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**Defending the Slave Trade and Slavery in Britain in the Era of  
Abolition, 1783-1833**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that I composed this thesis and that this work is my own. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Paula Dumas

2012

## **Abstract**

This study seeks to explore the nature and activities of the anti-abolitionists in the era of British abolition. There were Britons who actively opposed the idea of abolishing the slave trade and West Indian slavery. They published works promoting and defending the trade and the institution of slavery. They challenged abolitionist assertions and claims about life in the colonies and the nature of the slaves and attacked the sentimental nature of abolitionist rhetoric. Proslavery MPs argued in Parliament for the maintenance of slavery and the slave trade. Members of the West Indian interest formed committees to produce their own propaganda and petitions. They also worked with Parliament to develop strategies to ameliorate slavery and end British slaveholding, whilst securing several more years of plantation labour and financial compensation for slaveholders. Politicians, writers, members of the West Indian interest, and their supporters actively fought to maintain colonial slavery and the prosperity of Britain and the colonies.

A wide range of sources has been employed to reveal the true nature of the proslavery arguments advanced in Britain in the era of abolition. These include committee minutes, petitions, pamphlets, reviews, manuals, travel writing, scientific studies, political prints, portraits, poetry and song, plays, and the records of every parliamentary debate on slavery, the slave trade, and the West Indian colonies. Specific proslavery and anti-abolitionist arguments have been identified and analysed using these sources, with some commentary on how the setting or genre potentially impacted on the argument being presented. This analysis reveals that economic, racial, legal, historical, strategic, religious, moral, and humanitarian arguments were all used to counter the growing popularity of abolition and emancipation. Proslavery rhetoric in Parliament is also analysed, revealing an active proslavery side committed to fighting abolition. Overall, this study contributes to our current understanding of the timing, nature, and reception of British abolition in Britain by showing that the process was influenced by a serious debate.

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## Introduction

‘The sugar colonies themselves, sunk into social and economic stagnation, were viewed with hostile eyes and their value to the home land was commonly questioned. ... Had abolition never been instituted, had the regime of forced labour never come to an end, the proprietors there must still inevitably have suffered the general ruin which engulfed them.’

Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833*, 1928<sup>1</sup>

‘They [West Indians] had the advantages of prestige, custom, their great contributions to British economy in the past, and a strongly entrenched position. We can see today that they were doomed.... They put up a desperate fight... blind to all considerations and consequences except the maintenance of their diseased system.’

Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 1944<sup>2</sup>

‘As the pro-slavery interest began to realise that the prevention of emancipation was a lost cause, the tactics switched to that of delay. It was necessary for their interests to spin out the continuation of slavery using the argument of gradual improvement.’

Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838*, 2006<sup>3</sup>

The study of British abolition has benefited from decades of scholarly historical study. Historians have sought out reasons why Britain abolished the slave trade and slavery and why abolition took place when it did. They have looked at the individual abolitionists, their backgrounds, religious affiliations, activities, organisations, transatlantic connections, and methods. But British abolitionism was not a constant movement forward, nor was abolition a universal goal amongst all Britons. It took thirty years of parliamentary discussion for Britain’s participation in the slave trade to be abolished and another thirty to witness the end of slavery and apprenticeship in her West Indian colonies. So what was going on? Did some Britons actively oppose abolition? If so, how did they go about delaying abolition and protecting Britain’s exploitation of slaves?

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the nature and activities of the anti-abolitionists who have often been hidden, cast aside, or overlooked in the familiar story of British abolition. Men and women in Britain did oppose the idea of

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<sup>1</sup> Lowell Joseph Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833* (1928. Reprint, New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1963), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944. Reprint, London: Lowe and Brydon Ltd., 1964), 135.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 173.

abolition. They published works promoting and defending the trade and the institution of slavery. They challenged abolitionist assertions and claims about life in the colonies and the nature of the slaves and attacked the sentimental nature of abolitionist rhetoric. Proslavery MPs convincingly argued in Parliament for the maintenance of slavery and the slave trade. Members of the West Indian interest formed committees to produce their own propaganda and petitions. Last, but certainly not least, they worked with Parliament to develop strategies to ameliorate slavery and end British slaveholding while securing several more years of plantation labour and financial compensation for slaveholders. Far from being passive, doomed onlookers at the sidelines of British abolition, politicians, writers, members of the West Indian interest, and their supporters actively fought to maintain colonial slavery and the prosperity of the colonies and Britain. It is the nature of the public support and the fight for slavery that this study will examine.

It is first necessary to define a few of the important terms employed throughout this study. Definitions of the word ‘proslavery’ vary in their usage and meaning. In his foundational study of American proslavery, Larry E. Tise defined proslavery as ‘favoring the continuance of the institution of Negro slavery, or opposed to interference with it’.<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, the term ‘proslavery’ refers to arguments and individuals who promoted the institution of slavery as beneficial for them, the colonies, and Britain’s national interest. This term is contrasted with ‘anti-abolition’ and ‘anti-abolitionist’, both of which are used in the context of the pre-1808 debates to refer to people and arguments against a proposed abolition of the slave trade. Anti-abolition arguments in this period focused on defects in the abolitionist platform, emphasising the illegal, illogical, inhumane, or pro-French nature of their aims. Proslavery arguments, on the other hand, positively promoted slavery and the slave trade. This promotion of the institution of slavery receded quickly from the slavery debates following the abolition of the slave trade as politicians became increasingly reluctant to appear supportive of a demonised institution.<sup>5</sup>

The term anti-abolitionism requires further clarification because the meaning of the word changes both over time and depending on the context of its use, both in the contemporaneous debate and in this study. Whereas prior to the abolition of the slave trade the terms ‘anti-abolition’ and ‘anti-abolitionist’ can be generally defined

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<sup>4</sup> Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987), xv.

<sup>5</sup> See Section Seven of Chapter Five for discussion of post-1807 anti-abolitionist rhetoric.

as above in the context of the parliamentary debates, after 1807 the words become more changeable.<sup>6</sup> They can be used to describe an attack on an abolitionist and his position on slavery in Parliament, but they can also be used to describe a member or supporter of the West Indian interest who opposed immediate abolition. Some abolitionists, however, also opposed immediate abolition. This means that both ‘anti-abolitionists’ and abolitionists opposed immediate abolition and advocated gradual abolition and amelioration in the 1820s. It was their motivations, chosen arguments, and rhetoric that differed. In this study, ‘anti-abolitionists’ were members or supporters of the West Indian interest who opposed immediate abolition and supported proposals for amelioration, compensation, and apprenticeship out of self-interest. They wanted to secure financial compensation for themselves, their families, and their fellow West Indian colonists as well as to retain their labour force for as long as possible. Abolitionists, in contrast, often wished to proceed with caution in order to appease the colonists and secure a safe transition from slavery to freedom in as short a time as practically possible. This study will therefore employ the terms ‘anti-abolition’ and ‘anti-abolitionist’ to refer to members of the West Indian interest and their supporters who, throughout the slavery debates after 1807, repeatedly opposed the proposals of abolitionists, openly refuted abolitionists’ arguments and facts, defended themselves and the colonists from charges of inhumanity, cruelty, and backwardness, and opposed the immediate abolition of slavery.

The term ‘West Indian interest’ here refers to the individuals and organisations that had personal or business connections in Britain’s West Indian colonies. This includes plantation owners and workers, their family members, African merchants and traders, lawmakers and legal agents, ship-builders of transatlantic trading vessels, and dock owners.<sup>7</sup> The term amelioration also requires

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<sup>6</sup> Larry E. Tise has also defined the term ‘anti-abolitionist’ using a specific time period, which he states in the American case refers to individuals who opposed both slavery and abolition after 1831. See Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*, xvi. In her study of the rhetoric of the slavery debate to 1815, Srividhya Swaminathan limits her use of the term to describe the opposite of abolitionist writings. The narrower time frame of her study helps explain why the term is rarely used and not defined in her study of the slavery debate, as many of the politicians and writers she examines are clearly proslavery or anti-slavery/abolitionist in this period. See Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 40-2. Roger Anstey employs the term to refer to MPs who voted against abolition in Parliament in the 1790s and early 1800s. His study of British abolition ends in the year 1810 before the definition of anti-abolitionist necessarily becomes more complicated and nuanced. For example, see Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), 309.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff D. Bass, ‘An Efficient Humanitarianism: The British Slave Trade Debates, 1791-1792’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 75 (1989), 155.

some explanation. According to J.R. Ward, amelioration refers to concerns regarding raising the standards of slave maintenance that began in the second half of the eighteenth century and became a more defined method of plantation management from the 1790s onwards.<sup>8</sup> Ward notes that by 1823 amelioration meant different things to different people. Whereas the West Indian colonists viewed amelioration as a method to reinforce slavery and make the institution more efficient, humanitarians believed that amelioration could lead to a better social state with less racial hierarchy and subordination in the colonies.<sup>9</sup> In the end, amelioration resulted in the slaves having a better material wellbeing but this was not enough of a change to persuade Parliament that they should remain slaves indefinitely.<sup>10</sup> In this study the term ‘amelioration’ is used to describe and explain an effective method employed by the West Indian interest to delay and defeat calls for abolition as well as to demonstrate progress and the material benefits of slavery for the slaves in the colonies. It most frequently refers to the period after 1823 when Parliament formally asked the colonies to institute reforms on the plantations to benefit the slaves.

There are several aspects of this thesis that set it apart from existing studies of British slavery and abolition. This study focuses on the proslavery position rather than on the anti-slavery/abolitionist argument, failures, and successes. By concentrating solely on the proslavery position in this period this study is covering new territory and can inform existing works on abolition by exploring the range of challenges the abolitionists were facing. A comprehensive study of the West Indian interest and the proslavery position in Britain in the era of abolition has yet to be published. Perhaps historians have been cautious about investigating the proslavery case or embarrassed by the existence of Britain’s proslavery past, or maybe they continue to be influenced by the first generation of historians of British abolition who focused on the work of abolitionists. Douglas Hamilton has argued for the need to recognise Britain’s role in creating the abhorrent institution of the transatlantic slave trade in order to fully understand and be proud of her role in suppressing the

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<sup>8</sup> J.R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (1988. Reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 2-7. Robert E. Luster has suggested that amelioration developed out of Enlightenment philosophy and the Evangelical movement and was the principle around which many aspects of British politics revolved in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See Robert E. Luster, *The Amelioration of the Slaves in the British Empire, 1790-1833* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), Ch. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration*, 276.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

trade.<sup>11</sup> This study seeks to tell the proslavery and pro-slave trade perspective of the story of abolition that it might better inform the story of the great victory of abolition. The proslavery side advanced powerful, influential arguments to challenge abolition and defend slave trading and owning; they affected the timing and nature of abolition and emancipation and their history deserves to be studied and told. This work is an attempt to correct this imbalance. This study also covers the entire era of British abolition, 1783-1833, instead of only examining the debate over the abolition of the slave trade, the abolition of slavery, or the end of apprenticeship and the consequences of emancipation and compensation. This allows for the analysis of proslavery arguments and rhetoric over time and a discussion of how the abolition of the slave trade affected the fight to maintain slavery in the colonies.<sup>12</sup> This study is therefore able to demonstrate that the power of the anti-abolitionists diminished between 1783 and 1833. While they did not experience a steady decline and in fact at times were able to halt or reverse the abolitionists' momentum, the West Indian interest in Parliament did go from a position of great wealth, strength, and influence in the early 1780s to one of desperation, capitulation, and division in the 1830s.<sup>13</sup> Britain remains the geographical focus of this study which relies on published works rather than private records, memoirs, and diaries. By looking at public defences of the slave trade and slavery in Britain it is possible to understand better the political debate over slave trading and slave holding in Westminster, where the critical decisions were made. Finally, this study remains intentionally analytical regarding proslavery works, argument, and rhetoric in an attempt to avoid placing judgement upon the men whose work and opinions are analysed below.

This thesis can be situated within several areas of historical study. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that of British abolition. The history and timing of Britain's abolition of the slave trade and slavery have been heavily documented over a period of approximately two hundred years. Another important area of research is that on

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas Hamilton, 'Representing Slavery in British Museums: The Challenges of 2007', in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. Cora Kaplan and J.R. Oldfield (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 141-2.

<sup>12</sup> As Mike Kaye has noted, the anti-slavery movement lost momentum after 1807. See Mike Kaye, 'The Development of the Anti-Slavery Movement after 1807', in *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament, and People*, ed. Stephen Farrell, Melanie Unwin, and James Walvin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 238-41. This lessening of opposition, in combination with the passing of abolition and the fight to end the international trade in slaves, likely impacted on the West Indian interest's need and desire to continue its anti-abolitionist campaign, but analysing such a change requires extending the period of study beyond the abolition of the slave trade.

<sup>13</sup> This trend is in direct opposition to the power and influence of American slaveholders in the contemporaneous debate in the United States.

the discourse of American proslavery. Unlike the study of British abolition and anti-abolition, the American side has seen numerous publications devoted to proslavery ideology, publications, and politics. Major works draw connections between British and American proslavery arguments to demonstrate that the American proslavery position had its origins in British proslavery thought. There is also a small and relatively recent surge of research into British proslavery language, arguments, and rhetoric that is particularly relevant to this study. Several articles as well as a recent monograph and doctoral thesis have all demonstrated the absence of a comprehensive survey of British proslavery thought, argument, and rhetoric in the era of abolition.<sup>14</sup> A fourth area of study that informs this thesis is the research into the nature, make-up, and beliefs of the West Indian interest both in Britain and in the colonies. This research is particularly relevant to Chapter One of this study. Finally, there has been some recent exploration into the commemoration of British abolition and emancipation. These areas of research demonstrate that this study has the potential to inform various pathways of historical research related to abolition.

The first area of historiography relevant to this thesis is the study of British abolition. Numerous comprehensive surveys of the abolition of the British slave trade and slavery have been published; the first major account was printed immediately following the abolition of the slave trade. These studies attempt to understand why Britain ended its participation in the slave trade and why abolition and emancipation occurred when they did. They do this by examining the actions of the abolitionists, the prevailing economic conditions, and the historical context of the growing abolitionist movement in Britain. Until the later twentieth century the conventional history of abolition depicted abolition as the successful outcome of the work of saintly abolitionists; recent studies look at economics, slave resistance, the historical and international context of the anti-slavery movement, and the work (and

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<sup>14</sup> Srividhya Swaminathan identified that the proslavery side was absent from the familiar story of British abolition and that this oversight was a problem. See Srividhya Swaminathan, 'Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision', *Slavery & Abolition*, 24 (2003), 40. James Rawley and Seymour Drescher, for example, had previously examined the West Indian defence of the slave trade inside and outside Westminster, but their studies remained focused on a narrow time period and on specific groups of anti-abolitionists. See James A. Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', *Slavery & Abolition*, 14 (1993), 48-69. See also Seymour Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 20 (1990), 561-80. Swaminathan's more recent work seeks to address this absence by looking at the language used on both sides of the debate up to 1815. See Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*. Ian Barrett recently completed a doctoral thesis on the topic of proslavery with the intention of informing our understanding of the abolition debates, but again limited his focus to the period prior to the abolition of the slave trade. See Ian John Barrett, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807' (Unpublished King's College London PhD thesis, 2009), 229.

motives) of abolitionists to provide a more balanced, intellectual history of abolition.<sup>15</sup> This broadening of the scope of research has led to two opposing theories about the origins of popular abolitionism and the movement's ability to gain political backing.

The process of achieving abolition was initially attributed to the work of abolitionists. In his 1808 publication, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*,<sup>16</sup> prominent abolitionist Thomas Clarkson placed the actions of abolitionists at the centre of both the popular movement and subsequent parliamentary action to end Britain's participation in the slave trade. He depicted abolition as a great humanitarian achievement of which Britain could always be proud. This interpretation influenced generations of historians of British abolition. It required anti-abolitionists to be treated as a stagnant, inhumane force standing in the way of human progress, or as insignificant in (or even absent from) the story of abolition. This negative portrayal made it almost impossible to see the West Indian lobby as having any significant role in the story of British abolition beyond acting as a unified, doomed, and defensive stumbling block to human progress. The below study, therefore, helps correct the imbalance that remains to this day in the historiography of British abolition and anti-abolition.

In *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*,<sup>17</sup> Roger Anstey identified specific eighteenth-century ideologies and processes that contributed to the abolition of the British slave trade. He showed that to understand abolition one must focus one's attention on Westminster.<sup>18</sup> By focusing on the connections between political and ideological arguments behind the anti-slavery movement, Anstey concluded that the process of achieving abolition took twenty years because of the novelty of national lobbies and the prevalent belief that the West Indies were vital to Britain's prosperity.<sup>19</sup> Anstey echoed David Brion Davis' work in emphasising the role that Evangelicals and Quakers played in the anti-slavery movement and attempted to assess how influential they were in swaying popular opinion and

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<sup>15</sup> Christer Petley, 'Rethinking the Fall of the Planter Class', *Atlantic Studies*, 9 (2012), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808).

<sup>17</sup> Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Michael Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain, 1814-48* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*, 407.

political processes.<sup>20</sup> Contemporaries of Anstey writing in the 1970s, including David Brion Davis and Seymour Drescher, considered this study to be the latest in the Clarksonian tradition, with Anstey following Thomas Clarkson's lead in portraying abolitionists as men overcoming ruthless commercial interests and accomplishing a great step forward in human progress.<sup>21</sup>

Anstey notably devoted the twelfth chapter of his study to a discussion of the opposition to abolition in Parliament up to 1796. This contained a brief overview of the Society of West India Planters and Merchants in London, anti-abolitionist propaganda, and a record of relevant votes in Parliament. His assessment of British proslavery propaganda was that it was not of the quantity or quality of the abolitionists' works.<sup>22</sup> Anstey did, however, argue that while the abolitionists had to rely on 'hopes and calculations rather than demonstrable truths' in their speeches in Parliament, the anti-abolitionists were on much firmer ground with their arguments.<sup>23</sup> He also noted that both sides were similar in size with a small core of individuals committed to the cause and a much larger number who wavered unpredictably throughout the slavery debates.<sup>24</sup> His inclusion of a section devoted to the anti-abolitionists demonstrates his recognition that there was a serious and important debate going on over the continuance of the slave trade and slavery. This study takes Anstey's revelation about the existence of a significant anti-abolitionist body and focuses solely on it so as to better understand the members of the West Indian interest, the slave trade and slavery debates in print and in Parliament, and their strengths as well as their weaknesses. It also agrees that studies of British abolition and anti-abolition should remain focussed on Parliament because it was in the Houses of Parliament that abolition and emancipation were decided upon. Clarkson and Anstey wrote two of the most influential studies on British abolition that clearly attributed the political achievement of passing the act for abolition in 1807 to the work of abolitionists and a change in the popular mindset about the value and necessity of the trade to Britain. These studies, however, were unable to fully

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<sup>20</sup> In his 1975 study, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, Davis focused on the shift in the 'moral perception' of Europeans and Americans and the consequences of this change for the institution of slavery. He included discussions of the evangelical revival and the impact of the Enlightenment on those individuals who became involved in the anti-slavery campaign. While he stated that he did not want to portray the abolitionists as heroes, he also wrote that he would not paint them as 'misfits' either. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 11-13.

<sup>21</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*, 294.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

explore the nature of the slavery debates because they attributed most of the work, the arguments, and the successes to the abolitionists alone without (or with little) recognition of the powerful lobby they were fighting against.

Assessing and reassessing the importance of the slave trade to Britain's economy led to competing interpretations of British abolition in the mid-twentieth century. In his influential (and controversial) 1944 study, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Eric Williams argued that economics was the major factor in determining if and when abolition in the British West Indies would occur. According to Williams, it was money and 'a rising standard of political ethics' that led to abolition.<sup>25</sup> Slavery provided the capital for the Industrial Revolution and mature capitalism destroyed the slave system.<sup>26</sup> He believed that slavery would have continued as long as it remained profitable. This theory became known as the 'decline thesis'. According to Williams' decline thesis, economics rather than humanitarianism was the determining factor in ending the institution of slavery. He provided evidence of West Indian slave traders who were humanitarians in an attempt to erase the line between humanitarian abolitionists and the West Indian interest. Williams concluded that humanitarians helped free the slaves, but their roles had been exaggerated and misunderstood. This was partly due to contemporaries deliberately misrepresenting the abolitionist movement in their publications<sup>27</sup> and these works continuing to influence twentieth-century historians. *Capitalism and Slavery* has been republished several times and his decline thesis, which was supported by the generation of historians who followed, forced scholars to re-examine the influence of the abolitionists.

Seymour Drescher set out to challenge the consensus on Williams' decline thesis in *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*.<sup>28</sup> He believed that, contrary to Williams' assertions, the slave trade was growing in the era of abolition and thus decline could not sufficiently explain abolition. Drescher employed quantitative analysis to calculate and demonstrate the growth of production and the value of the trade and West Indian imports and exports to Britain in the decades leading up to abolition. He concluded that the slave system was actually growing at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Ending this profitable trade would have

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<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, viii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>28</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

seemed to be irrational from an economic viewpoint, hence the title of his study, 'Econocide'.<sup>30</sup> Market forces, he argued, would have caused the trade to increase had it not been for a change in popular and political beliefs. It was the pressure of abolitionists in the period 1788-1792 which caused Britons to view and, most importantly, assess West Indian slavery differently. He believed that Parliament had paid little attention to economics in their decision to abolish the trade.<sup>31</sup> His research therefore returned some influence to the actions of abolitionists and the importance of humanitarianism in the abolition of the slave trade. Both studies focus their attention on the economics of the era rather than on the actions of the people on either side of the slavery debate. The study below looks at how the state of Britain's finances and the perceived importance of the slave trade to her economy both helped and hindered the proslavery position in the slavery debates.

Economic decline has once again become the focus of scholarly assessments of British abolition. Joseph Inikori, in his 2002 study *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development*,<sup>32</sup> concluded that Williams' argument, that abolition was based upon economics, was 'basically valid, logically and empirically'.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Williams, whose initial research was on the relationship between economic decline and abolition and who then added research on the African contribution to Britain's overseas trade and the trade's profits' contribution to Britain's industrialisation,<sup>34</sup> Inikori focused on the whole of the Atlantic and was most interested in identifying Africa's role in Britain's industrialisation. He found that Africans were central to this industrialisation because their labour expanded Atlantic commerce.<sup>35</sup> Selwyn H.H. Carrington also found evidence of decline during his research for his 2002 study, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810*.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to Drescher's belief that decline only began after the abolition of the slave trade came into effect, Carrington argued that decline was already evident during the war with the American colonies in the 1770s.<sup>37</sup> He proposed that decline in the West

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<sup>30</sup> James Walvin, 'Why did the British Abolish the Slave Trade? Econocide Revisited', *Slavery & Abolition*, 32 (2011), 585.

<sup>31</sup> Petley, 'Rethinking the Fall of the Planter Class', 6.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>36</sup> Selwyn H. H. Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Indies was due to food shortages and the loss of American markets<sup>38</sup> combined with soil exhaustion and bad weather in Britain's West Indian colonies.<sup>39</sup> The issue of 'decline' in the West Indies will be discussed in the following section on studies of West Indians in Britain and the colonies. The study below will show that proslavery MPs emphatically and convincingly argued that the slave trade and slave produce in the colonies were vital elements in maintaining and ensuring Britain's financial prosperity.

