining ventures they failed to attract the same amount of anti-slavery scrutiny. Sadly, only a single annual report is extant for the Cobre Company and the Royal Santiago has

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<sup>168</sup> Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, p. 5-16.

<sup>169</sup> C. Evans, 'El Cobre', pp. 114-116.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 122-3.



left even less evidence behind. Therefore it is difficult to gauge how either company discussed their unfree workforce with shareholders.<sup>171</sup> However, reports of company meetings within the *Mining Journal* do not appear to indicate that slavery was a regular discussion. The greatest scrutiny of these mining ventures appears to have come from the Foreign Office and John Hardy jr. was forced to explain his use of slave labour to Palmerston in 1836. His justification, like many other slave-owners, rested upon the paucity of free labour within the region and the fact that slaves acquired through debt repayments rather than the slave trade.<sup>172</sup> Unlike the IBMA or SJDR Cuban companies appeared to lack shareholders willing to utilise a language of anti-slavery in pursuit of company reform. As Evans pointed out the Cobre Company rather than protesting the 1843 Act registered the slaves under the name of a Cuban employee before “renting” them back, as such they were not required to publicly legitimise slave-ownership to the same degree.<sup>173</sup>

The Cuban mines, as well as other Brazilian ventures, appear to have lacked shareholders, or other parties, willing to use anti-slavery as a means to air their discontent. The emancipation and mortality crises faced by these companies then demonstrate how anti-slavery was reconfigured by joint-stock politics. Slave labour became more a question of profit and directorial accountability than of morality. Defences of slavery shifted as well. The IBMA and SJDR justified their reliance on slave labour through a rhetoric that echoed ameliorationist writings of the pre-emancipation period. Both critiques and defences of slave labour in this context ultimately revolved around issues of the joint-stock economy such as efficiency, accountability, and publicity. By viewing the controversies surrounding the IBMA and SJDR through the lens of joint-stock politics I have complicated the traditional view of these companies’ relationship to the metropole. The IBMA and SJDR were less forced to recognise

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<sup>171</sup> *Royal Copper Mines of Cobre Association*, Annual Reports, British Library, 1890.e.1.105.

<sup>172</sup> John Hardy Jr. to Palmerston, 27 Dec 1836, TNA: FO 84-201; Evans, ‘El Cobre’, p. 122.

<sup>173</sup> Evans, ‘El Cobre’, p. 124.

abolitionist pressure than held to account by stakeholders who expressed economic concerns through a language of anti-slavery. As long as these concerns could be met then reliance on bonded labour, and therefore British slave-ownership, could be legitimised in anti-slavery Britain.

## Conclusion

British involvement in transatlantic slavery can only be understood as definitively ceasing with, as Thomas Clarkson had called for at the 1840 Convention, ‘extirpation of slavery from the *whole* [or in this case the Atlantic] *world*.’<sup>1</sup> Chattel slavery in the Americas ended with the Brazilian emancipation of 1888, at which point the most prominent British slave-owner in that country, the St. John d’El Rey Mining Company, successfully transitioned to use of a free labour workforce.<sup>2</sup> That British slave-ownership survived this long, far outlasting the initial outrage over British complicity in the 1840s, is a testament to the success of capitalists in reconciling profits from the transatlantic slave system and anti-slavery ideology. In 1840 abolitionists appeared unanimous in their belief that publicity and moral suasion would provide a solution to the problem of British involvement in slavery. As this thesis has demonstrated this proved to be far from the case. In this conclusion, I comprehensively analyse how British capitalists consistently rebuffed critiques and defended their right to deal with slave traders or own other human beings. In doing so I stress the continuities in both rhetoric and ideas from the earlier struggle over slavery in the British Caribbean. Finally, I briefly discuss an early twentieth century controversy surrounding the British firm Cadbury Brothers and cocoa production in the Portuguese colony of São Tomé and Príncipe. I highlight further continuities in how the relationship between British capital and unfree labour was understood, but also demonstrate a key shift in the geographic understanding of slavery. I argue that this thesis, then, complicates our understanding of Victorian Britain as an anti-slavery nation.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the slave systems of the new world dismantled. A discussion of the how the transatlantic slave trade and various internal slaveries of the Americas ended also serves as a recap of how the various iterations of

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<sup>1</sup> BFASS, *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention*, p. 3. [Italics in original]

<sup>2</sup> Marshall Eakin has argued a working-class community emerged at the mine in the decades after slavery. Eakin, *British Enterprise*, pp. 212-218.