Recent scholarship has continued looking beyond the time constraints of the era of abolition (generally considered to begin in the 1780s) and the geographical boundaries of the British Empire to better understand the origins and the timing of British abolition. In *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*,<sup>40</sup> Christopher Leslie Brown maintained that British abolitionism developed out of intercontinental concerns about revolution and empire building.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the studies mentioned above, Brown devoted little time to the economics or social history of the period.<sup>42</sup> He examined public opinion and evidence of slave resistance, but did not accept that either was enough to explain British abolitionism.<sup>43</sup> He looked at the lives and backgrounds of the various abolitionists and their individual motivations for becoming involved in the abolition movement. Brown argued that these motivations or 'interests' often developed out of a dislike of slavery's impact on Britain's international reputation and British society. Abolitionists were frequently more concerned about the health and wellbeing of their own countrymen than that of the slaves in the West Indies.<sup>44</sup> Brown also concluded that the tensions and fighting between Britain and her American colonies in the 1760s and 1770s were critical to the development of British abolitionism.<sup>45</sup> Suddenly, the morality of both colonial institutions and imperial practices were being

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Marcus Wood, 'Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity', *Slavery & Abolition*, 32 (2011), 595.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>45</sup> James Walvin has also argued that the war with America was the turning point which allowed the anti-slavery campaign to gain momentum and wider support. While major American revolutionaries were slaveholders, Britain offered slaves their freedom in return for fighting on their side. See James Walvin, 'Introduction', in *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament, and People*, ed. Stephen Farrell, Melanie Unwin, and James Walvin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4. In contrast, Trevor Burnard has asserted that repeated hurricanes in the Caribbean were more influential than the revolution. See Trevor Burnard, 'Et in Arcadia Ego: West Indian Planters in Glory, 1674-1784', *Atlantic Studies*, 9 (2012), 33.

scrutinised.<sup>46</sup> Brown's study thus described abolitionism as a way to validate the moral authority of Britain's elites both at home and in the colonies.<sup>47</sup> He concluded that abolition was not inevitable and in fact it required a specific set of circumstances and people in order to be achieved where, how, and when it was.<sup>48</sup> This conclusion allows one to re-examine the process of abolition without having to believe that it was an inevitable triumph of the good, enlightened abolitionists over evil, closed-minded planters. This recognition has therefore encouraged other interpretations of and perspectives on slavery and abolition such as this study of the defence of slavery in the era of abolition.

The study of American proslavery thought has benefited from several generations of historical research. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the British case, yet one of the most important historians of American proslavery, Larry E. Tise, firmly credited British anti-abolitionists with devising and advancing every proslavery argument later adopted in the American case.<sup>49</sup> This research into the American situation showed that the planters were worthy of study in their own right, as well as in relation to the abolitionists, in order to understand better the debates of slavery and freedom in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Eugene Genovese provided a Marxist interpretation of the development and character of the American South in his 1969 essays, *The World the Slaveholders Made*.<sup>50</sup> Written during the civil rights movement, Genovese was influenced by race relations and the apparent breakdown of the existing social order of segregation that had remained for a century in some states following the legal ending of slavery in the United States. His fourth chapter dissected the context of the defence of slavery in America, although it fell short of providing a close examination of the specific defences put forth by slaveholders. He described the slave system as a family with the planter as the patriarch ruling over his household.<sup>51</sup> Planters owed their slaves care, support, and protection, much like a parent owes these to his or her children.<sup>52</sup> The planter's parental influence and power, however, had to be supported by political and social authority.<sup>53</sup> Genovese described this situation in terms of class,

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, 26-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>49</sup> Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*, 78.

<sup>50</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two essays in interpretation* (1969. Reprint with new introduction, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

with the slaves as the weak-minded and weak-bodied masses in need of care and the planters as the ruling class that must be humane and not ignore those claims to care.<sup>54</sup> Genovese's *The World the Slaveholders Made* is an important contribution to the historiography of slavery and abolition because it focused on the lives and relations of planters and slaves, rather than on the end of their way of life. The study below continues to focus on the much neglected work and influence of the planters in the context of the abolition debate but its findings are firmly situated in Britain.

Tise's extensive study, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*, began by lamenting that every history of proslavery written since the Civil War had treated proslavery in a moral rather than historical manner. This had resulted in historians making moral rather than historical judgements and misunderstanding its true nature.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Tise valued proslavery culture and arguments as indicators of American ideals and society.<sup>56</sup> He described proslavery ideology as a mode of thinking and a system of symbols that expressed social, cultural, and moral values.<sup>57</sup> Part One of Tise's study examined the rise of proslavery ideology in America, the heritage of proslavery in Britain and her colonies in the West Indies, and proslavery arguments in Britain and America between 1701 and 1861. While much of the work is a narrative of proslavery, these early sections include numerous tables in his attempt to categorise proslavery arguments, their timing, and their geographical origins. He included British and West Indian authors in his research into proslavery publications and concluded that, in the sixty years prior to emancipation, these authors advanced every possible moral, philosophical, economic, and social argument that could be mobilised to support the institution of slavery.<sup>58</sup> These writers therefore foreshadowed the American debate on this subject in the nineteenth century. Tise argued that between 1823 and 1833 British and West Indian authors upheld the institution of slavery with a 'furor and assertiveness' that the American South could not match.<sup>59</sup> This is far from the passive, hopeless case recorded in several histories of British abolition. He concluded that, because most of these arguments remained fairly constant over time,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>55</sup> Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 90.

American historians must look beyond the arguments to find a uniquely American proslavery history.<sup>60</sup>

Several elements of Tise's approach are found in the study below. His recognition of a strong, powerful, British proslavery force that employed a full range of arguments in print is supported by the new research into British proslavery culture discussed below in Chapter Two. His method of categorising proslavery arguments in order to better identify, explain and understand the complex proslavery position is also undertaken, albeit with different categories and methods of analysis. The most important element of Tise's study which is reflected here is his focus on the proslavery side of the slavery debate and his intentionally analytical approach which he uses to refrain from imposing any judgement upon the planters and their supporters. This study too remains committed to identifying and explaining proslavery culture, writing, argument, and rhetoric without a negative or judgemental shadow being cast upon the people or their position on slavery.

There has been some scholarly interest in recent years in British proslavery arguments and rhetoric. These include examinations of proslavery arguments and their origins, specific parliamentary debates on matters of slavery and abolition, and proslavery publications. These studies have influenced the research and analysis contained within the last three chapters of this study. Previously, as Christer Petley recently lamented, historians such as Gordon K. Lewis (below), Davis, and Anstey oversimplified the proslavery advocates, their campaigns, and their ideology in their histories of British slavery and abolition.<sup>61</sup> This oversimplification appears to be being corrected through close readings and careful analysis of the slavery debate and the opposition to abolition. Seymour Drescher's article, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade',<sup>62</sup> contained a rhetorical analysis of the pro- and anti-slavery arguments advanced during the slave trade debates over four sessions in Parliament. He chose to examine parliamentary speeches because of the custom of alternating between supporters and opponents of motions, thereby providing a more balanced view of the debate than found in printed materials.<sup>63</sup> His quantitative approach to the debates revealed that, because the number of victories for each side between 1788 and 1807 was almost exactly equal, only a small core of MPs was truly committed to one side or the other; the majority were wavering in their

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>61</sup> Christer Petley, "'Devoted Islands" and "That Madman Wilberforce": British Proslavery Patriotism During the Age of Abolition', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39 (2011), 395.

<sup>62</sup> Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade'.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 568.

opinions.<sup>64</sup> The study below also employs close reading of the parliamentary debates in order to determine the nature of the proslavery argument but over a much wider time period.

Drescher warned his readers against relying upon rhetorical analysis as the rhetoric recorded during these debates could possibly demonstrate more about the audience's views than the speaker's attitudes or beliefs.<sup>65</sup> Contemporary reports of parliamentary proceedings and speeches in newspapers and other publications all have inaccuracies, omissions, revisions, and editorial opinions being placed upon the works. Dror Wahrman took issue with Drescher's reliance on the *Parliamentary Register's* record of the slave debates for more than just a narrative of the events.<sup>66</sup> Ian Barrett avoided the official records of the parliamentary debates in his doctoral research on proslavery culture in Britain. His analysis of the wording used in Parliament to defend Britain's participation in the slave trade instead relied upon pamphlet and newspaper reports of the debates because of his classification of Hansard and Cobbett as paraphrased and problematic.<sup>67</sup> This study, however, intentionally focuses on the available parliamentary reports, believing them to be the most comprehensive record of the parliamentary debates of the period.

Gordon K. Lewis's research into proslavery ideology focused on proslavery arguments employed by planters and their sympathisers in major publications. These included the barbarous nature of Africa, biblical defences, outdated or uninformed claims about life in the colonies, contented slaves, slaves' natural laziness, slaves' devotion to their masters, the suitability of gradual amelioration, and the right of the colonies to legislate for themselves.<sup>68</sup> Like Tise, Drescher, and this study, Lewis attempted to categorise the types of arguments to understand better the nature of the proslavery position without judgement or assumptions. Swaminathan's 2003 article, 'Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision', begins by recognising that historians of British slavery have focused almost all their attention on the abolition movement.<sup>69</sup> Her study examined the nature of West Indian publications prior to the 1770s and revealed that, without a direct challenge to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 579.

<sup>66</sup> Dror Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', *Past and Present*, 136 (1992), 90-1.

<sup>67</sup> Barrett, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807', 177.

<sup>68</sup> Gordon K. Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', in *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, ed. Verene Shepherd and Hilary Beckles (Oxford: Ian Randal, 2000), 555-6.

<sup>69</sup> Swaminathan, 'Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision', 40.

the institutions of slavery or the slave trade, these works were generally histories and journals that legitimated slavery based upon biblical, commercial, and humanitarian arguments.<sup>70</sup> After the Somerset Decision,<sup>71</sup> the West Indian interest had to develop new types of proslavery arguments to defend its property rights in a unified manner.<sup>72</sup> Swaminathan also noted that it was proslavery writers who first focused on the slave trade as a major issue in the debate over slavery.<sup>73</sup> She characterised the West Indian interest's arguments and rhetoric as intentionally nationalistic in order to depict itself as truly British and worthy of Britain's protection while being unfairly targeted and injured by abolitionists.<sup>74</sup> This connection between proslavery rhetoric and constructions of national identity was expanded upon in her later study, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, where Swaminathan conducted an extensive examination of pro- and anti-slavery publications in an effort to understand the effect of slave-trade rhetoric on British national identity.<sup>75</sup> Like Lewis, Swaminathan characterised the proslavery position as defensive, which she interpreted as a response to a change in public sentiment.<sup>76</sup> She argued that the sophisticated use of rhetoric by proslavery writers indicated their awareness of this shift in the British public's sympathies.<sup>77</sup> The proslavery publications examined for this work indicated that the planters were intentionally using their first-hand knowledge to legitimise their claims and attack the abolitionists' assumptions.<sup>78</sup> Swaminathan used her examination of pro- and anti-slavery rhetoric to prove that within the slavery debate was a debate about the nature of being British and also (crucial to this study) that it was a genuine debate. Like *Debating the Slave Trade*, this study also looks at rhetoric as well as argument, but over a longer period of time and without focussing on one particular reason to explain the specific arguments and wording chosen for much of the proslavery argument (which in her study was the defence of the planters' and colonists' Britishness). The findings below demonstrate that proslavery arguments cannot be categorised as simply defensive because they were also used to promote colonial

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>71</sup> See page 27.

<sup>72</sup> Swaminathan, 'Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision', 45-6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>75</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 142.

slavery and the slave trade, attack individual abolitionists, their publications, and their actions, and challenge the logic of abolition.

Like Swaminathan and Drescher, Ian Barrett's doctoral thesis, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807', also attempted to view abolition as a debate. His focus on why abolitionists were able to effectively ridicule the West Indian interest and its supporters and why the interest was unable to devise a successful response<sup>79</sup> reveals the study's underlying assumption that the West Indian interest was defensive and reactive in its language, arguments, and position during this period. Like Tise, Drescher, Lewis, and this study, Barrett categorised the proslavery arguments he encountered. His study remained focused on the fractured, defensive networks of anti-abolitionists in order to understand better the abolition debate.<sup>80</sup> By omitting an analysis of the debate in Parliament as recorded by Cobbett and Hansard, however, the full extent of the slavery debate and the political influence of the West Indian interest in Parliament could not be assessed. This study provides this missing information about the British proslavery position over a wider time period and shows that the proslavery position was more than just defensive.

Recent published collections of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century propaganda also reflect growing efforts to view the lead up to abolition as a debate rather than a one-sided movement. The eight volume *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*,<sup>81</sup> edited by Peter J. Kitson and Debbie Lee, included volumes entitled 'The Abolition Debate' and 'The Emancipation Debate'. 'The Abolition Debate' was usefully divided into abolitionist and anti-abolitionist works. Pickering & Chatto then published another edited collection of contemporary works with their four volume *The British Transatlantic Slave Trade*.<sup>82</sup> This collection devoted an entire volume to works in support of the slave trade. Volume Four, edited by David Ryden, is entitled 'The Abolitionist Struggle: Supporters of the Slave Trade', and the title suggests that it is meant to be read alongside Volume Three, 'The Abolitionist Struggle: Opponents of the Slave Trade', edited by John Oldfield. By referring to the 'struggle' of abolitionists in the

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<sup>79</sup> Barrett, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807', 9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-6.

<sup>81</sup> Peter J. Kitson and Debbie Lee, eds., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> Kenneth Morgan, ed., *The British Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003).

titles of both volumes, the collection subtly implies that proslavery works were hurdles standing in the way of a progressive abolitionist movement and that abolitionism was the focus of the propaganda on both sides of the debate. By focussing solely on the proslavery side of the debate, this study assists the reassessment of the slavery debate as a two-sided debate.

Historians have also examined West Indians in Britain's West Indian colonies and in Britain in the era of abolition. These works have helped to inform studies of abolition about the size, strength, composition, and motivations behind the West Indian interest's activities during this period. Early works on the subject focused on the decline of the West Indians' power that contributed to their inability to effectively fight abolition. Lowell Joseph Ragatz's classic study, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833*, argued that slavery would have come to an end in the islands regardless of abolition because of moral, social, and economic deterioration, the planters' loss of political influence, and the unwillingness of colonists to adapt to new progressive farming methods.<sup>83</sup> This study usefully looks at the existing system of agriculture in the colonies prior to the agitation for abolition in Britain before moving on to a lengthy discussion of events and influences which led to the decline of the planter class's influence and wealth. The study's value lies in its acknowledgement of the importance and influence of the West Indian interest at the beginning of the slavery debate, a point that is confirmed by the findings found below in this study.

In *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*,<sup>84</sup> Christer Petley echoed Ragatz's theory of planter decline as the reason behind the achievement of emancipation in the British Parliament in 1833. He argued that by being unwilling to defend slavery using moral arguments and instead focusing on the colony's financial value to the empire, Jamaican planters and other members of the West Indian interest brought a further decline in their influence upon themselves because the expanding British empire rendered the West Indian colonies less valuable to the mother country.<sup>85</sup> This study, however, identifies a wider range of arguments beyond economics that were employed in the later years of the slavery debates to defend the planters and the institution of slavery. Trevor Burnard concluded that Ragatz and Williams were wrong to depict Jamaican planters as being

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>84</sup> Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 47, 69.

in decline by the beginning of the era of abolition. His research into the pre-abolition period led him to assert that, without abolition killing the planters' participation in the trade, their drive for wealth and the continuing demand for colonial produce would have allowed their power to continue on into the nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup> The study below also demonstrates that the power and influence of the planters and the range of defences available to them declined significantly throughout the era of abolition.

While Ragatz, Petley, and Burnard<sup>87</sup> have focused on West Indians in the colonies (and to a limited extent at Westminster), in *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*<sup>88</sup> David Beck Ryden provided a detailed chronology of the formation and activities of West Indian societies in London and examined how they responded to the abolitionist threat. Ryden argued that the rise of capitalism did impact on the success of abolition and stressed that the core of Williams' thesis was correct.<sup>89</sup> His research led him to conclude that the planters were facing decline in the period due to three major factors: first, that mercantilist policy was working against their interests; second, that it was no longer easy or inexpensive to control their slaves; and third, the overproduction of sugar caused economic decline.<sup>90</sup> These factors, he maintained, combined to explain the timing of abolition.<sup>91</sup> He therefore lamented how, in the midst of the great masses of research being done on British abolition in the past thirty years, the West Indies and their inhabitants had been largely left out of the narratives of and the explanations for British abolition.<sup>92</sup> Decline thus again surfaces as one of the major factors for the timing of abolition and the West Indians' defeat in the debate of slavery. The study below supports this interpretation. It also goes some way to establishing a narrative of proslavery that Ryden and others have identified as missing from the historiography of British abolition.

The depiction and commemoration of slavery and abolition in Britain has been the focus of recent historical study, inspired by the wave of celebrations, museum displays, publications, and official ceremonies meant to mark the 200<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Burnard, 'Et in Arcadia Ego: West Indian Planters in Glory, 1674-1784', 34-5.

<sup>87</sup> For example, see Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

anniversary of abolition in 2007. J.R. Oldfield's *'Chords of Freedom': Commemoration, Ritual, and British Transatlantic Slavery* contained an overview of the various memorials, monuments, museum exhibitions, and commemorations of abolition and emancipation in Britain. His research showed that until the mid-twentieth century Britons were taught to celebrate and remember the triumphs of the abolitionists instead of the realities and experiences of the Africans who had been enslaved.<sup>93</sup> Monuments related to slavery centred on the moral achievements of abolition rather than the victims.<sup>94</sup> Specific choices were being made to remember not the slaves, but their abolitionist 'liberators'.<sup>95</sup> Oldfield argued that museums, memorials, and commemorations shape public memory and make judgements about what people should remember.<sup>96</sup> As Douglas Hamilton noted, by emphasising abolition in their displays, museums risked being accused of ignoring slavery.<sup>97</sup> Hamilton and Oldfield's comments also apply to the historiography of British slavery and abolition. By emphasising the work of abolitionists and the triumph of abolition, the slaves and the planters have been kept out of the spotlight of study. This study helps address the absence of the West Indian interest in the historiography of British abolition and therefore allows for a better understanding of British abolition and anti-abolition.

In the field of public history new exhibitions that acknowledge or attempt to recreate elements of plantation slavery and the slave trade risk alienating traditional museum visitors.<sup>98</sup> Marcus Wood has lamented the absence of the black story and adequate acknowledgement of black agency in the 2007 commemorations. In 'Significant Silence: Where was Slave Agency in the Popular Imagery of 2007?', Wood argued that the 2007 commemorations emphasised the 'heroes of abolition' at the expense of acknowledging the role of African agency in achieving the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>99</sup> Wood further examined this omission in his 2010 study, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of*

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<sup>93</sup> J.R. Oldfield, *'Chords of Freedom': Commemoration, Ritual, and British Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>97</sup> Hamilton, 'Representing Slavery in British Museums: The Challenges of 2007', 132.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>99</sup> Marcus Wood, 'Significant Silence: Where was Slave Agency in the Popular Imagery of 2007?', in *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. Cora Kaplan and J.R. Oldfield (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 163-4.

*Emancipation*.<sup>100</sup> His concluding summary of the 2007 commemorations, particularly the memorial service in Westminster Abbey, showed that it was the abolitionist narrative that was being remembered and recalled, not the slaves, and drew heavily on the myth of Wilberforce and his fellow abolitionists as saviours of the slaves.<sup>101</sup> It was not only the slaves who were being overlooked; the planters, merchants, traders, and supporters of the West Indian interest were also absent from the story being told. While several of the recent studies mentioned above go some way to addressing this significant gap in the historiography, the study below is the first to assess British proslavery argument, rhetoric, and culture without judgement, without half of the pages (at least) devoted to the work of the abolitionists, and without time constraints that prevent the entire period of British abolition from being considered. Wood's assertion brings this historiographical survey back to the concerted efforts of Thomas Clarkson two centuries ago to tell the story of the abolitionists as though it were the complete story of British slavery and abolition. This study actively breaks from this long-standing tradition.

This thesis has been divided into two main sections. Section One is an examination of the anti-abolitionists and their activities in Britain. The first chapter focuses on the role of anti-abolitionists in the era of abolition. It begins by providing a chronology of anti-abolition. This section explores the activities, successes, and failures of the West Indian interest and its supporters in and out of Parliament from the 1770s to 1833. This chronological narrative is a unique examination of the era of abolition from the perspective of the opposition to abolition and emancipation. The chapter then moves into an examination of the lives of West Indians in Britain, their organisations in Britain, and their ever-changing relationship with the British government. Chapter One demonstrates the existence and influence of an anti-abolitionist segment of the British public during an era so closely associated with the developing abolitionist movement and overwhelming humanitarian efforts in Britain.

The second chapter provides an overview of a large number of proslavery and anti-abolitionists works that were published in Britain and had the potential to contribute to the slavery debate. These works have been drawn from a variety of genres, contexts, and locations to reflect the broad range of information on slavery being shared by their proslavery or pro-colonist authors, artists, playwrights, and

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<sup>100</sup> Marcus Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

composers. All these were subjected to close reading and are generally discussed chronologically. The first set of publications under examination here is pamphlet propaganda. Major contemporary periodicals are then discussed to understand better the reception and promotion of proslavery/anti-abolitionist pamphlet propaganda before moving on to an examination of important informative works on the subject of slavery, the slave trade, and the West Indian islands. Finally, contemporary artwork and creative writing are examined to see further manifestations of proslavery thought and culture in Britain. By looking at this range of sources this chapter demonstrates that there was a culture of proslavery in Britain in the era of abolition and that the nature of the proslavery argument was affected by the genre in which it was contained.

This thesis then narrows its focus onto British anti-abolitionist argument and rhetoric in Parliament in Section Two. The discussions and findings in this section are based upon a close reading of Cobbett's *Parliamentary History* and Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*. Every parliamentary debate on slavery, the slave trade, and the West Indies between 1783, when the first anti-slavery petition was brought before Parliament, and 1833, when slavery was formally abolished by Parliament, was examined and an extensive database was created to categorise and quantify the numerous proslavery arguments put forth during the debates.<sup>102</sup> Section Two contains a detailed analysis of these debates using useful categories devised from the arguments themselves. These final chapters identify, explain, and contextualise numerous proslavery arguments brought forth during the slavery debates.

By focusing on the proslavery side of the debates in Parliament, one gains a clearer understanding of the nature of the debate and possible reasons for the numerous delays and failure of bills calling for abolition, amelioration, and emancipation. As in a number of studies discussed above, the proslavery arguments are categorised under broad headings and then compared and contrasted with others in the same category to understand better the nature of the argument, the timing, and the interest and potential motives of the speaker. Chapter Three identifies proslavery and pro-slave trade arguments presented in Parliament prior to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Chapter Four follows with an examination of several categories of intellectual arguments presented against the abolition of slavery between 1807 and 1833. The manner in which these arguments were voiced in Parliament is also

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<sup>102</sup> This database was created using *Microsoft Word* and *FileMaker Pro* and was used to sort through hundreds of recorded proslavery and anti-abolitionist statements from Cobbett's and Hansard's records.

relevant to the study of British proslavery. Chapter Five, therefore, focuses on the rhetoric used by the West Indian interest and its supporters in Parliament to promote and defend slavery and the slave trade during the slavery debates. It looks at the rhetorical style of slavery advocates instead of the intellectual arguments being put forth. These three chapters work together to provide a comprehensive overview of the proslavery position in Parliament across the entire period of British abolition.

Section One of this thesis demonstrates that the West Indian interest in Britain was active in and out of Parliament in defending the institution of slavery, spreading proslavery information to the wider British public using a variety of methods, and influencing the timing and nature of the bills for abolition and emancipation. It also shows that their power and influence diminished over time. Section Two reveals that some anti-abolitionist arguments could be coolly phrased, worded positively, and could even originate with those without an obvious or identifiable interest in the trade or the West Indies. This is in direct opposition to published studies that characterise broadly proslavery or anti-abolitionist arguments as defensive and put forth by those with an interest in the West Indies. Of course, other arguments were clearly defensive. They were used to defend fellow planters or Britain's continuing involvement in the trade and her reliance on colonial slavery for colonial labour. The nature of the arguments presented in Parliament largely depended upon the timing and language used in the introduction of the bill and the debate that followed. It is the focus on the proslavery side of the story and the recognition of the diversity of proslavery opinion, argument, and rhetoric in Britain that sets this study apart from other works on the abolition era. This study contributes to the thriving research into British abolition and provides a better understanding of the debate by recognising the importance of the other side of the debate during this significant period in British history.

## **Section One: Anti-Abolitionists and their Activities in Britain**

## Chapter One

### The Role of the West Indian Interest in Opposing Abolition and Emancipation in Britain, 1783-1833

‘He next observed, that it was the planters who were the greatest slaves. They hazarded all their property, and risked their life and health in the cultivation of these islands. Having obtained a property, they returned home; for the country they called their home.’

Crisp Molineaux, 21 May 1789<sup>1</sup>

‘As a West-India planter, I do not hold myself in any degree responsible for the establishment of the system. The planters of the present generation, most of them at least, found themselves, by inheritance, or by other accidental causes, in possession of property the fruit of the industry of their ancestors or other predecessors, and of capital vested in the West Indies by them, under the sanction of the government and of the parliament of this country, through their encouragement and in reliance on their good faith.’

Charles Rose Ellis, 15 May 1823<sup>2</sup>

‘He had laboured as much as any man for what he possessed; and though he did happen to be one of the masters of that portion of his Majesty’s subjects who had dark complexions – although he was one of those unfortunate masters – he had always been disposed to act by them conscientiously.’

James Wilson, 6 March 1828<sup>3</sup>

The West Indian interest in Britain was a diverse collection of men and women with complex connections to one another and to both sides of the Atlantic. In this study the West Indian interest will be defined as anyone who had direct or indirect links to the British West Indies. This could include personal possession of property or slave ownership, family connections and investment, place of birth, or connections through business or marriage, as well as British and West Indian merchants, traders, ship owners and builders, and mortgagees. British West Indians were not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> *The Parliamentary History of England* [Henceforth *PHE*], XXVIII, ed. William Cobbett (London: T.C. Hansard, 1816), col. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates* [Henceforth *PD*], New Series IX, ed. T.C. Hansard (London: Pater-noster-Row Press, 1824), col. 296. Ellis was MP for Heytesbury (1793-6), Seaford (1796-1806 and 1812-26), and Grinstead (1807-12). He became first Baron Seaford, was Chairman of London’s West India Planters and Merchants Committee from 1810, owned two plantations in Jamaica, and was made chairman of the West India subcommittee on amelioration in 1823. See D.R. Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), vol. 5, 34-9.

<sup>3</sup> *PD* New Series XVIII (London: Pater-noster-Row Press, 1828), col. 1048. Wilson was MP for York (1826-30).

either attached to formal West Indian organisations or politically active. They might be settled in the colonies, in London, in the major outports of Liverpool, Bristol, and Glasgow, or on a country estate. The West Indian interest in Britain was thus a large heterogeneous group whose members were a formidable lobbying force in the eighteenth century and possessed much political and financial power at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This chapter will explain the ways in which the interest influenced British society and politics during the era of abolition.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the West Indian interest had to develop new ways to depict, define, and defend itself in Parliament and to the British public because of the growing popularity of abolitionism. Its members' close ties to Britain, great wealth, transatlantic connections, practices such as absenteeism and intermarriage, and vital roles in ensuring Britain's economic prosperity and security during war and peace allowed the interest to maintain a significant hold on parliamentary decision-making in the face of popular abolitionism. This power became more concentrated in urban areas and more clearly defined as its members organised to fight abolition in the wake of the American Revolution. Their attempts to organise and consolidate their power to influence political debates are demonstrated by the development of formal lobbying groups discussed below.

This chapter is organised into four sections. The first provides a chronological narrative of events in order to contextualise the anti-abolitionist arguments discussed in later chapters. The second section looks specifically at the West Indian interest in Britain in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Section Three charts the ways in which the West Indian interest organised and made concerted efforts to defend itself, its fellow colonists, and the institution of slavery in the era of abolition. London's West Indian societies are the major focus of this section, but special emphasis has also been placed on the much overlooked Glasgow West India Association to understand better the range of issues with which West Indian associations concerned themselves and the actions they took to fight abolition. The chapter concludes with an examination of the changing relationship between the West Indian interest and Parliament in this period, a relationship that would directly impact upon the timing and nature of British abolition.

## **1. The Chronology of Anti-abolition**

The development and articulation of proslavery sentiment in Britain was related to a number of external factors and events. While the growing abolition movement and

legislation were two important factors in the development of the anti-abolition campaign, one must also consider the numerous domestic and international events by which it was affected. These developments impacted upon the West Indian interest and parliamentary activity, directly affecting the lobby's ability to fight, delay, and defeat calls for abolition and emancipation. External factors shaped the slavery debates, helping and hindering the proslavery cause at different points in time. They are vital to our understanding of both the timing of abolition and emancipation and the nature and content of proslavery arguments as they developed over time.

### *1. 1770s and 1780s – Considering the Legality of Slavery*

This thesis is framed by specific events in the years 1783 and 1833, namely the bringing of the first petition opposing slavery before Parliament in 1783 and the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies in 1833. Several important events, however, took place prior to 1783 that affected the later anti-abolition campaign and helped shape the proslavery arguments available to West Indians. In 1772, the Somerset Case was interpreted as outlawing slavery in England even though Lord Mansfield<sup>4</sup> carefully specified that his ruling only applied to the case in question and only while James Somerset resided in England.<sup>5</sup> James Somerset had been bought by Charles Stewart in Boston as a slave and brought to England in 1769. Somerset escaped in 1771 but was recaptured and imprisoned on a ship bound for Jamaica, where he was to be re-sold into slavery. A *habeas corpus* case was brought to determine if his imprisonment was illegal. Lord Mansfield ruled that no laws made slavery legal in England. The West Indian interest responded to the Somerset decision by developing arguments that legitimated the institution of slavery and the slave trade, as well as clarifying its role in the empire.<sup>6</sup> Srividhya Swaminathan has argued that Mansfield's decision ended the period in which the West Indian interest could be complacent because it destroyed legal precedent and recognised the slave's humanity.<sup>7</sup>

The Scottish high court outlawed slavery more explicitly in 1778 in the case of Knight versus Wedderburn. As a child Joseph Knight had been sold to the Scot

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<sup>4</sup> William Murray, first earl of Mansfield, was MP for Boroughbridge (1742-56), following which he was appointed Lord Chief Justice Mansfield.

<sup>5</sup> William Cotter has provided a useful examination of Mansfield's decision and its ramifications, as well as some discussion of how the case has been viewed within the wider historiography of British abolition. See William R. Cotter, 'The Somerset Case and the Abolition of Slavery in England', *History*, 79 (1990), 31-4.

<sup>6</sup> Swaminathan, 'Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision', 41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5.

John Wedderburn by a slave ship captain in Jamaica. Wedderburn brought Knight back with him to Scotland and after some time Knight wanted to leave his position. Wedderburn obtained a warrant to force Knight to go before Perth's Justices of the Peace, who found in favour of Wedderburn. John Cairns has noted that every justice presiding over the matter had an interest of some sort in slavery.<sup>8</sup> The case was pursued for several years before being considered by the Lords of Session in 1778. Through the course of the case the court considered different definitions of slavery and international laws regarding slavery. Wedderburn was able to argue that he owned Knight legally under Jamaican law and that the laws of the British empire condoned slavery and protected his right to his property.<sup>9</sup> The opposition, however, argued that their client had not willingly entered into a contract of service with Wedderburn, as Knight had been a boy and it was the ship's captain who had arranged his sale.<sup>10</sup> Their decision in Knight's favour meant that all current and former slaves held in Scotland were held illegally. This decision did not necessarily free Scotland's slaves immediately, but it did end the open holding of slaves in Scotland.<sup>11</sup> After the Somerset and Knight cases, when discussing the legality of colonial slavery, anti-abolitionists had to argue the legitimacy of their professions and property using examples of legislation that encouraged Britons to participate in the slave trade and use slave labour.

Britain was at war with the American colonies between 1775 and 1783 and with France from 1778. The American Revolution had a negative economic impact on the West Indies.<sup>12</sup> It interrupted and stopped trade, caused higher duties, increased the need for military protection, and inflated prices.<sup>13</sup> The West Indian interest was able to promote the African trade as the best training ground for seamen for the Royal Navy so that it could protect Britain's overseas possessions and trade routes. British West Indians in the colonies relied on the British armed and naval forces for protection from foreign invasion and internal strife and rebellion. The colonists also wanted the protection of the British army in the colonies because of the

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<sup>8</sup> John W. Cairns, 'The Definition of Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Thinking: Not the True Roman Slavery', in *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*, ed. Jean Allain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), 71.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

threat of slave revolts and the growing number of African slaves in the colonies.<sup>14</sup> In 1778 Parliament rescinded its right to levy direct taxes on the colonists.<sup>15</sup> The subsequent loss of the American colonies allowed planters and proslavery (and pro-slave trade) MPs to warn legitimately against so angering the colonists that it might result in wide-scale revolt and the loss of these prosperous plantation colonies in the Caribbean to their enemies. Politicians became more wary of dictating to the colonists because West Indians were now able to threaten to secede with some power behind their threats. According to Andrew O'Shaughnessy, British West Indians could never have followed through with their threats of secession during the slavery debates because they depended too much on their monopoly trade with Britain and Britain's naval and military protection.<sup>16</sup> While they needed Britain's protection, they wanted autonomy and self-government; they therefore aimed to be equal yet subordinate to the mother country.<sup>17</sup>

Abolition entered the political sphere in Britain in the early 1780s. On 17 June 1783 Quakers presented their first anti-slavery petition to Parliament. Upon the petition being brought in, Lord North<sup>18</sup> responded: 'he could have no objection to the bringing up of the Petition... but he was still afraid that it would be found impossible to abolish the Slave Trade'.<sup>19</sup> The stated impossibility of abolition by the former Prime Minister provided the West Indian interest in Parliament with some breathing space and legitimated its position. Their property and wealth remained secure in the face of this limited challenge. More determined individuals however began organising and formalising their thoughts about colonial slavery and Britain's role in the international slave trade. In 1787 the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed. In response, in 1788 the Society of West India Planters and Merchants of London formed a sub-committee to counter the abolitionist movement. In 1789 they agreed on a specific plan to finance their opposition campaign. While the first wave of popular abolitionism in 1787-8 caught many members of the West Indian interest by surprise, Liverpool was able to put together a large counter-

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 34.

<sup>15</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 86. This decision allowed planters in 1831 to argue against the financial clause of a contentious Order in Council which demanded that colonies implement the stipulations of the order or face financial repercussions. See page 37 for more information.

<sup>16</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 247.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>18</sup> Lord Frederick North, second earl of Guilford, was MP for Banbury (1754-90) and Prime Minister (1770-82).

<sup>19</sup> *PHE* XXIII (London: T.C. Hansard, 1814), col. 1026.

petition.<sup>20</sup> These decisions and the timing of the planters' and merchants' strategy show that by the end of the 1780s they were actively responding to an organised abolitionist threat. Their funded, targeted campaigns shaped ideas about slavery and about the empire in the minds of the British public.<sup>21</sup>

## *II. 1789-1807 – Revolution, War, and Abolition*

International unrest, wars, and upheaval affected both the abolition and anti-abolition campaigns in the 1790s. The French Revolution led to growing concerns about dangerous or revolutionary political and social reforms affecting Britain and its social order. The subsequent overthrowing of the French monarchy, the existing social hierarchy, and religion in France in favour of abstract principles, rights, and freedoms discouraged reform in Britain and aided the anti-abolitionists. In late 1791 the French colony of St. Domingo experienced a large-scale slave rebellion that continued into 1792. Not only did this contribute to growing fears of further slave uprisings, but it again increased the need for British military and naval security in the colonies and strengthened the West Indians' argument for maintaining the African trade as a training ground for naval recruits. British and French abolitionists were blamed for inciting the rebellion through the use of inflammatory language about the slave trade and slavery and indirectly encouraging the slaves to fight against their oppressors and take back their freedom. Anti-abolitionist MPs accused abolitionists of inciting rebellion in the colonies by simply discussing the possibilities of abolition and emancipation, using emotion-laden language, and declaring it to be inhumane and unjust. A vivid visual representation of this argument is found in the 1792 print, *The Blind Enthusiast* (Figure 1) published by William Holland, in which William Wilberforce<sup>22</sup> vocalises abolitionist arguments that literally set the colonies on fire.<sup>23</sup> These accusations persisted throughout the slavery debates.

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<sup>20</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', *Parliamentary History*, 26 Supplement (2007), 49.

<sup>21</sup> Petley, 'Rethinking the Fall of the Planter Class', 9.

<sup>22</sup> Wilberforce, MP for Hull (1780-4), Yorkshire (1784-1812), and the pocket borough of Bramber, Sussex (1812-25), created the African Institution and led the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade in Parliament.

<sup>23</sup> See Section Four of Chapter Two for a detailed examination of proslavery artwork and prints, including a brief discussion of this print and the other two pieces in the set.



**Figure 1 -- *The Blind Enthusiast* published by William Holland, 1792** (image from the British Museum)

In 1792 William Wilberforce's first bill for abolition was passed in the House of Commons. In 1792-3 the West Indian interest in Britain made a concerted effort to counter the wave of abolitionist propaganda that accompanied Wilberforce's bill. According to the bill, Britain's participation in the slave trade was supposed to come to an end on 1 January 1796, but the Lords postponed the motion indefinitely by calling for a lengthy inquiry to be conducted.<sup>24</sup> Wilberforce had nine bills or proposed bills rejected throughout the decade. This reflects the lowered level of interest in and concern for abolition in relation to other international and social issues as well as growing conservatism in Britain in the wake of the French Revolution.

On 1 February 1793 France declared war on Britain.<sup>25</sup> This again led to a greater need for naval and military security in the colonies. It also forced Britain to rely more heavily on her colonial territories to strengthen her economy because she was cut off from a number of pre-existing trade routes with Europe. Relying on her colonies for raw materials, foodstuffs, and trade meant that MPs were more wary of upsetting the colonists through social reforms or dismantling their labour supply

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Farrell, "'Contrary to the Principles of Justice, Humanity and Sound Policy': The Slave Trade, Parliamentary Politics and the Abolition Act, 1807", in *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament and People*, ed. Stephen Farrell, Melanie Unwin, and James Walvin (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>25</sup> The Peace of Amiens brought peace between England and France on 25 March 1802, but war broke out again the following year.

through abolition. When France outlawed slavery in 1794 and extended citizenship to all men, anti-abolitionists were able to draw clear connections between abolitionism, dangerous revolutionary principles, and Jacobinism. By the mid-1790s the French Revolution was hindering abolitionist efforts in Britain.<sup>26</sup> British abolitionism declined in the ten years following 1794 because of fears of change, hostility to Jacobinism, and alarm over the slave revolt in St. Domingo.<sup>27</sup> Connections were drawn between abolitionist rhetoric and revolution in France that, in consequence, associated emancipation with violence.<sup>28</sup> When Napoleon Bonaparte reinstated slavery in France's colonies and France's participation in the slave trade in 1802, British anti-abolitionists could argue that France's dangerous experiment had failed and should serve as a warning to them all.

The uprising in St. Domingo continued to be upheld by anti-abolitionists as a clear example of the dangers of abolition and emancipation into the 1800s. The loss of the colony, its people, its land, and its produce to France served as a warning to other European empires. Anti-abolitionists stressed that the rebellion demonstrated the chaos, destruction, and bloodshed that would follow any mass emancipation of black slaves. Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy has calculated that there were up to seventy-five actual and aborted slave rebellions in the British West Indies prior to 1837.<sup>29</sup> In 1801 Toussaint Louverture outlawed slavery in St. Domingo and in 1804 Haiti was established on the island as an independent nation. Anti-abolitionists used Haiti as an example of the lost productivity and territory that could result from abolitionist principles and the failed attempts to conquer it as proof that it would be impossible to re-establish order in Britain's slave colonies if similar rebellions were incited by abolitionist fervour.

In 1805 a sub-committee of the London West India Planters and Merchants Committee<sup>30</sup> was re-established to produce anti-abolitionist propaganda to fight a growing surge in abolitionism in Britain. In 1806 a bill to prevent importing slaves into foreign territories and a slave ship restriction bill were passed in response to continuing war with France and the concern that trade between the colonies was helping the enemy's financial situation and production. Opposition to the 1806

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<sup>26</sup> Farrell, "'Contrary to the Principles of Justice, Humanity and Sound Policy': The Slave Trade, Parliamentary Politics and the Abolition Act, 1807", 145.

<sup>27</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade', *Past & Present*, 143 (1994), 165.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>29</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Sometimes referred to as the slave trade sub-committee.

foreign slave trade bill had centred on anti-abolitionist arguments that it was in fact abolition of slavery in disguise.<sup>31</sup> That same year Napoleon's 'continental system' banned Britain from almost every major port in Europe.<sup>32</sup> These decrees were not rescinded until April 1814. This forced Britons to look to their own empire for trading opportunities. For the first time abolition became an election issue in some districts. This development had the potential to hinder the West Indian interest's political prospects, security, and numbers in the Commons. As it turned out, an estimated twenty-five members of the West Indian interest and their supporters lost their seats in Parliament in the 1806 election.<sup>33</sup> In 1807 the Commons and the Lords passed a bill for abolition. Britain and the United States of America abolished slave-trading from 1808. These decisions ended any remaining feelings of confidence members of the West Indian interest may have had about the permanence of the institution of slavery in the British empire.

### *III. 1807-1823 – International Abolition and Domestic Unrest*

Between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in 1833 both the West Indian interest and abolitionist humanitarians viewed the slavery debate in terms of Parliament's right to dictate to the colonies.<sup>34</sup> This fundamental right came up numerous times in the slavery debates as members of the West Indian interest argued against further parliamentary interference with colonial practices and trade. Parliament had previously had a difficult time considering slave legislation for the West Indies because some of the colonies had their own assemblies and the right to make their own laws. They were able to ignore the colonists and abolish the slave trade in 1807 because it was deemed to be a matter of navigation and commerce.<sup>35</sup> Shortly after the decision to pass the bill for abolition, Hugh Percy<sup>36</sup> moved to bring in a bill to abolish slavery gradually. His motion was quickly defeated and abolitionists immediately condemned his actions. The West Indian interest, however, used this incident to support its previous claims that the abolition of the slave trade was simply the first part of a secret master plan to dismantle the entire

<sup>31</sup> Drescher, 'Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade', 142.

<sup>32</sup> David Beck Ryden, 'Sugar, Spirits, and Fodder: The London West India Interest and the Glut of 1807-15', *Atlantic Studies*, 9 (2012), 41.

<sup>33</sup> Farrell, "'Contrary to the Principles of Justice, Humanity and Sound Policy": The Slave Trade, Parliamentary Politics and the Abolition Act, 1807', 161.

<sup>34</sup> B.W. Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', *Historical Studies*, 13 (1967), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 87.

<sup>36</sup> MP for Buckingham (1806), Westminster (1806), Launceston (1806-7), and Northumberland (1807-12).

institution of slavery upon which Britain's colonial production and her colonists relied.

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the West Indian interest remained focused on preventing foreign intrusion into Britain's sugar markets.<sup>37</sup> It used the growing abolitionist sentiment in 1814 sparked off by the Treaty of Paris to protect itself from international competition.<sup>38</sup> This apparent switching of sides was in fact consistent with some MPs' and planters' pre-1807 arguments about the feasibility of abolition. They had argued that it was absurd for abolitionists to think that Britain acting alone on the abolition issue would make any noticeable change in the overall number of slaves being transported. Everyone would have to enact and enforce abolition if the abolitionists were going to achieve their goals. After 1807, then, the West Indian interest had a vested interest in persuading other nations to stop the trade because its own interests were being injured by its continuance. Both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists focused much of their efforts on stopping the international trade in slaves that continued to benefit Britain's European rivals. They frequently petitioned the king to work with the leaders of other trading nations to secure an international abolition as well as the right to search and seize vessels participating in the trade in international waters. They also requested that the king receive specific dates and enforce deadlines for the various trading nations to end their participation in the trade.

The abolition of Britain's participation in the slave trade injured Britain's West Indian planters' ability to maintain plantation production levels and handed over the slave trade and slave markets to their international competitors.<sup>39</sup> By 1814 Cuban and Brazilian sugar production was better than Jamaica's.<sup>40</sup> Further legislation followed which affected the slave trade, slavery, and colonial life. In 1811 participation in the slave trade was made a felony. This ended the ability of Britain's West Indian merchants and traders to participate legally in the international trade in slaves. In 1812 Trinidad became the first British colony forced to institute a slave registry to monitor the island's slave population. Debate over the registry bill raised the issue of whether the British government could impose its will on colonies possessing their own legislative assemblies.<sup>41</sup> Planters became suspicious that more colonies would be forced to take similar action and that the information on births,

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<sup>37</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 277.

<sup>38</sup> Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', 63.

<sup>39</sup> Ryden, 'Sugar, Spirits, and Fodder: The London West India Interest and the Glut of 1807-15', 46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 87.

deaths, and (illegal) importations could be used against them to support the small but growing campaign for emancipation. This move by the British government also incited hostility in the planters towards Parliament as they resented being dictated to by the mother country. In 1814 the West-Indian counter-propaganda sub-committee reformed to combat a surge in abolitionism and an anti-slavery petition campaign. In 1815 the foreign slave trade bill failed due to the alleged crime of illegal trading under foreign flags not being sufficiently proven to exist by the abolitionists. Throughout the debate on the bill the West Indian interest maintained that no such illegal trade existed and succeeded in convincing the House that the bill was unnecessary and groundless.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 meant the end of preferential treatment for the colonies and their produce as trade with Europe was reinstated. Abolitionists and anti-abolitionists expressed their anger at France's reinstatement of the slave trade. France's decision reinforced anti-abolitionist arguments that Britain's abolition alone would not be able to affect significantly the total number of Africans being transported to the Caribbean colonies and that Britain would lose out financially to their European neighbours who continued to participate in and prosper from the trade. France abolished the slave trade again in 1817. In 1818, however, Britain failed to obtain an international agreement to their right to search ships in international waters. This ruling confirmed anti-abolitionist beliefs that abolition would not succeed without international cooperation.

Social unrest and rioting took place across Britain in the 1810s. These included Luddite activity between 1811 and 1816, the Corn Law riots between 1812 and 1815, the Spa Field Riots in 1816, reform agitation between 1816 and 1820, and 'Peterloo' in 1819.<sup>42</sup> Edward Royle has argued that it was the practice of enclosure, deteriorating working conditions, and poverty that were the long-term causes of rural rioting during this period.<sup>43</sup> During the same years low wages, bad trade, and high taxes encouraged industrial action and strikes by workers.<sup>44</sup> These uprisings caused concerns within the political elite and encouraged a conservative reaction against political and social reforms. This cautious behaviour provided the anti-abolitionists with some security and stability for much of the decade that followed the slave registry debates.