the problem of anti-slavery were resolved. For example my first chapter surveyed the historiography surrounding British consumption of slave produce specifically sugar, copper, and cotton. That chapter demonstrated the essentially heterogeneous character of anti-slavery rhetoric and action in Britain, including that the purchase and consumption of slave products could be reconciled with a professed opposition to slavery. Much of the debate over these commodities revolved around whether the British state, consumers, or capitalists should be held to moral account. The adoption of free trade and continued commitment to naval suppression equated to a consensus that the British state should police the slave trade, but not the internal slaveries of other societies. Consumers were viewed as exercising personal choice that had little effect on the national character. Capitalists might be conceived as bound to slave produce until the emergence of viable “free” labour alternatives. This process often corresponded to the decline of slave labour in the producer society, for example the disruption to Southern cotton production that resulted from the American Civil War..

The role of British capitalists in supplying slave traders came under greater scrutiny than their purchase of slave produced goods. This was, as argued in my second chapter, due to both government officials and abolitionists conceptualising economic ties to slave traders as practically undermining the British state’s commitment to ending the slave trade. The converging movements of British merchants, foreign slave traders, and the Royal Navy provided the material basis for a debate over the legitimacy of Britain’s West African commerce. Whilst critics of merchants attempted to demarcate certain sections of the West African littoral as off limits men like Matthew Forster maintained that their commercial activity was the best weapon against the slave trade. The problem of anti-slavery in this context was a consequence of the centrality of British manufactures to both the slave and palm oil trades, which relied on the same African brokers. In the short term West Africa merchants defended their commercial activity despite Colonial Office scepticism. In the long term this problem would be solved as

technological advances, specifically steam power, saw older firms supplanted by new companies less tainted by links to the era of the legal slave trade.<sup>3</sup>

Debates over British manufactures were part of a wider struggle to define legitimate commerce in the post-abolition era. As discussed in my third chapter, the idea of legitimacy and legality of British commercial activity in Cuba, Brazil, and West Africa was far from a given. The role of British capital was in fact highly ambivalent. It could be cast as consistent with, or contrary to, the campaign against the slave trade. Various merchants operating across these societies succeeded in limiting their personal responsibility for links to slave traders, often by playing on the assumption that these links were inevitable. Secondly, they maintained that interference with their economic activity was irrational. This argument rested upon the equation of individual merchants' prosperity with the success of Britain as a whole. Merchants were able to construct a favourable interpretation of what counted as legitimate commerce. From this perspective British capital's role in the slave trade became unproblematic, particularly as the British state's focus switched to gaining compliance in abolition from the Cuban and Brazilian governments.

The Brazilian trade ended following a British naval blockade of Rio, this approach to suppression saw the government substitute moralising for militancy and concerns over British complicity somewhat swept aside. In Cuba the slave trade would continue well into the 1860s and the final decade saw huge increases in the number of enslaved Africans brought to the country. British capital certainly played a role in this process. It seems very likely that British merchants continued to supply credit and manufactures, but British capital also lay behind technological advances such as steamships that allowed Cuban vessels to outstrip the suppression squadron.<sup>4</sup> At least some Britons were profiting from the Cuban traffic until a combination of increased naval

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, p. 115, pp. 128-150.

<sup>4</sup> Murray, *Odious Commerce*, p. 298.

suppression, a diplomatic climate created by the American Civil war, and political instability within the island saw the illicit trade die down by 1867.

For British slave-owners involvement with slavery ended through financial failure or emancipation. As discussed in chapter four British capital played a role in several of the New World emancipations. Unsurprisingly, most British slave-owners favoured a compensated emancipation followed by a period of apprenticeship, as had been the case in the British West Indies. Slave-owners based both in Britain and overseas played a role in securing this form of emancipation in the Dutch context when a compensation settlement was finally agreed in 1863.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Britons were among those slave-owners who violently re-imposed bondage, in the form of apprenticeship, on the former St. Croix slaves who had seized their freedom in 1848. This recognition of property rights in man combined with an attempt to bind black labourers to their former masters can be partially understood as a legacy of British Emancipation. These arguments for compensation can be read alongside a wider effort from different types of British slave-owners to try and legitimise their slave property in response to Brougham's 1843 Act. Key to this process was a concerted effort to reposition slave-ownership as ownership of land, or other forms of property which unfortunately happened to have enslaved people attached to them. Various British slave-owners were able to win a begrudging acceptance of their extant slave property, whilst dismissing any suggestion of links to the slave trade.