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<sup>42</sup> Joseph Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 200.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 83.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

#### IV. 1823-1833 – Resolutions, Revolutions, and Emancipation

The abolition of slavery campaign became a formal, organised threat to the West Indian interest in Britain in 1823. In that year the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery was founded. In response a West-Indian counter-propaganda sub-committee spent £1000 on newspaper articles and pamphlet propaganda to defend the institution of slavery in the colonies.<sup>45</sup> Government ministers in London began to look more closely at colonial laws, particularly those regarding slavery, and were more willing to threaten the colonists with the use of the royal veto to reject local legislation because of increasing pressure from the abolitionists.<sup>46</sup> In 1823 Parliament passed George Canning's<sup>47</sup> resolutions for ameliorating plantation life and the slave system in the colonies.<sup>48</sup> Abolitionist leaders had successfully argued that the colonial assemblies would not act to improve significantly or end colonial slavery on their own. This belief informed the 1823 resolutions for amelioration that were meant to give the colonies strong recommendations without the threat of enforcement or a defined timeline for visible improvement. These resolutions angered the majority of British slaveholders.<sup>49</sup> They were particularly incensed that they were being asked to risk their property and prospects without there being a clearly defined system of compensation in place.<sup>50</sup> The resolutions implied that British West Indians were not adequately caring for their slaves, nor were they expected to take any steps to better the working and living conditions of their slaves on their own initiative. Abolitionists were also disappointed with the resolutions because their adoption was not to be strictly enforced within a specified timeframe. Meanwhile, the existence of these resolutions allowed the West Indian interest to argue against further interference by Parliament in the running of the colonies while the colonists implemented these suggestions.

<sup>45</sup> David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991), 53-5.

<sup>46</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> MP for Newtown Isle of Wight (1793-6 and 1806-7), Wendover (1796-1802), Tralee (1802-6), Hastings (1807-12), Liverpool (1812-22), Harwich (1823-6), Newport Isle of Wight (1826-7), and Seaford (1827). Canning was a friend of plantation owner Charles Rose Ellis. See Derek Beales, 'Canning, George (1770-1827)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4556, accessed 3 December 2012].

<sup>48</sup> Canning proposed a number of reforms, including providing religious instruction, ending Sunday markets and labour, admitting slave testimony in court, legalising marriage between slaves, securing the slaves' property, removing obstructions to manumission, preventing the separation of enslaved families through sale, limiting corporal punishment, and establishing banks for the slaves' savings. These resolutions inspired a number of heated debates in Parliament and will be referred to numerous times in Chapters Four and Five during discussions of anti-abolitionist argument and rhetoric in Parliament.

<sup>49</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment* (1976. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 105.

Throughout the slavery debate anti-abolitionists continued to warn against dictating to the colonies for fear of a large-scale rebellion and the risk that the colonies might give their allegiance to the United States or another foreign power. The 1823 resolutions had been a compromise between abolitionists and the West Indian interest that granted the colonies time to implement the changes Parliament desired without requiring Parliament to dictate to those colonies with their own assemblies. As the decade unfolded, however, abolitionists and the majority of MPs were dissatisfied with the progress the colonies were making towards implementing these resolutions. Jamaica's revised slave code was rejected by Parliament in 1826, angering the colonists. The colonists rejected the interference of the Colonial Office as it infringed upon what they believed to be their right to self-regulation.<sup>51</sup> The Colonial Office could send Orders in Council to the crown colonies, but could only recommend legislation to the colonial assemblies. After the resolutions of 1823 were sent abroad the Colonial Office spent eight years trying to work with the colonists; when their attempts failed abolitionist MPs increased the pressure for abolition.<sup>52</sup>

The Order in Council of 1831 called for reforms similar to those in the 1823 resolutions, but these were to be enacted immediately in the crown colonies.<sup>53</sup> Colonies with their own legislatures would receive preferential sugar duties upon adopting them.<sup>54</sup> This contentious element of the order led to protests in the colonial legislatures, particularly in Jamaica, and growing white dissent overall in the colonies.<sup>55</sup> It caused tension and anger among the colonists who believed their attempts at amelioration were not given sufficient credit or were being unreasonably rushed. It also caused divisions between crown and legislative colonies as crown colonies had to implement the orders immediately. Some of the stipulations contained within the orders were deemed unreasonable or unsuitable to the plantation system, the environment, and the slaves' actual needs.<sup>56</sup> This allowed planters to argue that the British government was unaware of actual plantation conditions and the slaves' requirements.

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<sup>51</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Reckford, 'IV. The Colonial Office and the Abolition of Slavery', *The Historical Journal*, 14 (1971), 723.

<sup>53</sup> The Order in Council included detailed requirements, from the number of hours a slave could work per day (less than those in some English factories), to the type of clothing to be provided (including European-style hobnailed shoes), to how often males should receive new razors (annually).

<sup>54</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 97-8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-100.

<sup>56</sup> These orders sparked particularly angry, heated responses in Parliament, some of which will be analysed in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

Large-scale slave revolts in the colonies during this period both helped and hindered the anti-abolitionist cause. Barbados experienced a large slave riot in 1816, a large slave revolt took place in Demerara in 1823 and in 1831-2 a large slave revolt known as the 'Baptist War' broke out in Jamaica. The West Indian interest frequently blamed abolitionists, and in particular their emotionally-charged rhetoric and continual calls for reform and emancipation, for inciting the slaves to revolt. The Jamaican revolt intensified the distrust colonists had of the abolitionists and missionaries working in the colonies. Following the rebellion in Jamaica a paramilitary campaign was mounted in the colony to reassert the slaveholders' authority, promote the colonists' interests, and deter anti-slavery missionaries influencing the colony's slaves. White colonists had blamed the uprising on abolitionist propaganda.<sup>57</sup> The St. Ann branch of the Colonial Church Union (CCU), founded in 1832, sought to raise funds to produce and publish pro-colonial reports in the British press and to seek compensation for losses incurred during the rebellion by destroying mission property.<sup>58</sup> In December 1832 a Royal Proclamation declared the organisation illegal. The colonists' actions damaged the image and credibility of the West Indian colonists at a crucial point in the slavery debate.<sup>59</sup>

There was also a great deal of instability within Britain in the early 1830s. The country experienced rapid population growth, agricultural depression, and economic depression.<sup>60</sup> A cholera epidemic swept through Europe, eventually reaching Britain in the late spring of 1832.<sup>61</sup> George IV died on 26 June 1830. Parliamentary reform and slave emancipation became important issues in the lead up to the election that followed. Anti-abolitionist MPs commented on the unfair situation on which members of the West Indian interest and their sympathisers were placed when called upon to make a pledge for emancipation as part of the contest for seats in the election. There was also a great deal of concern about the stability of the country and the potential for uprisings, mass revolts, riots, and even revolution in Britain between 1830 and 1832. 1830 witnessed a wave of revolutions sweeping across Europe, affecting France, Poland, Switzerland and Belgium and the Netherlands directly, and affecting surrounding territories indirectly. On 31 July

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<sup>57</sup> Christer Petley, 'Slavery, Emancipation and the Creole World View of Jamaican Colonists, 1800-1834', *Slavery & Abolition*, 26 (2005), 103.

<sup>58</sup> They saw themselves as patriots who were loyal to the Crown but intent on defending their constitutional rights and the security and prosperity of the colony. See Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 120.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>60</sup> Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Pearce, *Reform! The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), 206.

1830, while many electoral contests were still undecided, news reached Britain of an uprising in Paris.<sup>62</sup> France was experiencing another revolution during which the Bourbons were again overthrown. Having been linked to the reestablishment of the French monarchy after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, concern grew that the duke of Wellington's support and leadership abilities might be affected by the revolution.<sup>63</sup> He declared himself to be against any reform, but there was growing excitement and support for reform across the country. Londoners hailed the French and spoke about following the Parisians' lead.<sup>64</sup> There was also a Belgian revolt against Dutch rule that September. The threat of an uprising in London led to the mustering of troops, which in turn increased fears among civilians.<sup>65</sup> In the election, influenced by the French revolution and issues of Catholic and slave emancipation, the Tory government lost an estimated thirty to fifty seats.<sup>66</sup> The duke resigned on 18 November. Earl Grey then formed a new government committed to reform.<sup>67</sup>

The story of parliamentary reform in the early 1830s demonstrates the growing influence of the British public on parliamentary decisions. As Edward Pearce has pointed out, reform had been discussed for over fifty years, particularly revolving around the rotten boroughs and the restricted franchise, and most Britons accepted that some form of change was necessary.<sup>68</sup> New political unions were set up across the country to articulate the public's views (perhaps most notably in unrepresented or underrepresented urban centres) and advance the push for reforms.<sup>69</sup> Over 120 political associations calling themselves unions were established between 1830 and 1832.<sup>70</sup> They were viewed as representatives of the people who were loyal to the monarch but against the Lords.<sup>71</sup> These unions became the clearest expression of the public's views on reform and convinced politicians that some reforms needed to take place.<sup>72</sup> The first bill for reform was defeated in March 1831. Some Tory peers viewed the latest French revolution as an example of the

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<sup>62</sup> Roland Quinault, 'The French Revolution of 1830 and Parliamentary Reform', *History*, 79 (1994), 378.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>68</sup> Pearce, *Reform! The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act*, 69.

<sup>69</sup> Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, 71.

<sup>70</sup> Nancy D. LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics, and the Great Reform Act of 1832*

(Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), 160-1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

dangers that could follow modest parliamentary reforms.<sup>73</sup> Grey and a number of other peers, however, feared that violence would be the result of the House not listening to public opinion.<sup>74</sup> In October 1831 demonstrations and violence followed the rejection of Grey's second bill for reform by the House of Lords.<sup>75</sup> There were attacks, pillaging, riots, mob violence, deaths, and a gaol was attacked.<sup>76</sup> The political unions' proposals to begin conducting military-style drills prompted a Royal Proclamation against the unions in December.<sup>77</sup> Nancy LoPatin has argued that William IV was afraid that the unions would be able to spark a revolution if the House of Lords did not pass the second bill for reform.<sup>78</sup>

The second bill, having been passed by the House of Commons, arrived at the House of Lords on 26 March 1832. In May 1832 Lyndhurst's motion for the bill to be postponed to consider a clause on disenfranchisement was passed 151 to 116.<sup>79</sup> Grey and his government submitted their resignations to the king after failing to convince William IV to create fifty or sixty new peers. Union members began arming themselves.<sup>80</sup> The duke of Wellington was asked to create a government (one which would have to try to implement some form of reform). The unions, however, were committed to supporting the Whig government. To help prevent the duke and the Tories from regaining control of the government, a few unions committed to staging uprisings, but most opted for economic action by encouraging a run on the banks and the withholding of taxes.<sup>81</sup> While they wanted to maintain order, the unions hinted that things could get out-of-hand. The threat of revolution was made clear, but there is debate about whether this was a genuine threat or the calculated use of revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> Grey and his ministry returned to power

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<sup>73</sup> Pearce, *Reform! The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act*, 184.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-4.

<sup>75</sup> Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, 72-3.

<sup>76</sup> Malcolm I. Thomis and Peter Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1784-1848* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977), 87.

<sup>77</sup> Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, 78.

<sup>78</sup> LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics, and the Great Reform Act of 1832*, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Pearce, *Reform! The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act*, 274-5.

<sup>80</sup> Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1784-1848*, 90.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-2.

<sup>82</sup> For example, while the revolution might have seemed very real to contemporaries, Nancy LoPatin has concluded that accusations of union members organising and arming themselves for revolution were unfounded. See LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics, and the Great Reform Act of 1832*, 159. Malcolm Thomis and Peter Holt have suggested that the threat of revolution was actually a successful middle class campaign and a 'bluff'. See Thomis and Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1784-1848*, 97-9. Joseph Hamburger found that even those who used the most revolutionary language publicly did not believe there would be a revolution. See Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution*, 114-25. Edward Royle has argued that, while between 1830 and 1832 there was a revolutionary situation in Britain (one which, if in France, would have resulted in revolution), the

ten days later. On 4 June the bill passed the House of Lords on the third reading, 106 to 22, and it received royal assent on 7 June. The Reform Act abolished the worst rotten boroughs and standardised and extended the franchise. This decreased the power of the Lords and the monarchy that were traditionally more conservative and cautious regarding reform. It also negatively affected the power, influence, and total number of seats of MPs in Parliament with an interest in the West Indies. The entire process demonstrated the importance of public opinion in the maintenance of stability in and outside of Westminster. With a wider franchise and the role of popular opinion in creating legislation now firmly established, the abolition movement was able to move forward with far less resistance in Parliament.

Following the reform bill of 1832, the West Indian interest's power in Parliament decreased as did its ability to defend the need for slaves in the colonies. The Colonial Office was significantly less willing to meet with slavery supporters during the final slavery debates of 1833.<sup>83</sup> The planters were, however, able to argue convincingly that they were entitled to financial compensation in return for the loss of their property in slaves. Between late February and early March 1833 the West Indian interest demanded that, as part of an agreement regarding emancipation, slaves were to be prevented from leaving the plantations for a set period of time and pressed for the proposed amount of compensation to be raised from £10 million to £30 million.<sup>84</sup> Negotiations stopped when Lord Howick,<sup>85</sup> the parliamentary undersecretary and the son of Prime Minister, Earl Grey, turned down their demands. Edward Stanley,<sup>86</sup> however, continued to search for a compromise.

The West India Committee intended to block the plan for emancipation by attacking its moral and legal basis, but after negotiating the amount and type of compensation in May 1833, it privately urged Stanley to bring forth the new plan in Parliament.<sup>87</sup> The West Indian interest rejected Stanley's offer of a £15 million loan as compensation and held daily meetings to draft its counter-proposal. On 7 June

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Reform Act of 1832 was a constitutional revolution that allowed the crisis to be peacefully resolved. See Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, 88-9.

<sup>83</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 139.

<sup>84</sup> Izhak Gross, 'The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832-3', *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), 69.

<sup>85</sup> Henry Grey, third Earl Grey, was MP for Winchelsea (1826-30), Higham Ferrers (1830-1), Northumberland (1831-2), Northumberland North (1832-41) and Sunderland (1841-5). He served as Under-Secretary of State for War and Colonies (1830-33).

<sup>86</sup> Stanley, fourteenth Earl of Derby was MP for Stockbridge (1822-6), Preston (1826-30), Windsor (1831-2), and North Lancashire (1833-44). He also held the offices of Prime Minister and Under-Secretary for the Colonies and served in the Colonial Office.

<sup>87</sup> Gross, 'The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832-3', 73-4.

1833 it unanimously adopted two resolutions: the first was for a £20 million gift to colonial proprietors that would satisfy mortgagees and creditors in England; the second was for a loan of an additional £10 million to secure colonial property that would allow the planters to have continued access to credit and to obtain necessary goods.<sup>88</sup> West Indian MPs reiterated to the Colonial Office that the sugar colonies were vital to the empire and were worth £30 million.<sup>89</sup> On 10 June the government replied, promising to grant £20 million in compensation to the West Indian proprietors; this was agreed upon by a vote of 286 to seventy-seven on 11 June.<sup>90</sup> The amount of compensation was initially based upon transaction records from the 1820s. Using these records and slave population totals, an average cost per slave was assessed and the owners compensated for a percentage of their worth. The compensation scheme also took into account the devaluation of the slaves' worth over the prior twelve years, the fewer hours apprentices would work after emancipation, and the financial loss of any children born to slave women who would be automatically freed.<sup>91</sup> Apprenticeship would be the period between slavery and emancipation that involved shorter workdays, remuneration, and education for former slaves provided they remained with their existing employers. It was terminated in 1838, two years earlier than originally planned, due to extra-parliamentary pressure. Robert John Buxton<sup>92</sup> moved for apprenticeship to expire in 1836 rather than 1840, but his motion was defeated by 206 votes to eighty-nine.<sup>93</sup> By increasing the levels of compensation for the slaveholders and halving the length of apprenticeship, Stanley was able to find a suitable compromise and achieve emancipation. According to Nicholas Draper's assessment, compensation was the key to the dismantling of slavery.<sup>94</sup> It allowed Stanley to secure the cooperation of the West Indian interest, or at least of those members of the interest who possessed slaves.

Parliament voted to emancipate Britain's 800,000 West Indian slaves of African descent from 1 August 1834. The act granted West Indian planters and

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<sup>88</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, 'The West India Sugar Crisis and British Slave Emancipation, 1830-1833', *The Journal of Economic History*, 21 (1961), 547.

<sup>89</sup> Gross, 'The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832-3', 74.

<sup>90</sup> Sheridan, 'The West India Sugar Crisis and British Slave Emancipation, 1830-1833', 547.

<sup>91</sup> For a brief summary of the calculations and payouts, see David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186.

<sup>92</sup> MP for Thetford (1790-96) and Great Bedwin (1797-1806).

<sup>93</sup> Gross, 'The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832-3', 78.

<sup>94</sup> Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 273.

merchants an unprecedented £20 million in compensation and secured a continuing supply of labour through an apprenticeship scheme that was meant to last until 1840.<sup>95</sup> William A. Green has argued that the amount of compensation was so great because of concerns over property rights.<sup>96</sup> Landowners dominated the Government and they would have been risking their own rights to property ownership if they had passed the act without compensation. This is because, without compensation, abolition would have been an act of Parliament that confiscated millions of pounds worth of property and set a dangerous precedent.<sup>97</sup> The granting of compensation showed a widespread acceptance in Parliament that slaves were property and that the planters and merchants were likely to be subjected to financial losses by emancipation. The West Indian interest secured these important elements because the government was willing to compromise and work with it to secure an eventual emancipation.

## 2. The West Indian Interest in Britain

The West Indian interest in Britain in the late eighteenth century was a large, diverse, wealthy, and influential collection of individuals and families with a number of different connections to the slave trade and slavery. It included merchants, traders, planters, shipbuilders, MPs of major slave ports, paid colonial agents, family members of plantation owners, mortgagees, absentees, and colonists. Their interests in the trade and in slavery varied due to their positions. Their opinions on slavery and abolition also diverged depending on their individual circumstances. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, their wealth and way of life were under sustained attack by abolitionist forces. Many came together to fight to protect themselves, their careers, and their property.

West Indian planters, their families, and their descendants were conspicuously rich and influential, with connections even to the British aristocracy. They travelled, attended good schools in England,<sup>98</sup> and intermarried with the British nobility and gentry.<sup>99</sup> They held impressive landed estates across the British countryside, demonstrating their prosperity and close ties to Britain in the later

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<sup>95</sup> Apprenticeship ended in 1838.

<sup>96</sup> Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment*, 120-1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>98</sup> They usually attended Oxford or Cambridge for their university education and the Inns of Court for law. See O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 21-2.

<sup>99</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 19.

eighteenth century.<sup>100</sup> The planters were disliked by members of Britain's upper classes because of their great wealth and lack of good lineage.<sup>101</sup> Their affluence confirmed the financial benefits of participating in the slave trade and using slave labour. It made the colonies appear worthy of Britain's military and economic protection, but this wealth also aroused suspicion.<sup>102</sup>

A small proportion of West Indian proprietors possessed the majority of the wealth in the islands.<sup>103</sup> Planters rarely divided their estates and relied instead on primogeniture and entails to maintain the size of their plantations over generations.<sup>104</sup> There could be many more slaveholders than landowners in a colony, but most slaveholders without their own plantations held fewer than fifty slaves.<sup>105</sup> Slave ownership extended far beyond those who participated in West Indian societies in Britain. It was passed along directly, through inheritance and marriage settlements, and indirectly, through annuities and legacies.<sup>106</sup> Slave ownership also spanned a wide political spectrum, including Whigs and Tories, reformers, radicals, and 'Ultras', although the majority of those who later received compensation were Tories.<sup>107</sup> Women could also inherit slaves and gain financial independence by exploiting their labour, but they faced greater restrictions than male slaveholders in the colonies.<sup>108</sup>

West Indians frequently applied to Parliament for aid in periods of distress and consequently received packages of financial assistance. Their claims of distress could be due to a variety of factors including devastating tropical storms, wartime trade restrictions, and rebellions. The true level of distress in the British West Indies at the time of emancipation is difficult to assess because both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists had an interest in depicting a negative situation in the colonies.<sup>109</sup> According to Richard B. Sheridan, the British West Indies had been in distress for over a decade by the time emancipation passed. Causes of distress in the West Indies by 1830 included restrictions on Anglo-American trade, the failure of the British market to expand relative to West Indian sugar production and imports, and the

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<sup>100</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 11-2.

<sup>101</sup> Burnard, 'Et in Arcadia Ego: West Indian Planters in Glory, 1674-1784', 19.

<sup>102</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 20.

<sup>103</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 27.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Petley, 'Slavery, Emancipation and the Creole World View of Jamaican Colonists, 1800-1834', 97.

<sup>106</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>108</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 20.

<sup>109</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 100.

ending of the slave trade in 1807.<sup>110</sup> The value of West Indian estates diminished significantly in the 1830s, leaving merchants, tradesmen, brokers, sugar refiners, absentees, and resident planters in debt.<sup>111</sup> Although the value of their plantations was depreciating, however, many planters were forced to hold on to their land and slaves due to a lack of buyers.<sup>112</sup>

Owning property in the West Indies, but maintaining one's residence in Britain, was common amongst wealthier planters in the early nineteenth century. Trevor Burnard has usefully defined an absentee as someone who was not resident in the place where he or she had an economic interest and yet depended on that place for an important portion of his or her income.<sup>113</sup> There were many types of absentees, including those who were sent to Britain for their education and who never returned to the colonies, those who moved to England but kept close ties to the colonies, and those who inherited plantations but never travelled to the West Indies.<sup>114</sup> Contemporaries believed that absenteeism was a widespread problem with a negative impact on the colonies.<sup>115</sup> Absenteeism, however, gave colonists a connection to and influence in Britain and, in particular, in London.<sup>116</sup> The large absentee population in London was able to influence political decisions in Parliament affecting the West Indies for much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

By 1833 most British West Indian sugar estate owners were absentees living in London.<sup>117</sup> Most absentees had never lived in the colonies, had no farming or agricultural experience, and had never encountered a slave.<sup>118</sup> Absenteeism restricted a planter's authority and his ability to implement changes.<sup>119</sup> Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy has argued that absenteeism contributed to a lack of commitment to providing and improving the infrastructure and education in the West Indies.<sup>120</sup> This distance, however, could also limit their responsibility to produce amelioration in the

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<sup>110</sup> Sheridan, 'The West India Sugar Crisis and British Slave Emancipation, 1830-1833', 540.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Trevor Burnard, 'Passengers Only: The extent and significance of absenteeism in eighteenth-century Jamaica', *Atlantic Studies*, 1 (2004), 181.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-6.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>116</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 32.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment*, 63.

<sup>119</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 41.

<sup>120</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 5.

colonies and could therefore be used to defend them against charges of inaction and apathy in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>121</sup>

### 3. West Indian Organisations in Britain

Groups of West Indians with shared interests came together in the eighteenth century to socialise and promote the interests of the colonists in public and in Parliament. Major West Indian associations were formed in London, Liverpool, Bristol, and Glasgow.<sup>122</sup> As popular support grew for abolition, these societies joined forces, formalised their activities, and devoted more time and money to publishing anti-abolitionist propaganda, organising petitions, supporting colonial agents and West Indian MPs in Parliament, and generally defending themselves against abolitionists' attacks in print and at Westminster. These organisations allowed members of the West Indian interest to formalise their demands and complaints and organise their strategies to compete with abolition's growing popularity in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

West Indians in Britain began to organise in the early-to-mid-eighteenth century to promote their own interests in Parliament. West Indian merchants in London formed 'The West Indian Merchants' and the 'Committee of West Indian Merchants' in the 1760s, which later evolved into 'The Society of West Indian Merchants'.<sup>123</sup> The Society was established at a time when Britain's changing colonial policies were affecting the West Indian islands' economic interests.<sup>124</sup> They began to use the press in their campaigns as early as 1763.<sup>125</sup> The merchants were initially focused on trade, and the two groups (planters and merchants) occasionally had different interests, but in the 1770s both worked to promote the sugar economy.<sup>126</sup> They held infrequent joint meetings as early as 1772.<sup>127</sup> This coalition

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<sup>121</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 54.