British banks who mortgaged slave property did not win as clear a recognition of their property rights as other slave-owners. This is despite the key role played by Barings Bank in organising parliamentary opposition to Brougham's Bill. Their response to doubts over the legality of slave mortgages was to avoid publicity of their slave-ownership. Whilst Barings did sell off at least one of the plantations they mortgaged it

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<sup>5</sup> For Dutch emancipation see C. Goslinga, *The Dutch*, pp. 387-313.

is not inconceivable that they and other Britons involved in Cuban slavery maintained their property until the emancipation legislation of 1884. The 'gradual, tortuous process' of ending slavery in Cuba demonstrates both the economic vitality and ideological power of slave-owning interests well into the late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Cuban slavery finally ended amidst republican resistance to Spanish rule and political upheaval with the final emancipation legislation passed in 1884.<sup>7</sup>

My final chapter explored British investment in the last New World slave economy. My analysis of the internal politics of the St. John d'El Rey Mining Company and Imperial Brazilian Mining Association demonstrated that debates over the problem of anti-slavery were not limited to the role of the British state, but might also take place within companies themselves. Shareholders and the financial press gave expression to a form of anti-slavery that mingled with the anxieties of the nascent joint-stock economy. This further attests to the heterogeneous nature of British anti-slavery sentiment. Whilst both companies succeeded in legitimising their reliance on slave labour to an audience of metropolitan investors it was a Brazilian audience who proved most troubling to the SJDR. In 1879 Joaquim Nabuco made explicit use of the company's British ownership as a means of launching a serious political abolitionism within Brazil. The company's foreign ownership, as well as its involvement in mining rather than the coffee production, allowed for an abolitionist critique that would not be opposed by other Brazilian slave-owners. Nabuco's attack on the SJDR was the first step in securing the wider political isolation of Brazilian slave-owners that would conclude with the Golden Law of 1888.<sup>8</sup> From this point forward anti-slavery would no longer be a problem that British capitalists in the Americas would have to contend with.

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<sup>6</sup> C. Nowara-Schmidt, *Freedom and Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba*, pp. 154-178.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of Brazilian abolition see R. E. Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850-1888* (Malabar: Krieger, 1993).

British involvement with transatlantic slavery was both diverse and resilient. Despite the variety of ways in which British capital and slavery were entangled I believe that three interconnected themes emerge from the attempts to legitimise these economic connections. Firstly, attempts to regulate economic activity or negate property rights relating to slavery were represented as economically irrational. Secondly, British capitalists rejected moral responsibility for slavery whilst representing themselves as morally superior to both enslaved people and foreign slave-owners. Finally, these arguments can be understood within a longer tradition of rationalising profiting from coerced labour and associated practices. Specifically, expressions of British anti-slavery ideology after 1833 echoed many of the assumptions of slavery apologists in the earlier period. I will now expand upon these three themes and what they reveal about the relationship between capitalism and anti-slavery.

The problem of anti-slavery, as proposed in my introduction, can be understood as having to make sense of economic connections to slave societies in light of an ideological opposition to human bondage. The majority of capitalists discussed in this thesis argued that reliance on slave labour or dealing with slave traders was inevitable. This defence of necessity was not meant to win over hard-line abolitionists like Richard Madden or David Turnbull. Instead it was intended to convince the Victorian state, which through guaranteeing property was 'was imbricated through all economic relationships.'<sup>9</sup> In doing so West African merchants, Brazilian mining company directors, and Caribbean plantation owners appeared to maintain that their involvement with transatlantic slavery was the result of amoral market relations. However, these claims, which depicted critics as economically irrational also attempted to align sectional interests with that of the nation as a whole. This was the logic that lay behind Pedro Zulueta's claims that his arrest threatened all British commerce, or the

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<sup>9</sup> P. Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 17.



similar claims made by partners in Barings. Whilst these arguments were pitched in terms of property rights or economic rationality they clearly rested upon cultural assumptions related to Britain's anti-slavery self-image.

When merchants, bankers, and, company directors asserted their economic behaviour was rational, or even inevitable, they also made both implicit and explicit moral claims. As I have demonstrated throughout these moral-political claims often related to how the economic activity of British subjects across a number of different sites advanced the cause of anti-slavery and civilization. Such a perspective required British capitalists to define themselves against a series of foreign others. One might compare this process to Jean-Paul Sartre's comment that European colonialism rested upon "creating slaves and monsters."<sup>10</sup> British capitalists projected an image of various foreign slave traders, slave-owners, and slaves who were to different degrees deficient in civilization. Of course many Brazilian slave-owners or Cuban slave traders were indeed monstrous. Yet, whether they were any more monstrous than their British counterparts is debatable. This imagined geography allowed British subjects to represent capitalism's relationship with slavery as at once inevitable, but also working towards a positive end. These assumptions underpinned discussion of property rights or economic rationality.

Both themes discussed above should be considered within the longer tradition of British debates around slavery. Throughout this thesis I have indicated continuities in rhetoric and practices that had been arraigned against both British abolition and emancipation. As Swaminathan has argued, debates over the slave trade had also been a contest over British identity, and this process continued. Prior to 1807, Britons involved in transatlantic slavery had positioned themselves as 'commercially savvy, "white" Briton poised to outstrip other European powers in trade.'<sup>11</sup> This representation was maintained alongside a belief that British capitalists, particularly

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 14, fn. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, p. 129.

those in West Africa, acted as agents of civilization. Many of the arguments that had previously been aired in defence of transatlantic slavery were redeployed as forms of anti-slavery. That the directors of the IBMA could position themselves as opponents of slavery with any degree of legitimacy speaks to the heterogeneity of anti-slavery as an ideology. Whilst the BFASS or government officials contested these claims it is clear that anti-slavery was not a normative concept. Instead measures taken to oppose slavery or the slave trade often boiled down to a compromise between the divergent perspectives of abolitionists, capitalists, and government.

The legacy of the West Indian Emancipation settlement loomed large over many of the case studies discussed within this thesis. Its simultaneous moral condemnation of slavery with the recognition of property rights re-occurred in a number of different contexts. Most prominently the Dutch and Danish West Indies were British slave-owners actively campaigned for a gradualist compensated emancipation. Eric Hobsbawm has argued that 'progress' was the central idea of the age of capital describing the social and economic upheavals of the period as the 'drama of progress'.<sup>12</sup> However, many Victorians hoped that progress would not be so dramatic. West Indian emancipation had a broader legacy as it conformed to a widespread belief within Britain in a stadial model of historical development.<sup>13</sup> Such a perspective allowed the end of slavery or the slave trade to be conceptualised as a point in the future, desirable but not yet achievable. British commerce would eventually put down the slave trade. A British slave-owner would bestow freedom upon the rising generation. This view of historical development was seen by many as consistent with opposition to slavery. As we have seen in the case of the SJDR this future remained out of reach for many slaves until the question of freedom was taken out of the company's hands. As David Brion

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<sup>12</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, p. 189; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 85-88.

Davis has noted, certain forms of “progress” could, and did, prove an obstacle to emancipation.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, it is worth considering what happened once the various New World abolitions and emancipations provided a definitive solution for the problem of anti-slavery. After 1888, no British capital could find its way into the transatlantic slave system, but new entanglements emerged. Abolitionists within Britain had become increasingly focused on East Africa from the late 1860s. Much of this attention was garnered through the missionary work and publicity efforts of David Livingstone, who argued that the slave trade between Zanzibar and Arab states needed to be tackled just as the European slave trade had been.<sup>15</sup> Following Livingstone’s death his supporters pressured a reluctant Liberal government into taking naval action against the Zanzibar slave trade.<sup>16</sup> Suppression in Zanzibar proved a precursor to an increasing entanglement between anti-slavery and imperial expansion in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The commercial motivation for much imperial expansion into Central and East Africa was grounded in a belief that ending slavery would ultimately result in material and moral benefits. Richard Madden and Matthew Forster had shared this same assumption of the ends of opposing slavery, even if they disagreed over the means. The 1880s at least witnessed relatively broad support for a more militaristic and explicitly imperial anti-slavery, with even the previously pacifistic BFASS seeing force as a viable option.<sup>17</sup> Within this framework British businesses were most likely to be viewed as promoting anti-slavery, even as they facilitated violence against various African populations.

These imperial developments set the stage for a renewed anti-slavery debate over the role of British capital. The early twentieth century would see anti-slavery attention

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<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, p. 154.

<sup>15</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, pp. 261-264.

<sup>16</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 148-154.