<sup>122</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, Bristol was Britain's leading outport for sugar imports, Liverpool was the major outport for the slave trade, and Glasgow was the major outport for tobacco. See Kenneth Morgan, 'Bristol West India Merchants in the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series 3 (1993), 187.

<sup>123</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 36.

<sup>124</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 77-8.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>126</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 35-6.

<sup>127</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 80.

developed into a Standing Committee in 1782-3 as the revolutionary war was coming to an end.<sup>128</sup>

A 'Planters' Club' was also formed in London in the first half of the eighteenth century and, while it primarily served as a social club, its members also lobbied Parliament on issues concerning the West Indian interest.<sup>129</sup> Lord Penrhyn<sup>130</sup> chaired the Planters' Club and became the chairman of the 'Society of West India Planters and Merchants'<sup>131</sup> which was a working group of the merchants' committee.<sup>132</sup> Because of the large absentee population living in London and the value of the island's sugar to Britain's trade, Jamaican planters and merchants dominated the Society.<sup>133</sup> The Chair, Lord Penrhyn, possessed 8000 acres of land and 600 slaves in Jamaica, but lived as an absentee land and slave owner in Britain, never returning to Jamaica after being brought to England as an infant.<sup>134</sup> His grandfather, Sir Samuel Pennant, served as lord mayor of London in 1749 until his death in 1750 and had owned substantial plantations in Jamaica.<sup>135</sup> Penrhyn was the first person to rise and speak in the Commons after Wilberforce introduced his bill for abolition on 12 May 1789. By 1792 the major spokesmen for the slave trade in the Commons, Lord Penrhyn, Benjamin Vaughan,<sup>136</sup> Sir William Young,<sup>137</sup> William Dickinson,<sup>138</sup> and James Baillie,<sup>139</sup> were all members of the Society of West India Planters and Merchants.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> It is unclear when the Planters Club was formally established, but it is thought to have occurred in the 1730s or 1740s.

<sup>130</sup> Richard Pennant (c. 1737-1808), MP for Petersfield, Hampshire (1761-1767) and Liverpool (1767-80 and 1784-90).

<sup>131</sup> Later known as the Committee of West India Planters and Merchants.

<sup>132</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 36.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>135</sup> Jean Lindsay, 'Pennant, Richard, Baron Penrhyn (c.1737-1808)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21859, accessed 3 Nov 2011].

<sup>136</sup> MP for Calne (1792-96) and a West Indian merchant born in Jamaica. See Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 5, 442-3.

<sup>137</sup> MP for St. Mawes, Cornwall (1784-1806) and Buckingham (1806 to 1807). Young was a West Indian proprietor with 1300 slaves and an important lobbyist for the West Indian interest in Parliament. He had inherited four sugar estates from his father in 1788 and his marriage settlement in 1793 included an estate in St. Vincent with 200 slaves. His father was Sir William Young, Lieutenant Governor of Dominica and Tobago. His family also had financial interests in Tobago, Antigua, and St. Vincent. Young served as agent for St Vincent from 1795 to 1802 to Parliament and as Governor of Tobago from February 1807 until his death in 1815. He presented a petition in Parliament against abolition from West Indian merchants on 25 February 1794. See Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 79-80.

<sup>138</sup> MP for Great Marlow (1768-1774), Rye (1777-90), and Somerset (1796-1806).

<sup>139</sup> Agent for Grenada; MP for Horsham (1792-93); co-owned land in St. Vincent with two MPs. See Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 3, 109-10

<sup>140</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 194.

The Society of West India Planters and Merchants was formed to apply constant pressure on the government to maintain the West Indian interest's privileged position. It funded its activities via a levy raised on imported West Indian produce.<sup>141</sup> A sub-committee of the Society was formed on 7 February 1788 to oppose the abolitionists.<sup>142</sup> On 24 April 1789 the Society set up a fund to finance its campaign to oppose abolition and to prepare a petition to Parliament.<sup>143</sup> In 1792 the Society enlarged its sub-committee and gave it the new task of circulating publications in defence of the colonies.<sup>144</sup> Publication numbers peaked in 1792 with a large number of pieces focusing on the destruction in St. Domingo.<sup>145</sup> The West India Committee in London later revived its propaganda subcommittee in 1805 in response to a surge in popular support for abolition.<sup>146</sup> Because of these efforts and their presence in Parliament the Society became the main defender of planter rights. They published pamphlets, drafted petitions, and lobbied MPs and the government.<sup>147</sup> The Society focused on using economic arguments and logic to try to persuade the public and politicians to support its cause.<sup>148</sup> Members used complex statistical calculations in their arguments more often than the abolitionists. Seymour Drescher has argued that their arguments regarding demography might have been convincing in the 1830s if their audiences were not already distracted by anti-slavery rallies and petitions, slave revolts, and MPs' pledges to vote for emancipation.<sup>149</sup>

The minutes of London's Society of West India Planters and Merchants note 280 meetings between 1785 and 1807, but it is likely that more were held during busy periods that were not recorded.<sup>150</sup> More than sixty individuals on average attended the Society's General Meetings. Attendees included absentees, merchants, politicians, and, on one occasion (14 February 1805), the duke of Clarence.<sup>151</sup> More

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<sup>141</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 33.

<sup>142</sup> Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', 50.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>145</sup> Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', 56-7.

<sup>146</sup> Drescher, 'Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade', 140.

<sup>147</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 37.

<sup>148</sup> Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 44.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5. William Henry, the duke of Clarence and of St. Andrews (1765-1837), opposed abolition and emancipation. His maiden speech reflected his and his family's opposition to the proposed abolition of the slave trade and his opinion did not change during his time in the House of Lords. As King William IV (1830-7) he continued to sympathise with the slaveholders. It was during his reign, however, that the bill for emancipation passed. See Michael Brock, 'William IV (1765-

than two-thirds of the meetings were held between January and June each year when Parliament was in session, reflecting the Society's endeavours to lobby the legislature.<sup>152</sup> Men with military (particularly naval) backgrounds and no obvious connection to the trade also attended Committee meetings. This may have been because of personal experiences travelling and working overseas, familial connections that have gone unrecognised, or genuine curiosity about the West Indian position. According to newspaper reports one meeting in April 1832 attracted 6000 attendees.<sup>153</sup> Liverpool, Bristol, and Glasgow also had West India Associations. Of these three only Bristol's worked with London's.<sup>154</sup>

The Society of West India Planters and Merchants discussed all areas of sugar policy including military protection, security, trade, taxation, the sugar market, agricultural practices, and abolition.<sup>155</sup> Merchant members focused on warehousing and the distribution of muscovado in London.<sup>156</sup> Access to markets and government subsidies dominated meeting agendas. The Society resolved to seek open trade with the United States in April and November 1783 and it petitioned the king in 1784.<sup>157</sup> Their petitions were printed in newspapers along with articles they wrote explaining and defending their position.<sup>158</sup> After the American war, the planters publicly expressed their anger about its cost and futility and the trade restrictions that resulted from it.<sup>159</sup> Taxes on the sugar industry rose seven times during the era of abolition.<sup>160</sup> Members of the West Indian interest persuaded Parliament to grant them some tax relief from 1799 to April 1800.<sup>161</sup> The Society repeatedly argued for more protection to prevent foreigners from entering the British market, but it also wanted trade restrictions to be relaxed.<sup>162</sup>

Most MPs with interests in the West Indies allowed Jamaican planters and London merchants to represent their views in Parliament; Glasgow and Liverpool merchants rarely spoke out during the debates.<sup>163</sup> William Robert Keith Douglas<sup>164</sup>

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1837', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29451, accessed 3 December 2012]

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-1.

<sup>153</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 34.

<sup>154</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 7.

<sup>155</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 36-7.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>157</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 240.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>160</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 116-7.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>163</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 8.

joined London's West India Planters and Merchants Committee in 1824 and served as the Committee's spokesman from 1829. In 1821 Keith Douglas had married the daughter of Walter Irvine, a West Indian planter and London merchant, and was entrusted with his Tobago plantations, Buccoo and Woodlands.<sup>165</sup> He had served as the colonial agent for Tobago from 1823 to 1826. As spokesmen for the London Committee, Keith Douglas was one of (if not the most) vocal supporter of compensation and the need to delay abolition in Parliament.

While London's Committee has received a great deal of attention from historians, Glasgow's West India Association remains under-discussed. Iain Whyte, however, has argued that contemporaries viewed Glasgow's Association as the most powerful West Indian society outside London.<sup>166</sup> Glasgow West Indian merchants were wealthy, politically active, and influential, particularly prior to the Burgh Reform Act of 1833 which significantly widened the franchise.<sup>167</sup> The first meeting of the Glasgow West India Association took place on 22 October 1807 at the Tontine Tavern in Glasgow. In attendance were approximately twenty planters and merchants with interests in the West Indies. At this first meeting they unanimously resolved:

That much inconvenience having been felt, and much injury sustained by the want of mutual co-operation in matters affecting the general interests of the Trade, it was an object of great importance that the different Planters and Merchants connected therewith in this Place should form themselves into a Public Association for the protection of their various rights, privileges and interests.<sup>168</sup>

By 1808 the association had twenty-eight company members and forty-three individual members who all paid an annual subscription (twenty-five guineas for company members and five for individuals).<sup>169</sup> Family and business ties connected many of the Association's members over the years.<sup>170</sup> The association also received support from the *Glasgow Courier* under the editorship of James MacQueen.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> MP for Dumfries Burghs (1812-32).

<sup>165</sup> See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-32*, vol. 4, 945-53.

<sup>166</sup> Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838*, 146.

<sup>167</sup> Anthony Cooke, 'An Elite Revisited: Glasgow West India Merchants, 1783-1833', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 32 (2012), 138.

<sup>168</sup> *Records of the Glasgow West India Association 1807-1969 from the Mitchell Library, Glasgow* (n.d.), n.p.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Cooke, 'An Elite Revisited: Glasgow West India Merchants, 1783-1833', 132.

<sup>171</sup> MacQueen was an outspoken critic of the British anti-slavery movement and the abolitionists in the 1820s and 1830s. He had been a plantation overseer in Grenada and became the editor of the *Glasgow Courier* in the mid-1810s, a post he held until 1830. MacQueen used the *Courier* to stage debates on slavery that were slanted in the anti-abolitionists' favour and received financial support from the West Indian colonists to continue his efforts. See David Lambert, 'The "Glasgow King of

West Indian planters and merchants in Glasgow were united in their opposition to emancipation and worked together to fight for compensation for absentees in Britain and slaveholding colonists.<sup>172</sup>

Between 1807 and 1833 the Association addressed a number of issues of concern to its members. These included infrastructure, agricultural produce, slavery, legal issues, trade and taxation, committee work, and other general concerns of the West Indian interest. Their discussions specifically relating to colonial slavery revolved around the foreign slave trade, educating slaves, the African Institution, improving and emancipating slaves, misrepresenting slaves, potential problems following abolition, property and free labour (including ensuring the continuance of production and using other potential labourers), the slave population, the origins of colonial slavery, and compensation. The Association sent representatives and petitions to Parliament (records indicate that petitions were sent in 1826, 1828, 1830, and 1833), pleaded on behalf of the colonists, and paid £50 to have an agent in London's Society.<sup>173</sup>

The creation and submission of anti-abolition petitions to Parliament never approached the scale or frequency of anti-slavery petitions in the era of abolition. Three anti-abolitionist groups often petitioned Parliament between 1787 and 1807: merchants, traders, ship owners, and ship manufacturers; absentee planters and merchants; and merchants, mortgagees, annuitants, and creditors.<sup>174</sup> B.W. Higman has found that between 1807 and 1833 the West Indian interest presented forty-three petitions to Parliament including five that were joint planter-merchant petitions.<sup>175</sup> Of these forty-three, seven were from old colonies, eight were from new colonies,<sup>176</sup> nine were from London, seven were from Liverpool, five were from Bristol, five were from Glasgow, and two were from Dublin.<sup>177</sup>

Like the other associations, Glasgow's West India Association prepared petitions for Parliament that asserted the rights of the interest and countered

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Billingsgate": James MacQueen and an Atlantic Proslavery Network', *Slavery & Abolition*, 29 (2008), 390-8.

<sup>172</sup> Cooke, 'An Elite Revisited: Glasgow West India Merchants, 1783-1833', 132-3.

<sup>173</sup> *Abstract of Minute Books of the West India Association of Glasgow* (1871), 631.

<sup>174</sup> Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', 49.

<sup>175</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 6.

<sup>176</sup> West Indian colonies that Britain settled in the seventeenth century and which they held in 1833 included Antigua, Barbados, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, the Virgin Islands, and Jamaica. Britain seized Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Tobago from France in 1763. Colonies Britain seized during or after the Napoleonic Wars included British Guiana, St. Lucia, and Trinidad.

<sup>177</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 9.

abolitionists' claims. One such petition was sent to Archibald Campbell<sup>178</sup> to be presented to the House of Commons and another copy to Lord Eldon<sup>179</sup> to be presented to the House of Lords in June 1828. The petitioners requested a thorough investigation into the actual state of slavery in the colonies:

previously to sanctioning any innovation on the property of your Petitioners in deference to popular clamour, be pleased to take into consideration such information as may be collected on the spot by Commisioners [*sic*] impartially chosen by the Executive Government and practically acquainted with Tropical Agriculture Labour in the Colonies, and sent to the Colonies for the purposes of ascertaining the actual Physical Condition of the Negroes as well as the progress made in their moral and religious state...<sup>180</sup>

They wanted to ensure that any legislation was based upon facts and an understanding of plantation agriculture and the working and living conditions of the slaves. The language used here implied that the Association was concerned that the abolitionists were swaying popular and political opinion to the detriment of the planters. The use of the word 'innovation' implies something new or unprecedented, a change coming about due to this popular pressure on Parliament. Their argument implies that with first-hand information would come a better understanding of the true state of slavery in Britain's West Indian colonies and greater financial security for the planters, as their property (they hoped) would then be secure.

Earlier in the petition concerns were expressed about growing public support for the abolition of slavery and the worrying consequences of abolition:

your Petitioners have reason to complain of the manner in which the public feeling in this Country has of late been excited and deluded on the Subject of Slavery; that the actual condition of the Negro population has been greatly misrepresented; that the resident proprietors, and those to whom your Petitioners have entrusted the Charge of their property, have been calumniated; And that Your Honourable House has been called upon to sanction measures tending not only to the ruin of your Petitioners but to the ultimate loss of the West India Colonies to the British Empire.<sup>181</sup>

These arguments of the abolitionists misleading the public and intentionally misrepresenting life on the plantation to gain support for abolition, the right of the

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<sup>178</sup> MP for Glasgow Burghs (1806-9 and 1820-31), Elgin Burghs (1812), and Perth Burghs (1818-20). Campbell presented this petition to the Commons 1 July 1828. He submitted several petitions on behalf of the West India merchants and planters of Glasgow regarding duties, abolition, and the interference with colonial laws. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons 1820-1832*, vol. 4, 525.

<sup>179</sup> John Scott, MP for Weobley (1783) and Boroughbridge (1796-9), was the first Earl of Eldon and served as Lord Chancellor from 1801 to 1806 and 1807 to 1827.

<sup>180</sup> *Abstract of Minute Books of the West India Association of Glasgow* (1871), 548.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.

planters to their property and Parliament's duty to protect their property, and the threat of entirely losing the colonies were commonly advanced throughout the slavery debates.<sup>182</sup>

Anti-abolitionists relied on petitions and sworn evidence to influence MPs and counter abolitionist efforts.<sup>183</sup> First-hand knowledge of plantation life was rare among MPs beyond those with an interest in the colonies or men who had served overseas in the military. This was a significant problem for West Indians, who were unable to compete with the sheer volume of abolitionist propaganda containing equally-biased stories of life in the colonies. Personal testimonies were thus vital to the West Indian position. For example, in response to Wilberforce's bill for abolition in 1789, London witnesses defended the slave trade before a House of Commons committee over a period of nine days; when West Indian MPs announced that there were many more witnesses to come the Committee was discharged until the following session.<sup>184</sup> The Lords defeated a bill passed by the Commons to restrict the supplying of foreign territories with slaves in May 1794 after hearing from witnesses who all opposed abolition.<sup>185</sup> The West Indian interest relied on the testimony of witnesses in combination with petitions from interested parties to support and justify sympathetic MPs' arguments in Parliament. Through concerted, organised efforts the West Indian interest in Britain was able to explain and defend its position to the wider British public and to Parliament throughout much of the era of abolition.

#### **4. The West Indian Interest and Parliament**

The West Indian interest was a large, influential pressure group in Parliament in the eighteenth century. The colonies were not directly represented in Parliament, but MPs, peers, and colonial agents successfully pleaded the colonists' case for financial and military aid during periods of war, and following environmental disasters and economic distress. Despite falling numbers of elected MPs by the 1820s the interest was still able to negotiate privately with politicians during the abolition debates to secure compensation and a favourable outcome for the planters. They were therefore able to influence parliamentary proceedings and partly protect their interests as the institutions of the slave trade and slavery were dismantled by Parliament.

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<sup>182</sup> These will be discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

<sup>183</sup> Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', 49.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

The West Indian interest was not a homogeneous body with identical views, positions, and goals. There were in fact numerous conflicts and divisions within the interest. Divisions occurred between planters and merchants, absentees and residents, those with property or interests in the old versus the new colonies, between islands or between Jamaica and the other islands, and between London merchants and those trading from the outports.<sup>186</sup> The West Indian interest did not act as a united voting bloc in Parliament; it was often evenly divided on issues affecting the colonies.<sup>187</sup> It was not even united on the issue of emancipation.<sup>188</sup> These numerous internal divisions help explain why generations of historians have advanced different definitions of the interest and have calculated its size and influence on British politics in various ways.

The West Indian interest had to rely on colonial agents based in London to advance its arguments and defend the islands' interests.<sup>189</sup> These agents came from a variety of backgrounds, were based in London, and in some cases had little or no other connections to the colonies.<sup>190</sup> Colonial agents were paid to represent the interests of the colonists in Parliament, to lobby MPs, and to send reports and information back to the colonial assemblies in the West Indies.<sup>191</sup> They were chosen for their political skills and received payment for their work. Absentee planters and British merchants living in London were also able to represent their interests in Parliament.<sup>192</sup> This was done through private lobbying and personal connections as well as by petitioning and organising public meetings and the funding of publications.

Stephen Fuller was the most active colonial agent in Parliament and attended numerous Society meetings.<sup>193</sup> Joseph Marryat was the colonial agent for Trinidad from 1805 to 1815 and for Grenada from 1815 to 1824. He was a West Indian merchant and ship owner based in London with plantations in Grenada, Trinidad, and Jamaica and regularly attended Society meetings after 1806.<sup>194</sup> His plantations were

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<sup>186</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 74.

<sup>187</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 18.

<sup>188</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 75.

<sup>189</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 33.

<sup>190</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 72.

<sup>191</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 75.

<sup>192</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 2.

<sup>193</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 81.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

sold upon his death rather than being passed on to his children.<sup>195</sup> Like his father, Joseph Marryat the younger<sup>196</sup> served as the colonial agent for Grenada from 1831 to 1851 and was also a member of London's West India Planters and Merchants Committee. He was born in Grenada, but, unlike his father and brother, Marryat was not a slave owner.<sup>197</sup> Both father and son spoke out frequently in support of planters' rights during the slavery debates in Parliament. Edward Lyon, agent for Jamaica (c. 1803-12) and Barbados (1805-23), and Joseph Marryat the elder were the only colonial agents who petitioned Parliament to defeat the 1807 abolition bill.<sup>198</sup>

During the era of the American Revolution the West Indian lobby evolved from an informal group that requested political favours into a more organised body similar to modern economic interest groups. Prior to 1763, Britain's own mercantilist policies and commercial interests had been beneficial and similar to those of the West Indians.<sup>199</sup> The West Indian interest cooperated with the government throughout the war with the American colonies, even though serious ideological and political divisions existed within it, because its members wanted to influence political decisions.<sup>200</sup> According to Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy they intentionally evaded confrontation by choosing pragmatic arguments and avoiding constitutional discussion.<sup>201</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century West Indian planters and merchants living in Britain had become one of the most powerful business lobbies in the country.<sup>202</sup> They also possessed important political allies. Jamaican agent Stephen Fuller, for example, referred to William Pitt<sup>203</sup> as 'a great favourite' with the West Indian interest in the winter of 1787.<sup>204</sup> By complying with and assisting in areas such as military recruitment, the West Indian interest maintained its enviable access to the government and was able quickly and easily to obtain meetings with senior government officials.<sup>205</sup> Their success was due not only to their size or degree of

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<sup>195</sup> See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-32*, vol. 6, 350-3.

<sup>196</sup> Marryat the younger (1790-1876) entered Parliament in 1826, where he represented his father's former constituency of Sandwich until 1834.

<sup>197</sup> See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-32*, vol. 6, 353-6.

<sup>198</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 81.

<sup>199</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 76.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807*, 21.

<sup>203</sup> William Pitt the Younger, MP for Appleby borough (1781-4) and Cambridge University (1784-1806), was Prime Minister from 1783 until 1801 and from 1804 until his death in 1806.

<sup>204</sup> Cited in Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', 45.

<sup>205</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 91.

organisation, but also to the widely held belief that the West Indian colonies were vital to Britain's economy and power.<sup>206</sup>

The emergence and success of the anti-slavery lobby in Britain after the American Revolution challenged the West Indian colonists' influence in Parliament. The West Indian interest had to form a united proslavery defence in order to counter these abolitionist influences.<sup>207</sup> Abolitionists regularly emphasised their moral motivations for action, whereas anti-abolitionists emphasised economics and security.<sup>208</sup> According to Christer Petley, slaveholders were limited in their ability to defend slavery before the public and Parliament, the two decisive influences on the debate, because few men wanted to defend the morality of slaveholding publicly.<sup>209</sup> Petley argued that they therefore chose to defend it on economic grounds.<sup>210</sup>

The exact size of the West Indian interest in Parliament has been difficult to determine. Historians' estimations differ in part due to the different definitions used to classify the interest, whether individuals had direct or indirect links, whether their links to the colonies were known at the time of writing, and the specific point in time to which an estimate refers. Colonial agent Stephen Fuller, for example, listed forty-eight West Indian MPs in Parliament in 1781.<sup>211</sup> According to James Rawley, more than sixty London merchants sat in the Commons in 1788.<sup>212</sup> B.W. Higman found that between the years 1807 and 1833 at least twenty-two West Indians, along with at least forty-nine planters and twenty merchants who never went to the West Indies, sat in the House in Commons.<sup>213</sup> Nicholas Draper disagrees with Higman's assertion that there were only thirty to thirty-five West Indian MPs returned in 1830-1; he believes there were closer to eighty.<sup>214</sup> Christer Petley has maintained that the number peaked in 1826 with forty members of the interest returned to Parliament. His research has shown that parliamentary reforms and the successes of the abolition movement weakened the West Indian interest's influence in the House of Commons. Between the years 1818 and 1833 at least thirty MPs with West Indian connections

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>207</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 47.

<sup>208</sup> Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', 49.

<sup>209</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 47.

<sup>210</sup> A detailed analysis of the various ways MPs defended and promoted slaveholding in Parliament is found in Chapter 3, below.

<sup>211</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 73-4.

<sup>212</sup> Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', 49.

<sup>213</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 4.