<sup>17</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 265.

turn towards what Kevin Grant has called the 'new slaveries of European imperialism in Africa'.<sup>18</sup> During the mid to late nineteenth century European powers operating in Africa had followed a similar approach to the British government in technically outlawing slavery in colonial possessions but de facto maintaining the various forms of bonded labour within those societies.<sup>19</sup> The maintenance of older forms of slavery and coerced labour, under euphemistic terms, had during the era of transatlantic slavery allowed these practices to escape sustained critique from abolitionists or even stand in contrast to the particular evils of new-world bondage. The slaveries within Britain's African protectorates were dynamic institutions and African slave-owners often protested when they feared colonial interference.<sup>20</sup> At the same time British officials and capitalist "men on the spot" in Egypt, Sudan, and Uganda did face abolitionist critique for use of slaves or coerced labour in the 1870s and early 1880s. Their response was to suggest that such a reliance on slavery was a temporary measure in line with advancing civilization.<sup>21</sup> These arguments almost certainly benefited from the understanding of transatlantic slavery as a peculiarly immoral form of labour exploitation.

The carving up of African territories by European powers at the Berlin (1884-85) and Brussels (1889-90) conferences had been predicated in part on a commitment to end slavery and bring so-called civilization to Africa. The 1890s saw missionary societies feed news of labour abuses to the BFASS and the Aborigines Protection Society, especially with regard to rubber production in the Congo Free State. The turn of the century saw the emergence of a nationwide movement, the Congo Reform Association, attacking Belgian labour abuses as akin to those committed during the era of

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<sup>18</sup> K. Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Miers, 'Slavery to Freedom', pp. 253-257.

<sup>21</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 162-174.

transatlantic slavery.<sup>22</sup> This campaign can be attributed to a late Victorian humanitarianism, that like anti-slavery, that was heterogeneous in nature. Grant has argued that this humanitarianism was characterised by different ideological strands, specifically an older tradition of evangelicalism, represented by missionaries, and a newer human rights based discourse grounded in ideas of property and cultural relativism.<sup>23</sup> This particular strand of humanitarianism bears a striking resemblance to the claims made by Matthew Forster in defence of his West African commerce.

Within this context, British capital's global reach continued to raise moral quandaries. From around 1902 to the beginning of the First World War a controversy unfolded that echoed many of those discussed in this dissertation. Once again, a number of British firms who placed great stock in their metropolitan respectability stood accused of profiting from the exploitation of black bodies overseas. Three chocolate companies, Cadburys, Rowntree, and Fry, appeared to be both reliant on unfree labour and complicit in the transportation of Africans.<sup>24</sup> Despite these echoes of previous controversies there were two key differences. Firstly, location as the labourers involved found themselves transported within Africa, from the Portuguese colony of Angola to the cocoa plantations of the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe. Secondly, the labourers involved were technically not slaves, rather they were *serviçaes*; a term that roughly translated as contract labourer.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as one British observer noted, "if this is not slavery, I know of no word in the English language which currently characterizes it."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1999); Grant, *Civilised Savagery*, pp. 39-78.

<sup>23</sup> Grant, *Civilised Savagery*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>24</sup> L. J. Satre, *Chocolate on Trial: Slavery, Politics, and the Ethics of Business* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Satre, *Chocolate on Trial*, pp. 41-43; see also G. Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists in Southern Angola, 1840-1926* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Burt quoted in Satre, *Chocolate on Trial*, p. 73.

The ability of Britons to move past a strict binary of slave/free labour spoke to shifts in political and imagined geographies. After 1888 the British Empire could not be perceived as the only area definitively free of chattel slavery. However, the controversy echoed many of those of the earlier period. Debate raged both privately and in the press over the correct response to the revelations of São Tomé slavery. The Aborigines Protection Society argued for boycott and a moral example. Others pressured a reluctant Foreign Office to intervene. William Cadbury, purchasing agent for his family firm, argued for a diplomatic approach whilst continuing to purchase cocoa. As ever British opinion was heterogeneous and there was much dispute over how bad labour conditions in the Portuguese islands actually were. The final resolution, which saw Cadburys switch production to the British colony of the Gold Coast and win a libel suit against press critics, echoes the case studies of this thesis. Often what was most important was protecting the reputation of British firms or the British state, securing material benefits for enslaved Africans fell by the way side.<sup>27</sup> All sides in this debate explicitly positioned themselves as acting within Britain's tradition of anti-slavery, but as I have shown this tradition contained a great deal of slavery apologism.

At first glance the involvement of British subjects in transatlantic slavery seems both obvious and inevitable. Such a conclusion in many ways echoes the claims of those British subjects who successfully defended their right to profit from the enslavement of other human beings. This thesis has begun to reassemble the ways in which Britons profited from slavery, and more importantly how they justified it. A diverse collection of British capitalists succeeded in distancing themselves from the slave trade or reimagining their slave-ownership as a means of spreading so-called civilization. By revealing the practices, rhetoric, and people involved in this process I have hopefully laid the foundation for future research that will deepen our understanding of Victorian Britain's economic and ideological relationship to slavery.

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<sup>27</sup> Satre, *Chocolate on Trial*, pp. 73-98; pp. 104-178.

A central contention of this thesis is that the Victorian economy was not merely an impersonal market place, but also a site of cultural and moral debate. Anti-slavery provides a particularly fruitful entry point into these debates as it allowed many of the assumptions that underpinned the British economy to be questioned. Victorians were aware that opposition to slavery had previously formed the basis for the British state negating property rights and prohibiting the slave trade. At the same time they were aware that success within the nineteenth-century economy rested on the ability to forge trust relationships, maintain a good reputations, and that most important of source of social capital "character." Within this context both the economic actions of individuals and whole categories of economic activity, for example investing in joint-stock companies, were open to being moralised. It was on this basis that abolitionists believed that simply revealing involvement in transatlantic slavery would expose capitalists to moral condemnation and even prosecution. Across this thesis I have demonstrated that the absence of these was due neither to a weakness of anti-slavery nor the inexorable logic of the market. Rather, those invested in slavery successfully constructed an alternative account of the Atlantic economy to that proposed by abolitionists or government critics.

This thesis has revealed how the entanglement of physical and imagined geographies provided an answer to the problem of anti-slavery for British capitalists. Debates over the role of British capital in transatlantic slavery were physically removed from actual sites where Britons owned slaves or dealt with slave traders. As such material geographies aided British capitalists in their ability to limit the flow of information back to the metropole. This included obscuring the trust relationships through which commerce functioned or the elision of slaves into landed property. When abolitionists did succeed in identifying British complicity merchants, bankers, and company directors sought to establish their legitimacy through correspondence, company reports, and the press. In positioning themselves as possessing authentic knowledge

about the different slave societies of the Atlantic world these capitalists relied upon an imagined geography that conceptualised various slave societies as occupying different positions in a hierarchy of civilization. This imagined geography then justified the material geography of Atlantic world capitalism by securing government sanction or the support of investors for the deployment of capital within slave societies.

Moral and cultural ideas cannot be easily separated from economic reasoning. British capitalists constantly positioned themselves as economic rationalists in opposition to critics who did not understand the reality of the Atlantic economy. This was true of both British merchants hoping to avoid regulation in West Africa and joint-stock directors arguing that they were taking appropriate care of their enslaved workforce. Always implicit in these arguments was the assumption that British commerce or mining ventures would eventually benefit both Britons and the societies where capital was being deployed. By adopting a non-normative definition of both morality and anti-slavery this thesis has demonstrated the wide variety of economic activities that could be defended as both moral and working towards the end of transatlantic slavery. It has also stressed that the knowledge upon which appeals to economic rationality was based depended on the ability of historical actors to present themselves as trustworthy informants. Company directors, plantation owners, and merchants generally had enough social capital to win the war of representation over the nature of the Atlantic economy. They imagined a world in which certain moral expectations must be suspended to allow the movement of British goods, capital, and people.

The problem of anti-slavery was the question of whether it was possible to operate morally in an Atlantic economy built upon chattel slavery. For some, particularly the abolitionists of BFASS, the answer to this question was to cut off connections to slavery. But few Victorians dealt in such moral absolutes. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis capitalists argued time and again that their economic activity was both



moral and economically rational. This does not suggest that overseas British slave-ownership or complicity in the supplying of the slave trade were inevitable, but that they could be reconciled with an opposition to slavery. They were able to do so in part because the British Empire, as a political and geographic unit, was considered to be free of slavery. Whilst connections to slave economies had the potential to disrupt this image British capitalists succeeded in positioning themselves as opponents to slavery and champions of civilization. As such the idea of Victorian Britain as an anti-slavery nation should not be dismissed; instead we must acknowledge how those involved in transatlantic slavery helped shape the way anti-slavery was practiced, expressed, and curtailed.

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