<sup>214</sup> Nicholas Draper, 'The Rise of a New Planter Class? Some Countercurrents from British Guiana', *Atlantic Studies*, 9 (2012), 75.

sat in the House; after the general election in 1833 there were only nineteen.<sup>215</sup> By contrast, over one hundred MPs returned in 1833 had pledged their support for immediate emancipation.<sup>216</sup>

The West Indian interest's political power changed in the era of abolition, as did its goals. Shared economic interests brought interest groups in Parliament together, as did kinship and close business and political relationships.<sup>217</sup> These groups were made up from different overlapping interests rather than forming a solid political party.<sup>218</sup> Rather than pulling together mass counter-petition campaigns to combat the waves of abolitionist petitioning in Parliament, the West Indian interest focused on producing pamphlets, lobbying Parliament, and making private appeals to government officials.<sup>219</sup> They preferred discreet lobbying and developed public campaigns only as a last resort.<sup>220</sup>

London merchants exerted a great deal of influence over colonial policy in the later eighteenth century. Absentee planters had been lobbying Parliament since the late seventeenth century.<sup>221</sup> Between 1787 and 1807 Liverpool's merchants and manufacturers petitioned against every parliamentary motion related to abolition.<sup>222</sup> Liverpool's role in defending the West Indian interest and Britain's participation in the African trade in the early years of the slavery debates has tended to overshadow London's, yet London was Britain's second most important slaving port by the early nineteenth century and London's MPs played an important role in resisting abolition.<sup>223</sup>

The West Indian interest and the British government worked together on numerous occasions during the slavery debates. Private lobbying helped defeat abolition schemes for parliamentary bills in 1816 and 1823.<sup>224</sup> The Colonial Office needed the cooperation of the colonists because the government was limited in its ability to implement these changes.<sup>225</sup> MPs believed that it was vital to leave the

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<sup>215</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 139.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 2.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', 50.

<sup>220</sup> It is this distinction, according to O'Shaughnessy, that made them an interest group and not a pressure group. See O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution', 95.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>222</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'The Slaving Capital of the World: Liverpool and National Opinion in the Age of Abolition', *Slavery & Abolition*, 9 (1988), 130.

<sup>223</sup> Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', 48-9.

<sup>224</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 139.

<sup>225</sup> Reckford, 'IV. The Colonial Office and the Abolition of Slavery', 724.

governing of the colonies to their own local institutions.<sup>226</sup> This was due in part to the legacy of the American Revolution and also the perceived impossibility of effecting significant change on the ground in the West Indies from Westminster. Parliament were therefore willing to rely on the voluntary cooperation of the planters to obtain change, maintain the strength of the empire, and solve the slavery question for much of this period.<sup>227</sup>

Compensation was a crucial element in the planters' and merchants' arguments against abolition and emancipation and its vital role in gaining their cooperation was not overlooked by the British government. In 1807 the West Indian interest in London called for either the defeat of the abolition bill or for compensation.<sup>228</sup> A key element of the West Indian interest's arguments for compensation was that slaves were classed as property.<sup>229</sup> West Indian property, however, could also be interpreted as different from other kinds because in the era of abolition possessing it had become a liability for the owners. It was subject to depressed economic conditions and declined in value due to the abolition campaigns.<sup>230</sup> Slaveholders were thus vulnerable to popular political movements and repeatedly argued for financial security and remuneration for the financial losses they were continually being forced to endure.

Some absentees in the 1820s refused to discuss compensation because to do so meant contemplating the idea of emancipation. MPs with interests in the old colonies, including Charles Rose Ellis, Ralph Bernal,<sup>231</sup> George Watson Taylor,<sup>232</sup> and Thomas Wilson,<sup>233</sup> began arguing for compensation in 1823-4 because, according to B.W. Higman, they viewed emancipation as inevitable.<sup>234</sup> Those who did so were always careful to include in their arguments their thoughts on property rights and they often depicted planters as vulnerable individuals dependent on slave

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<sup>226</sup> Gross, 'The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832-3', 64.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Rawley, 'London's Defense of the Slave Trade, 1787-1807', 64.

<sup>229</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 79.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>231</sup> MP for Lincoln (1818-20), Rochester (1820-41 and 1847-52), and Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (1842-7). Bernal owned plantations in Jamaica and was an active member of London's West India Planters and Merchants Committee. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 4, 262-9.

<sup>232</sup> Taylor, MP for Newport Isle of Wight (1816-8), Seaford (1818-20), East Looe (1820-6), and Devizes (1826-32), married the niece of a wealthy Jamaican planter. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons 1820-1832*, vol. 7, 672.

<sup>233</sup> Wilson, MP for London (1818-26), had been to Grenada and was interested in the Atlantic trade. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 7, 853-9.

<sup>234</sup> Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', 12.

labour for their livelihoods.<sup>235</sup> By 1833 slaveholders were mainly concerned with preserving their status, financial position, and colonial constitutional rights.<sup>236</sup> White male solidarity collapsed in Jamaica in 1833 as richer planters were more concerned with ensuring their share of the compensation rather than focusing their efforts on maintaining the institution of slavery in the colony.<sup>237</sup>

Three out of the four main principles of the Slave Emancipation Bill were gestures and assurances to the West Indian interest.<sup>238</sup> These vital elements were apprenticeship, monetary payment funded by the government through taxes, and revenue raised via colonial sugar duties to ensure compensation for slaveholders. Izhak Gross has argued that the Colonial Office devised the two schemes of apprenticeship and compensation in 1832 in order to persuade the West Indians who had not agreed to the 1823 resolutions to agree to emancipation.<sup>239</sup> According to Seymour Drescher, the inclusion of compensation in the bill, along with the change in the nature of compensation from a £15 million loan to a £20 million grant, proves that the government accepted that emancipation would be costly to the slaveholders.<sup>240</sup> The West Indian interest had been arguing this point for decades with varying degrees of success. In the end their persistence paid off; they received a considerable sum of money and reassurance that production would continue.

The chronological narrative at the beginning of this chapter is vital to our understanding of the origins, phrasing, and timing of the proslavery arguments that were presented in Parliament during the era of abolition. The West Indian interest and its supporters utilised prevalent, pressing concerns about Britain's and the empire's stability, safety, and national interests to support its proslavery and pro-slave trade arguments during parliamentary debates. Uprisings, revolutions, natural disasters, and wars were woven into their arguments for maintaining the long-standing institutions of the slave trade and slavery. Calls for stability, cool-headed decision-making, and (if necessary) gradual change and amelioration were presented in the midst of widespread change and upheaval both at home and abroad. The make-up of the West Indian lobby varied greatly, as did the ways in which West

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<sup>235</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, compensation and British society at the end of slavery*, 88-9.

<sup>236</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 142.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>238</sup> Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation*, 128.

<sup>239</sup> Gross, 'The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832-3', 66.

<sup>240</sup> Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation*, 136.

Indians and their supporters defended their positions on slavery and the slave trade. Having briefly examined the West Indian interest and the wider context in which it was fighting growing opposition, this study will now begin an examination of the ways in which the interest publicly defended colonial slavery and Britain's participation in the slave trade.

## Chapter Two

### Proslavery and Anti-Abolitionist Works Created and Published in Britain

The anti-abolitionist and anti-emancipation campaigns outside Parliament relied greatly on the printed word. While books remained expensive at the turn of the century, newspapers, pamphlets, and serial publications reached more readers and brought them into the public, political sphere.<sup>1</sup> At certain points during the slavery debates West India committees made a concerted effort to funnel money and time into producing print propaganda to state their case and refute the abolitionists' arguments.<sup>2</sup> Through the use of pamphlet production and distribution, London's West India Committee was determined to distribute evidence and speeches, provide individual perspectives on the debate, and respond to the threatening sugar boycott.<sup>3</sup> Proslavery literature has been characterised as defensive because it attempted to present a rational position on the issue of slavery and abolition when threatened by abolitionism.<sup>4</sup> Positive images and depictions of colonial slavery, however, were also created. Anonymous individuals and authors without obvious connections to the West Indies contributed to the fight against abolition or immediate emancipation through opinion pieces, articles, art, and literature; Gordon K. Lewis has maintained that sympathetic publicists rather than the planters wrote most of this proslavery literature.<sup>5</sup> Roger Anstey has also noted that the propaganda that the West Indian interest produced was not of the quality or quantity of the abolitionists' works.<sup>6</sup> Ian

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<sup>1</sup> Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 158.

<sup>2</sup> For example, London's West India Committee was particularly active in producing propaganda in the early 1790s to counter the abolitionists' petitioning campaign of 1792 and Wilberforce's motion for abolition within a defined timeframe. They later spent £1000 on articles and pamphlets in 1823 as Parliament debated abolition versus amelioration and the West India Committee found itself challenged by the new Anti-Slavery Society. Several historians, however, have argued that the West Indian interest was relatively quiet when faced with abolitionist opposition, spending little overall on propaganda and defending slavery on utilitarian rather than moral grounds. For example, see James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>3</sup> Barrett, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807', 162.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 549.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*, 294. For statistics on abolitionist propaganda production in the 1820s and 1830s, see James Walvin, 'The Public Campaign in England against Slavery, 1787-1834', in *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. David Eltis and James

Barrett disagrees with this claim, arguing instead that anti-abolitionists had a different understanding of the role of pamphlets and other print propaganda.<sup>7</sup>

Printing grew significantly during the eighteenth century. The number of provincial presses and booksellers rose to almost 1000 firms in 300 locations across England.<sup>8</sup> This was aided by changes in copyright laws, censorship, and a lack of registration. Most British reformers rejected the idea of using force to gain reform in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> They often appealed instead to the public using rational and moral arguments contained within printed materials.<sup>10</sup> Conservatives also employed this strategy of spreading information and gaining support. Periodicals gave individuals the chance to become writers and make a living by writing.<sup>11</sup> Literary criticism commented not only on the work, but also on its novelty, originality, and how the author had shaped the work.<sup>12</sup> Most pamphlets were printed in batches of between 100 and 500 copies.<sup>13</sup> Not every copy necessarily sold, but several people probably read each copy that did sell.

Literacy rates in England varied by sex, class, and location. Figures based on collected signatures are not very reliable, but it is estimated that by the mid-eighteenth century sixty per cent of men and forty per cent of women were literate.<sup>14</sup> Literate Christians of all classes read the Bible and religious tracts regularly.<sup>15</sup> The lower classes and illiterate members of all classes could still partake in some aspects of the arts. All classes tended to read aloud. Public reading was seen to demonstrate one's cultivation and refinement.<sup>16</sup> This meant that anyone within earshot had some access to the printed word, including newspapers, literature, and pamphlets.<sup>17</sup> They

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Walvin (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 76. For a lengthier discussion of abolitionist propaganda and its production prior to the abolition of the slave trade, see Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade 1783-1807* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1997), Ch. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Barrett, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807', 162.

<sup>8</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 133.

<sup>9</sup> H.T. Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Chadwyk-Healey Ltd., 1986), 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 142.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

could also enjoy music and the theatre without being able to read. Not everyone was welcome at galleries or theatres, however.<sup>18</sup>

Several important social and intellectual trends of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries impacted upon the potential audiences, readers, and viewers of these proslavery works which could affect the nature of the pieces and the reactions which they provoked. Politeness had become the goal of eighteenth-century gentlemen and gentlewomen.<sup>19</sup> It could be used to gain social improvement and refinement and affected every aspect of society's cultural life.<sup>20</sup> Art and literature were central to the belief that politeness could promote both taste and morality in individuals.<sup>21</sup> Polite conversation could make evident what was in the public interest and for the greater good.<sup>22</sup> The educated elite disseminated polite values emphasising virtue, progress, and profit to the wider society (both to the lower classes and out into provincial society).<sup>23</sup> At the centre of these values was benevolence.<sup>24</sup> While politeness focused on outer behaviour, sentiment and sensibility stressed inner feeling and emphasised affections and emotions over reason and judgement.<sup>25</sup> Sympathy was supposed to be more important to an individual than self-interest.<sup>26</sup> The more sensitive the viewer or reader was, the more morally virtuous they were also.<sup>27</sup> Sentimental works were used to promote causes including anti-slavery.<sup>28</sup> Logic and reason, in contrast, were frequently employed by proslavery authors to counter the growing number of persuasive and sentimental anti-slavery pamphlets and propaganda.

Much of this thesis remains intentionally focused on proslavery argument and rhetoric because such a study is missing from current scholarship. Abolitionists often employed sentimental rhetoric to engage their readers emotionally in order to elicit a passionate response and gain support for their cause.<sup>29</sup> Proslavery authors and MPs employed sentimental language less frequently, such as when highlighting the suffering of Englishmen and women while downplaying that of the slaves, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>23</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 114-7.

<sup>26</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>29</sup> Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2005), 2.

chastising abolitionists for their dangerous use of passionate, emotive language. While they were often proud of having avoided the use of sentimental language in their own works and arguments,<sup>30</sup> the use of sentimental language does not necessarily denote that an argument or piece was intended to support abolition.<sup>31</sup> Both sides employed a wide range of rhetorical strategies to argue their positions throughout the slavery debates.

The philosophical doctrine of utilitarianism was employed by anti-abolitionists in print as well as in their oral arguments. West Indian writers used this philosophical theory, 'that the aim of moral, social, and political action should be the largest possible balance of pleasure over pain or the greatest happiness of the greatest number',<sup>32</sup> in combination with their happy descriptions of plantation life to justify maintaining the institution of slavery in the colonies. By the end of the 1790s they were able to point to the destruction of St. Domingo and the hardships experienced by thousands of planters and slaves as a result of the mass, bloody emancipation on the island as evidence that abolition would not bring happiness to the majority of individuals directly involved in colonial slavery. Jeremy Bentham, an early classical utilitarian thinker, was, for example, anti-slavery in his writing,<sup>33</sup> but he did not advocate immediate abolition and emancipation because of the need for a new social and economic system to replace the current system and because he could not be sure that the slaves would be better off once freed.<sup>34</sup> Numerous anti-abolitionist writers echoed this argument in their calls for greater caution and gradual emancipation. It was not necessary, however, for one to be a utilitarian to believe that the prospective end result of political or social action was more important than the principles upon which it was based.

Below is found an overview of numerous types of publicly available printed sources created or employed by anti-abolitionists in Britain during the slavery debates. This chapter will cover the entire period of this study, 1783 to 1833, and will look at propaganda against the abolition of the slave trade, reflections on

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15 and 90.

<sup>31</sup> George Boulukos has noted that sentimental language has sometimes been taken out of context and misinterpreted as anti-slavery in histories of abolition. See George E. Boulukos, 'Maria Edgeworth's "Grateful Negro" and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 23 (1999), 12-3.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Babcock Grove, ed., 'Utilitarianism,' in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1993), 2525.

<sup>33</sup> Bart Schultz and Georgios Varouxakis, 'Introduction', in *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Bart Schultz and Georgios Varouxakis (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Rosen, 'Jeremy Bentham on Slavery and the Slave Trade', in *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Bart Schultz and Georgios Varouxakis (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 45.

abolition, and those pieces that were against immediate or indeed any emancipation. It will provide an overview of the range of published sources anti-abolitionists employed to strengthen their case against the abolitionists and counter the vast amount of abolitionist propaganda reaching the British public. These authors often opposed slavery in principle (particularly in publications created after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807), but still argued for its continuance.<sup>35</sup> Numerous types of sources were used to counter the abolitionist fervour sweeping the nation. These different genres contained a range of proslavery arguments using different types of evidence and language to persuade the reader/viewer/audience of the validity of the proslavery position. These differences and the relationships between argument or intention and genre will be highlighted below.

The first section of this chapter will focus on pamphlet propaganda. This includes a survey of selected first-hand accounts, replies to major abolitionist works, and religious tracts. Two major periodicals of the period are then consulted to examine briefly the popularity of major abolitionist and anti-abolitionist works in the early nineteenth century and the anti-abolitionist sentiment contained within the reviews. The third section will focus on informative works meant to instruct and educate the reader. These include histories of the West Indies and the slave trade, travel writing, plantation handbooks and manuals, and scientific studies on the nature of mankind. Anti-abolitionist and overtly racist thinking informs many of these studies, even though the authors sometimes state that were not necessarily created to contribute to the slavery debate. The final section of this chapter will focus on relevant art and creative writing during the period that reflected anti-abolitionist and proslavery beliefs.<sup>36</sup> This includes a discussion of portraiture and political print as well as an examination of relevant literature, drama, poetry, and song. Anti-abolitionists faced countless humanitarian, moral, and religious arguments from the abolitionists in print;<sup>37</sup> they countered these attacks with arguments that they believed were informed by superior logic and reason.

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<sup>35</sup> Petley, 'Slavery, Emancipation and the Creole World View of Jamaican Colonists, 1800-1834', 100.

<sup>36</sup> As Marcus Wood has recognised, an image can change one's understanding and perception of words, and words can change how one views an image. See Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 301. Art historians have shown that visual images and art were specifically created to sway public opinion; they could thus be powerful tools in the larger political debate on slavery and are thus worthy of academic study. See Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Petley, 'Slavery, Emancipation and the Creole World View of Jamaican Colonists, 1800-1834', 100.

Before entering into in-depth discussion of the nature of the pieces and the connection between genre and argument in proslavery works, it is necessary to discuss first and briefly the range of proslavery arguments advanced in Britain during the era of abolition. Proslavery and anti-abolitionist writers, publicists, colonists, and politicians used a variety of different arguments to defend and explain their position on abolition and emancipation. The origin and context of the argument helps to explain its type and wording. Economic arguments were frequently employed during the wars with France and the debate over abolishing the slave trade in order to stress the importance of the African trade to colonial production and Britain's wealth and ability to fund her military. This leads to strategic and naval arguments, which again were mainly advanced during war against revolutionary France and Napoleon. These highlighted the important role of the slave trade in training seamen for the British Navy. They also reflected upon how Britain's European rivals and their neighbouring West Indian colonies would benefit financially from Britain's abolition of the slave trade. Historical and legal justifications stressed the importance of relying upon precedent in order to maintain social order. This was a particularly pressing issue during the French Revolution and when experiencing major slave uprisings in the colonies. The historical encouragement of the trade over several centuries by the British Parliament and monarchy and the right to private property were also convincing arguments employed by planters to maintain their labour supply and plantation property (including slaves). Prior to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 some were willing to use moral and religious arguments to defend the enslavement of Africans. They emphasised paternalist master-slave relations and examples of slavery in the Bible to defend colonial slavery. Racial arguments drew upon pseudo-scientific explanations of racial differences to justify enslaving Africans. Finally, throughout the era numerous members of the West Indian interest argued against even discussing abolition because of the threat of rebellion in the colonies. This threat was justified using the revolt in St. Domingo as an example of the destructive nature of abolitionist argument and rhetoric. These seven broad categories of argument, and the rhetoric used to make these arguments, will be the focus of Section Two of this study.

## **1. Pamphlet Propaganda**

The anti-abolitionist lobby and West Indian interest used pamphlets to spread the word about the true state of the West Indian colonies and the biased nature of the slavery debates. They wrote and distributed first-hand accounts of life in the colonies to show the humanity of the planters, highlight the benefits of slavery for the slaves, the planters, and the British empire, and counter abolitionist accusations and opinions. Detailed replies were produced to counter popular abolitionist pamphlets. In some cases proslavery authors attacked abolitionist writers for their general lack of first-hand knowledge, foresight, or evidence. Other replies dissected specific pieces of abolitionist propaganda line-by-line to highlight the offending author's slanderous accusations and incorrect assumptions. Finally, a number of religious tracts and sermons were published to support the anti-emancipation cause. These publications were an attempt to contribute to the slavery debate, counter the abolition movement, and persuade the general British public to reconsider their views on the slave trade and slavery.

These works were informative as well as persuasive and were aimed at a literate audience with the potential to take an interest in the pro- and anti-slavery movements. Proslavery pamphlets contained strongly-worded arguments about the nature of slavery in Britain's colonies and defended both the institution of slavery and the planters. They were written to contribute to the slavery debate and distributed to sway people's opinions, helping them understand the basis for enslaving Africans and using slave labour on Britain's West Indian plantations. They were also meant to correct readers' assumptions about the slave trade and slavery and counter anti-slavery propaganda with supposedly more accurate information and explanations using personal stories and first-hand experiences. They vary in writing style more than the informative works discussed in the third section here, but continued to rely more on logic and reason than on the sentimental language anti-slavery associations, speakers, and writers often used to enlist support for their cause. Their brevity and format allowed for cheaper production than most informative works and potentially wider distribution. As a result more people could be persuaded and educated about the pro-slavery cause through pamphlets than the other genres discussed in this chapter.

A number of strongly worded pamphlets were published during the slavery and slave trade debates that supported the planters' livelihoods and property and called on Parliament to do the same. Thomas Maxwell Adams concisely-written piece, *A Cool Address to the People of England, on the Slave Trade* (1788), was

strongly against abolition and emancipation. Adams spent the first part of his pamphlet stressing the numerous benefits of slavery for the slaves who were protected by law. He argued that the slaves were better off than Britain's beggars and former prisoners:

Suffer your minds to contemplate coolly the number of *vagabonds* you have throughout this kingdom: contemplate also the multitudes of unfortunate men released from time to time out of prisons by acts of grace, which set them at liberty, 'tis true; but at the same time, leaves them at little better more than *the liberty of starving*. The slaves work, and are under subordination; but, on the other hand, are maintained at considerable expence [*sic*], and become *useful* to others; USEFUL TO YOU YOURSELVES. Whose condition is the most happy? By which of these is mankind most benefited?<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note that here, as he does throughout the pamphlet, Adams asked his readers rationally and dispassionately to consider the question of slavery. This might imply that he was trying to highlight a difference in the tone of his language from that of abolitionist writers. He also argued that abolition and emancipation would ruin the West Indian colonies and gratify the country's French rivals.<sup>39</sup>

Adams reminded his readers that British laws were in place to protect the slave trade and the planters' property in slaves by listing numerous relevant acts of Parliament through the centuries. His words expressed great distress over the British public's and Parliament's confusion over the true nature of the slaves and slavery in the colonies because, according to Adams, despite the abolitionists' optimistic claims, emancipation would cause the slaves to lose the many possessions and security they currently enjoyed.<sup>40</sup>

Jesse Foot, a physician who spent three years in the West Indies in the mid-eighteenth century, wrote *A Defence of the Planters in the West Indies; Comprised in Four Arguments* to inform and convince 'rational men' of his position on the subject of colonial slavery and the slave trade.<sup>41</sup> Foot strongly disliked Wilberforce and his

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Maxwell Adams, *A Cool Address to the People of England, on the Slave Trade* (London: R. Faulder and J. Stockdale, 1788), 18-9.

<sup>39</sup> Adams, *A Cool Address*, 36-7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Foot remarks that he will leave the 'modern pioneers of humanity' to inform the others. See Jesse Foot, *A Defence of the Planters in the West Indies; Comprised in Four Arguments*, 2nd edn. (London: J. Debrett, 1792), iii. Seymour Drescher's findings in his study of parliamentary rhetoric employed in the slave trade debates support this assertion. His research showed that abolitionist arguments were twice as likely to be based upon spiritual and moral grounds, whereas the anti-abolitionists were twice as likely to base their arguments on policy matters such as economics and security concerns in the colonies. See Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade', 572-4. Foote's use of the term 'rational men' could also be interpreted as implying that his work was meant for a logical, rational, male mind, whereas anti-slavery and abolitionist works which appealed to the passions were intended for sensitive female or feminine readers. See Sryvidya Swaminathan's

followers for, in his view, repeatedly misleading the British public. He charged Wilberforce with rushing Parliament to act because he was afraid the current support for abolition would disappear:

as he [Wilberforce] brings this subject forward again, he has judged right in being so speedy, lest the fountain be drained dry from whence he draws his support—lest those who have hitherto pinned their credulity on his sleeve, should have seen the light of reason, and discovered *that truth*, he has aimed to conceal and wilfully pervert. The more this cause be thoroughly searched, the less *support* he will meet in the House of Commons.<sup>42</sup>

Foot argued that Wilberforce had good reason to fear a dwindling level of support because his accusations and unfounded charges would be proved false over time. He also blamed Wilberforce for inciting the recent rebellions in the colonies:

Long before that time [when Foot was there], down to the present, there has not been the least disposition in the *negroes* to *resistance* and much less to *rebellion*. Whilst I was there, so docile were their tempers, so pastoral were their habits, that the outer doors of their master's house were never fastened during the whole of the night... What the practice might now be, since Mr. Wilberforce is beating the drum of sedition in their ears, I will not take upon me to say; but this I know, that if the effect operates naturally, it will act as it has at St. Domingo.<sup>43</sup>

A heightened fear of violence and rebellion in the wake of the alarming insurrection in St. Domingo permeated many proslavery arguments during this period.<sup>44</sup> Foot asked his readers to remain rational in their assessment of the situation so as to assist the cause of humanity.<sup>45</sup> His use of the phrase 'beating the drum of sedition' recalled language often employed to describe a prominent radical, Major John Cartwright, from the 1780s onwards. Foot was intentionally connecting Wilberforce's activities to popular radicalism. Foot also asked his readers to consider channelling their humanitarian concerns and efforts towards the worthy recipients at home in Britain before looking further afield:

What are the conditions of other societies to us, if that society we live in be so wretched and depraved, as to call loudly for our direct attention? Are we not compelled by the force of reason to correct the

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discussion of women becoming involved in the abolition movement in Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, 190.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>44</sup> Further discussion of this important rebellion and its impact on the slavery debates can be found in the second section of this dissertation.

<sup>45</sup> Foot, *A Defence of the Planters*, 8.

desperate conditions of those in our own *state*, and *before our own noses*, before we are authorised in conscience to examine farther off?<sup>46</sup>

To support his rhetoric, Foot listed numerous areas in society where Britons could help their fellow men. Truly anti-abolitionist in his opinions and sentiments, Foot's *Defence* was a vivid piece that encapsulated numerous proslavery arguments and called upon its readers to challenge Wilberforce and focus their humanitarian efforts closer to home.

In *The West India Legislatures Vindicated from the Charge of Having Resisted the Call of the Mother Country for the Amelioration of Slavery* (1826), Alexander McDonnell defended the colonial legislatures' actions (or lack thereof) in enacting the 1823 resolutions for amelioration. McDonnell believed that the manumission clause contained within the resolutions was the main reason why the colonial governments appeared to be refusing to enact the resolutions and outlined their problems with them.<sup>47</sup> He was strongly opposed to Britain dictating to its colonies and especially so in this case where he believed its decisions were based upon the abolitionists' lies. McDonnell called on Parliament to stand up to the lying abolitionists and allow the public to see the real evidence on the state of slavery in the colonies:

Ministers have never attempted to allay the public clamour, or to remove any of the misunderstanding which prevails throughout the community respecting the present condition of slavery, so greatly improved since the abolition of the Slave Trade. Possessing despatches and authenticated statements in detail, proving the systematic exertions of individual proprietors to have established a milder system of management, and also demonstrating the utter fallaciousness, in practice, of many of the plans of the abolitionists, they have suffered such evidence to repose quietly in the Colonial Office, and have allowed opinions to go forth to the world, not only unjust towards men who reposed confidence in their impartiality, but injurious to the character and prosperity of the British empire.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the pamphlet, McDonnell was overtly anti-abolitionist and pro-colonist. Foot, Adams, and McDonnell used their pamphlets to argue for a reassessment of the planters' position and challenge the words, motives, and potential outcomes of the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> He believed that the manumission clause would lead to an insufficient number of workers on the plantations, would lower the worth of the slaves, and created the need for a clear discussion and assurance of compensation for any losses the planters will encounter through enacting the clause. He also argued that planters were not opposed to manumission or to using free labour if free labourers could be found who would work their lands. See Alexander McDonnell, *The West India Legislatures Vindicated from the Charge of Having Resisted the Call of the Mother Country for the Amelioration of Slavery* (London: John Murray, 1826), 89-102.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

abolitionist movement and its leaders. Their proslavery propaganda vindicated the planters' position overall without the use of descriptive first-hand accounts that might be charged with bias or self-interest.

West Indians also published their first-hand recollections, anecdotes, and observations in a number of pamphlets to share their experiences and personal beliefs with the British public. These were used to counter the popular abolitionist strategy of making the slaves' struggles evident to Britons through the use of eyewitness accounts from visitors and blacks in England.<sup>49</sup> In the anonymously written *Sketches and Recollections of the West Indies* (1828), the author stated that he<sup>50</sup> was providing a record of his own experiences in order to help others better understand the slavery question.<sup>51</sup> For his *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies* (1830), F.W.N. Bayley wrote an almost 700 page letter to his readers which was meant to be light and entertaining except for its commentary on the emancipation question.<sup>52</sup> In these serious sections he hoped to provide new information and in the process enlighten his readers to the need for a gradual rather than immediate emancipation.<sup>53</sup> Mrs. Carmichael drew from her experiences as a slave owner in St. Vincent and Trinidad to inform her readers in her two-volume publication, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833).<sup>54</sup> She noted that, while much of her work was written prior to the agitation of the question of emancipation in Parliament, she recognised that the timing of the publication would allow it to inform her interested readers, whom she hoped would be the general public and not just 'grand people, planters, and M.P.s'.<sup>55</sup> The three accounts discussed here were all published in the final years of the slavery debates in Britain. First-hand accounts had also been published in the eighteenth century, but these were often less political and described the author's journey to and around the colonies rather than the political atmosphere and the state of slavery in the islands with the intention of informing the slavery debate in Britain.

The author of *Sketches and Recollections of the West Indies* observed early on that any document that could provide information on colonial slavery was useful

<sup>49</sup> James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom 1776-1838* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 19.

<sup>50</sup> For simplicity, any anonymous author mentioned here will be addressed using a male pronoun.

<sup>51</sup> A Resident, *Sketches and Recollections of the West Indies* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1828), ix.

<sup>52</sup> F.W.N. Bayley, *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies* (London: William Kidd, 1830), vi-vii.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> The popular *Domestic Manners of the Americans* by Frances Trollope had been published one year earlier. The author or publisher would have been trying to capitalise on the earlier travel journal's success.

<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Co., 1833), vol. 1, 32.

and that his long and intimate acquaintance with the islands had given him enough personal knowledge to be able to provide a ‘just’ perspective on the subject.<sup>56</sup> His publication began with a narrative of his travels to and around the islands before moving on to discussions of the work planters had done to meliorate conditions, the current state of plantation slavery, and his thoughts on the emancipation question. He included several chapters outlining the colonists’ efforts towards enacting the amelioration resolutions of 1823, but also provided information on why they had not implemented every suggestion. His reasons included recent insurrections, the need for compensation, the prevalent belief that the abolitionists and Parliament were trying to destroy their property, and the unjustness of forcing men to adopt new methods of cultivation on their own lands. The author noted the dangers of adopting untested farming methods and questioned whether farmers in Britain would ever be forced to do such a thing:

Should the English farmer be told, that a new mode of husbandry was about to be introduced by the manufacturers, and that they were required to adopt it, without any practical trial, or without time being allowed for experiment – would they, or could they, be expected to enter into the new measure so fully and readily, as after the requisite test?<sup>57</sup>

He also argued that the colonists themselves did not believe in the perpetual existence of slavery:

Let it not for a moment be imagined, that the colonists seek to uphold the system of slavery. No; they wish only to have *security* for their property—*compensation* for it—and they will resign it *to-morrow*. They are friendly to melioration; and *they are* the *friends*, as well as the *masters* of the slaves, not alone from interested motives, but from the ties of mutual protection and dependence—from those ties which long and reciprocal relations naturally produce between master and servant.<sup>58</sup>

To conclude, the author stated that he believed that the colonists had been unfairly portrayed and that the only way to understand the true nature of colonial slavery (and thus form an unbiased opinion on the subject of emancipation) was to witness it for oneself.<sup>59</sup> This reflects an underlying message throughout many of the works discussed here that abolitionist writings by authors with no first-hand experience

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<sup>56</sup> A Resident, *Sketches and Recollections*, vii; xii-xiii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 316. In addition, the author advocates reading the works of James MacQueen and Alexander Barclay for further information on the colonies. Several of these works are discussed below.

could not be trusted to provide accurate information on the colonies and on colonial slavery for their readers.

Throughout his letter to his readers, F.W.N. Bayley asserted both his impartiality and his desire to see a gradual emancipation occur in the colonies. In the relevant sections that considered colonial slavery, he hoped to provide new information supported with excerpts of dialogue. Like *Sketches and Recollections* examined above, Bayley's *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies* began with his travels to and throughout the West Indies. He provided short histories of the colonies and numerous chapters on the slaves and slave life before concluding with the details of his voyage home to Britain. Bayley argued for a gradual emancipation to take place because he believed that the slaves were happy in their current position:

if a slave be really happy in his slavery he is by no means fit for emancipation. If he feels that he enjoys blessings and privileges of no common order—that he is provided with all the necessaries and comforts he can desire, and if contented with that feeling he exclaim “what do I want more?” I maintain that he is not prepared for freedom; but if on the contrary he say, “I am housed, fed, clothed, and nourished, but what is all this without liberty?” then I say that he is entitled to the emancipation he desires.<sup>60</sup>

According to his logic, if the slaves were truly ready for freedom, they would not be happy. He noted conversations that he had with misinformed slaves, recalling that, upon informing them that after emancipation they would no longer have their homes, land, food, clothing, medical care, and so on provided for them, they immediately withdrew any stated desire for freedom.<sup>61</sup> In his later chapters, Bayley noted the many ways in which colonists had improved plantation life for their slaves and provided stories of idle, destitute freed slaves to warn against premature emancipation. This work overall provided detailed information on the lives and beliefs of slaves and their owners and was constructed in such a way so as to promote a safe, gradual emancipation in the colonies.

Mrs. Carmichael provided a slightly different point of view in her *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies*. First, she was a slave owner; second, she admitted that before arriving in the islands she had been influenced by anti-slavery propaganda and therefore had held a negative opinion of colonial slavery;<sup>62</sup> and third, most of the piece was written before the issue of emancipation became pressing. The first volume of *Domestic*

<sup>60</sup> Bayley, *Four Years' Residence*, 372.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>62</sup> Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, 324.

*Manners* included her initial impressions of the colonies, with one chapter each on the white and coloured populations on the islands, and then the remaining chapters were devoted to descriptions of the colonies' black population. The second volume focused more on the environment and various elements of colonial life. She intended to give her opinions and findings on the slaves, slavery, and emancipation, and identified numerous areas in which to correct erroneous beliefs about slavery and colonial life. Her work contained arguments and evidence to show that the slaves were not overworked, they were all Christians,<sup>63</sup> their housing was adequate to suit the climate, and that the administering of corporal punishment was not cruel, nor did it mean that the slaves' masters did not care for them. Carmichael also noted a dramatic change in her slaves' work ethic and opinions of her after colonial newspapers reported on Parliament's debates on slavery:<sup>64</sup>

Although few slaves can read, yet there are many free negroes and coloured people who can, and who do read the English newspapers; and the very memorable debates in parliament upon the subject of slavery soon found their way, in a most distorted and mangled form, to the negroes—and the effect was instantly visible... [the slaves] shewed in their every action that they looked upon me, being their *proprietor*, as *necessarily* the enemy.<sup>65</sup>

She employed numerous anecdotes from her time in the colonies to explain her reasoning and views on the propriety of colonial slavery and the dangerous effects of the emancipation debate. All three of these writers drew extensively on their personal experiences to provide information to their readers in the hopes of promoting the policy of gradual emancipation. They recognised that the majority of their readers would never go to the West Indies and yet might possess knowledge of the colonies based on the work of Britain's abolitionists. In response, they stressed their personal interactions with the slaves and shared scenes of actual plantation life in an effort to provide an accurate and opposing point of view.

A number of publications were produced in the 1820s to refute abolitionist works directly. Some authors were compelled to contest the damaging claims being

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<sup>63</sup> Converting one's slaves was an essential part of being Christian slave owners and, from a proslavery activist's perspective, demonstrated the existence and success of benevolent masters. See Allan Galloway, 'The Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism: George Whitefield, the Bryan Family, and the Great Awakening in the South', *Journal of Southern History*, 53 (1987), 393-4.

<sup>64</sup> Slaves were able to gain political knowledge through newspaper articles and editorials. Andrew Lewis has argued that the information contained within the articles might have been intended to be innocuous but was likely re-interpreted many times as the information filtered through the slave masses. This flow of information to the slaves was greatly feared by slave-owning colonists. See Andrew Lewis, "'An Incendiary Press': British West Indian Newspapers during the Struggle for Abolition", *Slavery & Abolition*, 16 (1995), 348-51.

<sup>65</sup> Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, vol. 1, 244-5.

published in order to vindicate the West Indian interest and help restore the reputation of the colonists. They attacked the abolitionists for supposedly spreading lies about the West Indians and highlighted specific ways in which they had intentionally misled the British public on the subjects of colonial slavery and abolition. It is not surprising that these pamphlets contained much more heated language than that found in other anti-abolitionist publications. The authors' emotional attachment to the subject (and the colonies) is evident throughout many of the responses addressed here.

In 1823 Rev. George Wilson Bridges wrote a succinct response to Wilberforce's *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (1823), entitled *A Voice from Jamaica in Reply to William Wilberforce, Esq. M.P.* His reply was composed in the form of a letter addressed to Wilberforce and was intended to confront him and his followers. Bridges expressed great frustration and anger that Wilberforce had published lies about the colonies for the general public to read: 'Our laws, Sir, if you will read them, our habits, our religion, our common sense, will prove that your suspicions are erroneous, and your accusations unfounded, uncharitable, and unjust.'<sup>66</sup> He also noted that Wilberforce might be accidentally publishing only inaccurate information because he had never been to the colonies himself.<sup>67</sup> Bridges was convinced, however, that Wilberforce's language and accusations would have dangerous consequences for the colonies:

I cannot, Sir, read these passages, and think of the horrible results they lead to, and which you so calmly anticipate, without conceiving that you must be under the influence of mental delusion; and without shuddering at the fate of the thousands you carelessly doom to the scalping knife of men now harmless, contented and quiet; but whose almost obliterated African passions such language is calculated to inflame, and thus to transform our very servants into agents devoted to our destruction.<sup>68</sup>

Throughout this short, confrontational pamphlet Bridges was able to refute numerous specific claims made in Wilberforce's publication, using first-hand knowledge, recorded laws, and contrary evidence.

Robert Hibbert Junior's pamphlet, *Facts, Verified Upon Oath, in Contradiction of the Report of Rev. Thomas Cooper, concerning the General*

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<sup>66</sup> Rev. George Wilson Bridges, *A Voice from Jamaica in Reply to William Wilberforce, Esq. M.P.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1823), 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

*Condition of the Slaves in Jamaica* (1824), is an interesting, concise reply that employed the sworn testimony of three men in Jamaica to disprove Thomas Cooper's report, *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica* (1824). Cooper had recently published this negative report of his three years in Jamaica, during which time, as Hibbert emphasised to his readers early on, he never complained or made the owner of the estate he was staying on aware of his concerns about slavery on that plantation. As a Creole who had lived in Jamaica for twelve years, Hibbert wrote that he was stunned and hurt by Cooper's accusations.<sup>69</sup> His goal was to produce sworn testimony that would refute Cooper's account of his time on the Georgia estate in Jamaica without having to give evidence himself. The body of the pamphlet dissected Cooper's report and provided references to specific arguments and pages that were contradicted using the testimony of the plantation's overseer, the medical practitioner, and George Hibbert Oates. This piece is a terrific example of a West Indian contesting abolitionist propaganda and appealing to the putatively objective testimony of sworn witnesses.

James MacQueen published two very different defences in the mid-1820s. In his lengthy work, *The West India Colonies* (1824), MacQueen accused the *Edinburgh Review* of being a major source of inaccurate, biased information on the West Indies and of spreading misleading, harmful information to its readers.<sup>70</sup> He drew on a variety of sources to back up his own claims and opinions on colonial slavery, including laws, the Bible, production levels, and the known history of slavery. These were also employed to refute various claims that the *Edinburgh Review*'s writers had made. This long, detailed piece also challenged the manifesto of the African Institution and claims made by abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson. The Barbadian legislature was so pleased with his effort that it awarded MacQueen £500 for defending the West Indies in this publication.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to the style and origin of his *West India Colonies*, MacQueen's *The Colonial Controversy* (1825) was a collection of letters that he originally wrote and published in the *Glasgow Courier* in the autumn of 1824. His letters were edited for this publication and formed a lengthy reply to the attacks by 'Anglus' on the

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Hibbert Jun., *Facts, Verified Upon Oath, in Contradiction of the Report of Rev. Thomas Cooper, concerning the General Condition of the Slaves in Jamaica; and more especially Relative to the Management and Treatment of the Slaves Upon Georgia Estate, in the Parish of Hanover, in that Island* (London: John Murray, 1824) ix.

<sup>70</sup> James MacQueen, *The West India Colonies; The Calumnies and Misrepresentations Circulated Against Them by The Edinburgh Review, Mr. Clarkson, Mr. Cropper, etc. etc.* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824), 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 145.

West Indians and on MacQueen himself. Every letter was addressed to the Prime Minister, the earl of Liverpool, whom MacQueen maintained should be protecting the West Indians by taking a stand against the abolitionists' false accusations.<sup>72</sup> In his first letter, MacQueen argued that the abolitionists were having to resort to lying because they were losing the debate: 'they feel the ground they take sliding from beneath their feet, and hence they endeavour to confuse the question, by *vain* declamation: by substituting clamour, and every kind of misrepresentation and misstatement, in order to withdraw the public mind from the real point at issue, that under deception they may carry their point'.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the letters, MacQueen also highlighted the misleading works of other abolitionists in order to stress the fragility and dubious nature of the anti-slavery movement.

Alexander Barclay also complained about the *Edinburgh Review's* treatment of the West Indian colonists. His work, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies* (1826), ended with a fifty-page discussion of the *Review's* errors and thoughts on two other abolitionist pamphlets, but focused most of its attention on James Stephen's *Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated* (1824). Like the other authors noted in this section, Barclay believed that the abolitionists had grossly and intentionally misled the British public.<sup>74</sup> He informed his readers that, having lived in Jamaica for twenty-one years before returning to England, he had long been aware of the inconsistent and incorrect comments spread in abolitionist literature, but was only recently inspired to publish his opinions after the slavery debates started up again in Parliament and the *Edinburgh Review* began treating Stephen's work as though it were true.<sup>75</sup> He was able to employ some first-hand knowledge, along with an account of recent changes in the colonies, to contradict Stephen's claims and highlight where abolitionists were employing outdated information to sway public opinion. In this reply, Barclay presented his view of the current state of colonial slavery, admitted that it was not without its faults, and accepted that slaves would eventually receive their freedom, while

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<sup>72</sup> James MacQueen, *The Colonial Controversy, containing a Refutation of the Anticolonists; the State of Hayti, Sierra Leone, India, China, Cochin China, Java, &c. &c.; the Production of Sugar, &c. and the State of the Free and Slave Labourers in those Countries; Fully Considered, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Earl of Liverpool; with a Supplementary Letter to Mr. Macaulay* (Glasgow: Khull, Blackie, & Co., 1825), 5.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies; or, An Examination of Mr. Stephen's "Slavery of the British West India Colonies"* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1826), i-ii.

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

continually reminding his readers that they were being regularly fed false, dangerous information by abolitionist propagandists.

Alexander McDonnell's *Compulsory Manumission; or an Examination of the Actual State of the West India Question* (1827), was written in reply to the anonymous pamphlet, *Remarks on an Address to the "Members of the New Parliament, on the Proceedings of the Colonial Department with respect to the West India Question"*, in which the author attacked Britain's West Indian colonists for being inconsistent in their actions and demands. The author claimed that the West Indians were not vocal enough in their opposition to compulsory manumission, whereas McDonnell argued that Lord Seaforth spoke out in Parliament and every published West Indian pamphlet had indeed voiced its author's opposition to this proposal.<sup>76</sup> McDonnell was strongly opposed to compulsory manumission and employed a number of arguments to justify his position. These included the loss of property, the destruction of the positive master-slave relationship, the loss or complete stoppage of production,<sup>77</sup> and the possibility of former slaves reverting to their barbarous ways. He believed that it directly contradicted Parliament's stated goals for ameliorating conditions as part of the preparation for their freedom:

It has been considered, and repeatedly declared by His Majesty's ministers, that a progressive amelioration in the condition of the slaves, the diffusion of moral instruction, the just appreciation of the blessings of a pure religion, and a gradual reformation in manners and opinions, should continue to exercise their salutary influence, until slavery insensibly glided into freedom. Yet compulsory manumission proceeds in express contradiction to this principle. It teaches the slave, that the sooner he demands his freedom the easier it will be for him to succeed. It discourages the idea of delaying till the morals be improved by instruction, and it urges him to rush forward at once by the most expeditious course, by teaching him, that those only who delay incur the danger of disappointment.<sup>78</sup>

Like the authors of the other responses discussed here, in *Compulsory Manumission* McDonnell dissected specific arguments made by abolitionists and contradicted them by producing argument after argument in defence of the colonists. This strategy was used to question and challenge the legitimacy of the abolitionists' assertions, evidence, and ultimately their motives.

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<sup>76</sup> Alexander McDonnell, *Compulsory Manumission; or an Examination of the Actual State of the West India Question* (London: John Murray, 1827), 6-7.

<sup>77</sup> Anti-abolitionists attempted to counter abolitionist depictions of colonial slavery as 'un-English' by reaffirming the colonies' centrality to Britain's empire and economy. See Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> McDonnell, *Compulsory Manumission*, 62.

In 1824, two religious tracts discussed the nature of slavery and the current state and consequences of religious education in Britain's West Indian colonies. Richard Watson's sermon, *The Religious Instruction of Slaves in the West India Colonies Advocated and Defended*, promoted the efforts of Methodist missionaries in the West Indies.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, the Rev. B. Bailey's<sup>80</sup> *The House of Bondage* provided readers with a history of slavery from biblical times to the present. These short tracts approached the institution of slavery from a religious perspective and promoted the study and knowledge of Christianity as a vital step in the transition from slavery to freedom.

In his sermon Watson was sympathetic towards Africans and their descendants in the colonies, arguing that they had faced more hardships than any other race, and even titled the first section of his sermon, 'The objects of your sympathy'.<sup>81</sup> Both Watson and Bailey discussed the origins of African slavery in terms of God cursing Ham's descendants, as recorded in the Bible.<sup>82</sup> Bailey examined this theory in detail. He argued that all of Africa had been populated by Ham's descendants and asserted that their uncivil manners and lack of intellectual progress were examples of God's eternal wrath.<sup>83</sup> Unlike Watson, who stated that his intention was to promote missionary work in the colonies, Bailey informed his readers that, having personally avoided reading any pamphlets on the slavery debate, he wanted to provide information from a religious perspective to educate his readers as they chose sides in this debate.<sup>84</sup> He argued that European men were far more concerned with the slaves' position in society than the slaves were themselves.<sup>85</sup> Both men recognised that emancipation might result in much bloodshed and violence.<sup>86</sup> They therefore stressed the need for the continuation and extension of

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<sup>79</sup>Watson was the Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the piece's cover page noted that the profits of the publication were to be put towards their West Indian missions.

<sup>80</sup> Bailey was the Curate of Burton-Upon-Trent and the Domestic Chaplain to the Rt. Hon. Lord Torphichen.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Watson, *The Religious Instruction of Slaves in the West India Colonies Advocated and Defended. A Sermon preached before the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, in the New Chapel, City-Road, London, April 28, 1824*, 4th edn. (London: Butterworth and Son, n.d.), 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9; Rev. B. Bailey, *The House of Bondage. A Dissertation upon the Nature of Service or Slavery under Levitical Law, among the Hebrews in the Earliest Ages, and in the Gentile World, Until the Coming of Christ...* (London: C. & J. Rivington, 1824), 15-7. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould have noted that by interpreting Genesis Chapter Nine to mean that Africans were Ham's descendants, writers could argue that Africans were meant to be slaves. See Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould, 'Introduction', in *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*, ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 5.

<sup>83</sup> Bailey, *The House of Bondage*, 22.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; Watson, *The Religious Instruction of Slaves*, 15.

religious education to every slave in Britain's West Indian colonies and, throughout their tracts, they advocated a gradual, cautious transition to emancipation.

## 2. Reviews

One method with which to assess the popularity or impact of pamphlet propaganda in the early nineteenth century is to look at those that were discussed in contemporary periodicals. Contributors to the major periodicals wrote their reviews anonymously but have since been identified. Influential periodicals were closely aligned to political parties and contained reviews meant to contribute to political and popular debate, informing the reading public as well as politicians of a similar mindset. The *Edinburgh Review* was Whiggish from the beginning and, as John Clive has noted, openly supported Charles James Fox.<sup>87</sup> Biancamaria Fontana has argued that the relationship between the *Edinburgh Review* and the Whigs was much more complex than this, as not all of the reviewers were Foxites or Whigs, or even necessarily unified in their personal political opinions.<sup>88</sup> Clive's research, however, has also shown that younger Whigs were bound together against Scottish Toryism by the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>89</sup> *The Quarterly Review* developed out of Tory desires to challenge the *Edinburgh Review*'s 'intellectual and ideological monopoly'.<sup>90</sup> Reviewers presented strong opinions on the major topics related to the pieces being discussed and put forward their views in a manner that aimed to correct or confirm the contents of the works. In respect to the slavery question, contributors to the anti-abolitionist periodical, *The Quarterly Review*, prided themselves on their use of logic and temperate language and chastised the authors of the abolitionist works they were reviewing for using incendiary language, negative imagery, and un-checked facts to promote their cause. As one author noted in the July 1823 edition of *The Quarterly Review*: 'The abolitionists [had] accordingly re-commenced their efforts with all the ardour of men whose imaginations are kindled by the hope of accomplishing a favourite object, and who are strangers to the coolness and deliberation inspired by an accurate knowledge of circumstances'.<sup>91</sup> The politically influenced editorship and review format of the periodicals of the early nineteenth century allowed anti-

<sup>87</sup> John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802-1815* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1956), 36.

<sup>88</sup> Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6.

<sup>89</sup> Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802-1815*, 84-5.

<sup>90</sup> Jonathan Cutmore, 'Introduction', in *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Jonathan Cutmore (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), 10.

<sup>91</sup> 'Art. VIII. Substance of the Debate in the House of Commons on 15th May, 1823...', *The Quarterly Review* 29.58 (1823), 477.

abolitionists overtly to challenge abolitionist works and opinions as well as the underlying assumptions on which their publications and proposals were based.

The two most important periodicals of the period, the *Edinburgh Review* and *The Quarterly Review*, have been examined from their origins (1802 and 1809 respectively) until the end of 1834 for any article relating to the West Indies, the slave trade, slavery, and abolition. The *Edinburgh Review* contained thirty articles reviewing forty-two publications and one note on these topics, whereas *The Quarterly Review* contained twelve articles reviewing a total of thirty-one publications. The *Edinburgh Review* co-founder and editor, abolitionist, and future Lord Chancellor, Henry Brougham, contributed nineteen of these articles in the *Edinburgh Review*. Other abolitionists, including Wilberforce and James Stephen,<sup>92</sup> also wrote reviews for the *Edinburgh Review*. *The Quarterly Review*, by contrast, contained pieces by members of the West Indian interest, including slaveholders Charles Rose Ellis and George Ellis,<sup>93</sup> son of a member of Grenada's House of Assembly and grandson of a member of Jamaica's Council. This reflects the different positions on the slavery question and the political leanings of the two periodicals. The proslavery, pro-colonist stance of *The Quarterly Review* is particularly relevant to this chapter.

The two periodicals reviewed a variety of works including abolitionist propaganda, poetry, histories, published travel journals, parliamentary speeches, and reports of institutions. Seven works relating to slavery, the slave trade, or the West Indies were reviewed by both periodicals: William Spence's *The Radical Cause of the Present Distresses of the West India Planters, &c.* (2nd edition, 1808); *A Permanent and Effectual Remedy suggested for the Evils under which the British West Indies now labour, in a Letter from a W.I. Merchant to a W.I. Planter* (1808); Zachary Macaulay's *Negro Slavery; or a View of some of the more prominent Features of the State of Society as it exists in the United States of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies, especially in Jamaica* (1823); Thomas Clarkson's *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies, with a view to their ultimate Emancipation; and on the Practicability, the Safety, and the Advantages of the latter Measure* (2nd edition, 1823); James Stephen's *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies delineated, as it exists both in Law and Practice, and compared with the Slavery of other Countries, Ancient and*

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen (1758-1832) became a devoted abolitionist after witnessing slaves on trial for murder in the West Indies where he was resident.

<sup>93</sup> Ellis (1753-1815) was a writer.

*Modern* (1824); *Statements, Calculations, and Explanations, submitted to the Board of Trade, relative to the State of the British West India Colonies*, printed by order of the House of Commons (1831); and Matthew G. Lewis' *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1834). The timing of these articles and dates of publication reflect periods of higher interest in the subjects of abolition and emancipation and surges in abolitionist propaganda and popularity. Three of the works commented on in the *Quarterly Review*, John Poyer's *The History of Barbadoes, from the first Discovery of the Island in the Year 1605, till the Accession of Lord Seaforth, 1801* (1808), James MacQueen's *The West India Colonies; The Calumnies and Misrepresentations Circulated Against Them by The Edinburgh Review, Mr. Clarkson, Mr. Cropper, etc. etc.* (1824), and Mrs. Carmichael's *Domestic Manners in the West Indies* (1833), have already been discussed in this chapter. The inclusion of these pieces in the periodicals indicates that these items were particularly influential and related to issues on which the editors wished to comment.

The twelve articles in *The Quarterly Review* relevant to the slavery question were published during two distinct periods of debate on the subject. The first four articles were written between 1809 (when the journal began) and 1811 as Parliament and abolitionists were focused on persuading other nations to end their participation in the slave trade and planters and other proslavery and pro-slave trade activists pessimistically watched for the negative and unforeseen ramifications of abolition. The remaining eight articles were published between 1822, when abolitionists increased their calls for ameliorating conditions for slaves in the colonies, and the end of colonial slavery in the British West Indies in 1834.

Contributors to *The Quarterly Review* included editorial commentary on the slavery debates and the issues of abolition and emancipation in their reviews. In his review of John Poyer's *The History of Barbadoes*, for example, George Ellis first provided an outline of Poyer's work before focusing on the issue of the slave population in the islands and possible reasons for its decrease.<sup>94</sup> This would have been particularly relevant in the period following abolition as there was suddenly no legal means of acquiring new slaves beyond those born in the colonies. Ellis doubted that plantation labour, long hours, whipping, or government interference was causing the low birth rate and impeding the natural increase of slaves in the islands:

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<sup>94</sup> See pages 126-7 for more information on the decreasing slave population in Britain's West Indian colonies.

To say that this increase has been hitherto prevented by the severity of their treatment, is to attribute to those of our countrymen whose daily emigration forms so large a part of our West Indian population, a strange and unnatural cruelty; besides which it appears very doubtful, from the experience of the severer monastic orders, whether labour, and abstinence, and stripes, and interrupted slumbers can materially check the impulse which leads to the union of the sexes...<sup>95</sup>

He defended the planters from charges that they were impeding the slave population through strenuous or violent labour by comparing plantation life to monastic life and questioned how planters could possibly have control over the physical interactions between their slaves. Ellis, with his own personal connections to colonial life, had a strong interest in portraying the colonists as paternalist carers for the colonies' slaves.

An anonymous contributor<sup>96</sup> to the July 1823 issue of *The Quarterly Review* wrote a substantial review of six works including abolitionist pamphlets and a published version of the 15 May 1823 debate in Parliament on amelioration.<sup>97</sup> The author began by stating his intention to focus on the true state of slavery in the colonies rather than the international trade in slaves. He believed that conditions in the colonies were improving, but that abolitionists in Britain over the past year had become impatient, hence the move for government-outlined amelioration. Throughout the review the author argued that abolitionists had knowingly or unknowingly been spreading false information about life in the colonies and about the colonists through propaganda: 'They assailed the public through a variety of channels, in pamphlets, reviews, magazines, constantly pursuing the plan of flinging odium on the treatment of the negroes in our sugar colonies, and of rousing in their behalf the sympathy of the public'.<sup>98</sup> He believed, however, that if the planters had made more of an effort to counter the wave of abolitionist propaganda and explain the situation to the British public, popular opinion might have been swayed their way and erroneous views of slavery in the colonies would have been corrected.<sup>99</sup>

The author then provided a three-part review for his readers. He first reviewed a number of abolitionist works and then countered their information with what the author described as 'a sketch of the actual treatment and condition of the

<sup>95</sup> [George Ellis], 'Art. II. The History of Barbadoes, from the first Discovery of the Island in the Year 1605, till the Accession of Lord Seaforth, 1801', *The Quarterly Review* 1.2 (1809), 267.

<sup>96</sup> The contributor was likely Joseph Lowe. Lowe had published an *Inquiry into the State of the British West Indies* in 1807. See Jonathan Cutmore, *Contributors to the Quarterly Review: A History, 1809-1825* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 176.

<sup>97</sup> Published 30 December 1823.

<sup>98</sup> 'Art. VIII. Substance of the Debate...', *The Quarterly Review* 29.58 (1823), 477.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

slaves in our colonies'.<sup>100</sup> He then looked at the ways in which the planters could improve conditions for their slaves without encountering any injury to their property. Within the review he included a history of servitude throughout the world, made comparisons between slavery in the colonies and the working conditions of the poor in Europe and Ireland, and expressed the prevailing belief in the colonies that Africans and their descendants would not work without coercion. He argued that they did not need to stop wishing for emancipation, but that they must make Britons aware of actual life in the colonies. He also noted that the terms 'slavery' and 'emancipation' had very different connotations in different locales that must be overcome.<sup>101</sup> In his conclusion the author stated that he had tried to remain impartial:

We have done our best to conduct our researches with strict impartiality, and if the larger share of our animadversions is pointed at the abolitionists, it is only because they have been more active in the field, and have, as we conceive, communicated, in several respects, erroneous ideas to the public. Their better plan would have been to distrust all *ex parte* evidence...<sup>102</sup>

The planters, however, as the author lamented, had been almost silent on the subject, leading to a lack of accurate information with which to help the British public understand the true nature of slavery in the colonies.<sup>103</sup>

Plantation owner Charles Rose Ellis and Robert John Wilmot Horton<sup>104</sup> wrote a lengthy review for the January 1824 issue of *The Quarterly Review*.<sup>105</sup> It began with a discussion of the published version of George Canning's speech in the House of Commons of 17 March 1824 and the related Order in Council sent to Trinidad for amelioration. While the review initially listed a number of publications to be discussed within the review, the authors focused on Canning's speech, the issue of free versus slave labour, and defending the colonists against abolitionists' charges and MPs' assumptions. Like the previous article discussed here, the authors remained focused on explaining and defending the West Indian position and devoted little time to discussing the various titles under review.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 496-7 and 507.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 508.

<sup>104</sup> Wilmot Horton was MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme (1818-30), Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies (1821-8), and knighted in 1831.

<sup>105</sup> Published 28 August 1824.

Ellis' own connections to slavery would have encouraged him to defend his fellow planters throughout the piece. He and Wilmot-Horton argued that the planters did not love the institution of slavery nor did they necessarily want it to remain:

It is by no means the love of slavery which characterizes the proceedings or the sentiments of the West India colonies: it is the dread of the loss of property; –it is the instinctive anxiety for the preservation of life; –it is the fear of an experiment involving a radical change, which, however benevolent in its intention, may lead to results which the promoters of it did not contemplate...<sup>106</sup>

They argued for compensation for the planters as a means of quelling the colonists' fears of destruction and the need to move slowly forward with any changes to the labour structure in the colonies. They also disagreed with the use of Sierra Leone as a positive example of Africans providing wage labour because the colony did not produce and export sugar.<sup>107</sup> The authors instead pointed to St. Domingo as the most relevant example of what Britons should expect following a mass emancipation. Throughout the piece Ellis and Wilmot-Horton complained that the abolitionists were promoting inaccurate and dangerous ideas and actions:

we shall never yield to declamation, or to arguments that are not directly founded upon facts of a clear and unimpeachable nature; and—in a question of such extreme delicacy, we must beg leave to observe that those who advance facts, of the correctness of which they are not absolutely certain, allow themselves a latitude very nearly approaching to criminality. We are sometimes afraid, that there are persons engaged in polemical controversy upon this subject, so hurried on by their detestation of a state of slavery—so morbidly anxious for its extinction, that they are disposed to adopt that most dangerous of all human principles of action, that the end may occasionally sanctify the employment of means which in themselves, and abstractedly taken, cannot be justified.<sup>108</sup>

Their concerns, echoing those of the author of the previous review discussed here, centred on the charge that abolitionists had been misleading the British public while encouraging Parliament to make dangerous decisions on colonial slavery. They stressed the need for patience and for the West Indian colonists to be given the time and the respect they deserved because no one, not even the planters, wanted slavery to continue forever.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> [Charles Rose Ellis and Robert John Wilmot-Horton], 'Art. XIII – 1. Speech of the Right Honourable George Canning...', *The Quarterly Review* 30.60 (January 1824), 566-7.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 570-1.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

### 3. Informative Works

The works discussed in this section were not solely intended to inform the British public about the slavery debate, but rather about the nature of mankind, the makeup of the British Empire, or the workings of a colonial plantation. While any of these sources might have contributed to the debate, certain histories and studies provided useful information and evidence for authors without first-hand knowledge of the West Indians or enslaved Africans and their descendants to promote the continuance of the slave trade and slavery.<sup>110</sup> Several histories and pieces of travel writing from the West Indies and of Britain's relations with the West Indian colonies gained widespread attention and gave credence to the anti-abolitionists' contentions of the importance of the colonies to Britain and her long-standing support for and encouragement of the slave trade. Plantation manuals for the running of colonial plantations and maintaining the health of the slaves promoted the notion that plantation slavery in the colonies was normal and relatively healthy, although it was work to which Africans were better suited than Europeans.<sup>111</sup> Supposedly scientific studies of the nature of mankind, including theories on the evolution of man and developments in racial theory (some of which reflect a growing interest and trust in phrenology), reinforced long-held prejudices of European cultural and intellectual superiority and African inferiority. Contemporary beliefs about white supremacy helped to shape amelioration, rationalise slavery, improve productivity while debasing blacks, and demonstrate opinions about the innate animalistic nature of Africans.<sup>112</sup> These ideas pervaded the histories, journals, manuals, and studies addressed in this section.

These instructive works were intentionally educational and aimed at an educated audience with interests in a wide range of subjects including human history and diversity, geography, travel, the environment, and agriculture. They therefore discussed slavery, enslaving Africans, and the nature of Africans in scientific terms, classifying, categorising, and ranking them in areas including physical and mental abilities (as individuals or in tribes) and level of civilisation (of the entire continent). The authors wrote with authority, clarity, and knowledge gained through personal

<sup>110</sup> For example, Long and Edwards' histories, discussed below, have been cited as sources for late eighteenth and early nineteenth century fiction. See Brycchan Carey and Sara Salih, 'Introduction', in *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760-1838*, ed. Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis, and Sara Salih (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>111</sup> For example, see discussions of James Grainger's *An Essay on the More Common West Indian Diseases* (1764, 2nd edn. 1802) or *Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves in the Sugar Colonies* (1803), below.

<sup>112</sup> Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 61.

experience or from supposedly credible outside sources to support their findings. These studies were written without excessive feeling or sentiment and instead were assumed to be based on logic, rationality, and facts. Authors claimed that their studies were contributions to or reflections on modern scientific study and research rather than informing the slave debates. These claims were not necessarily truthful. Care has been taken to note below whether each author commented on the slavery debates and the place of their work within the context of these debates. Additional research into the personal writings of the individual authors might reveal if the content and timing of the publications were intentional. The arguments contained within the works were about the innate nature of Africans and frequently emphasised their natural suitability for performing hard labour and labouring in hot environments (with the obvious subtext that they were therefore well-suited to labour on Britain's West Indian plantations). These works were therefore intended to help Europeans and Caribbean colonists work with, assist, and enslave Africans on their plantations and justify enslaving Africans to the wider, educated, literate elite.

A number of popular histories and travel writings about the West Indies were published in the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. These histories frequently contained extensive commentary on the slaves' lives in the West Indies and in Africa as well as providing a history of one or more of Britain's West India islands. The authors, only some of whom were from the West Indies, included commentary and opinions on the innate nature of African and Creole slaves, their living and working conditions on the plantations, and their treatment by their masters. The writings of English historians promoted the superiority of the English or Europeans over other nations (and races), defended the existing social order and plantation system in the colonies, and singled out troublemakers in the colonies who challenged the status quo and threatened the stability of the colonies.<sup>113</sup> Advocates of the slave trade and slavery were able to employ the writings of authors such as Edward Long and Bryan Edwards<sup>114</sup> as evidence to counter the abolitionists' claims, although only some of the histories examined below claimed that they were intended to contribute to and inform the slavery debate.

Edward Long's 1774 work, *The History of Jamaica*, was written outside the period addressed in this study, but it influenced later writers and was exploited by the West Indian interest. It has been called 'the most exhaustive defence of colonial

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<sup>113</sup> Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 546-7.

<sup>114</sup> Edwards, MP for Grampound, a Cornish borough (1796-1800), served in Jamaica's Assembly and published numerous items related to the West Indies and the transatlantic slave trade.

slavery ever written' and a work which employed 'every available proslavery argument'.<sup>115</sup> Long included sections on the island's government, history, settlement, life on the island, slaves, and the environment. He stated in his introduction that he intended to give an impartial account of all the island's inhabitants,<sup>116</sup> but he only examined Africans and their colonial descendants in detail. He was dismissive of African culture, civilisation, intelligence, and abilities, and frequently compared them to beasts.<sup>117</sup> In his ranking of men and animals, Africans were placed on the lowest rung of mankind, just above the orang-utan, with whom (he argued) African women occasionally coupled.<sup>118</sup> By promoting this pre-Darwinite, fixity-of-species theory, Long was able to argue that all ranks of men and beasts had pre-ordained positions in society which they were meant to fill.<sup>119</sup> Over time, Long became the most notable supporter of the polygenesis theory.<sup>120</sup> He defended the colonists by comparing working conditions and laws and punishments to those in England.<sup>121</sup> It is important to note that he was writing ten years before the formal British abolition movement began.

Two of Bryan Edwards' studies will also be examined here. Edwards' 1793 work, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, was published in several editions in the 1790s alone.<sup>122</sup> This highly influential and extensive work covered the histories of Britain's West Indian colonies, their people, produce, and government. He stated early on that he had relied on his own experiences in the West Indies<sup>123</sup> and those of his friends and acquaintances to

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<sup>115</sup> His defence included economic and paternal arguments, the opportunity for mission work, racial differences, freedom from African masters, and better working conditions for slaves than for Britons. See Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 142-3. For a detailed examination of these and other proslavery arguments, see chapters Three and Four of this thesis.

<sup>116</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica. Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island: with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), vol. 1, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Gordon Lewis has argued that Long had to portray Africans as having no ability to reason or any higher aspirations because otherwise it would be wrong to enslave them. See Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 552.

<sup>118</sup> Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 370. Note that orang-utans are native to Indonesia and Malaysia, not Africa.

<sup>119</sup> Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 551.

<sup>120</sup> Peter Kitson, "'Candid Reflections": The Idea of Race in the Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteen and Early Nineteenth Century', in *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760-1838*, ed. Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis, and Sara Salih (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 13. This is discussed in some detail below in Section Six of Chapter Three.

<sup>121</sup> Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, 493-6.

<sup>122</sup> Some of these were abridged single-volume versions and later copies included a discussion of St. Domingo.

<sup>123</sup> The cover states that Edwards is from Jamaica.

inform his work rather than making use of other histories and published sources.<sup>124</sup> Edwards thanked Long in particular for his assistance in editing and providing additional information to support and expand his study.<sup>125</sup> Throughout the history, he attempted to achieve two goals. The first was to emphasise the great importance of the colonies to Britain's prosperity and power.<sup>126</sup> The second was to prove the abolitionists wrong and to persuade them to stop spreading false information and apologise to the planters and the British public for their actions.<sup>127</sup> This goal brought his study directly into the slave trade debates. Edwards overall provided a positive view of plantation life that could be ameliorated further through the efforts of compassionate, caring planters.<sup>128</sup>

In his 1797 study, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo*, Edwards claimed that he was trying to stay out of the slave trade debates.<sup>129</sup> The evidence he gathered from personal experience and testimony, however, led him to believe that abolitionists were inciting slaves to rebel and he recorded this in his study.<sup>130</sup> This opinion, given within the context of a study of St. Domingo's history, was strengthened when Edwards argued that it was London's abolitionists who inspired France's *Les Amis des Noirs*, a contentious abolitionist society largely blamed for the rebellion and bloodshed in St. Domingo.<sup>131</sup> Like his history of the West Indies, this study began with a history of the islands. It then provided readers with a dramatic and entertaining account of the rebellion from the white colonists' perspective,<sup>132</sup> statistics on the French and Spanish settlements,<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London: John Stockdale, 1793), vol. 1, xvii.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, xviii.

<sup>126</sup> This goal is evident from the dedication dated 3 June 1793: 'To the King's Most Excellent Majesty; this Political and Commercial Survey of His Majesty's Dominions in the West Indies; which, under his mild and auspicious government, are become the principle source of the national opulence and maritime power...?'

<sup>127</sup> Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, vol. 1, xx-xxi.

<sup>128</sup> Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 553.

<sup>129</sup> Bryan Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo: Comprehending a Short Account of its Ancient Government, Political State, Population, Productions, and Exports; A Narrative of the Calamities which have Desolated the Country ever since the year 1789, with some Reflections on their Causes and Probable Consequences, and a Detail of the Military Transactions of the British Army in that Island to the End of 1794* (London: John Stockdale, 1797), xxii.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-5.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>132</sup> Edwards explains that it is his duty as an historian to describe the scenes of brutality. *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>133</sup> While statistics underwent significant development in the nineteenth century, their use in the social sciences was far less developed than in other scientific disciplines. However, statistical theory and analysis dramatically increased in Britain beginning in 1830. See Stephen M. Stigler, *The History of Statistics: The Measurement of Uncertainty before 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 4-5 and Part Two. See also Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), Ch. 1.

and reports on Britain's military successes in the area. Edward's history of St. Domingo was far more entertaining than his earlier work, but it occasionally ventured into political commentary by providing opinions on slavery and abolition. He noted in the first chapter, however, during a discussion of the terms slavery and freedom that he was not defending the institution of slavery, just reporting on it.<sup>134</sup> The language and timing of the piece suggests otherwise.

John Poyer's 1808 study, *The History of Barbados*, traced the entire known history of Barbados in eighteen chapters. What set his study apart from the others was his decision not to discuss colonial slavery or the slaves beyond the preface. Poyer remarked that he made this choice because Edwards had already given a thorough account of the institution and, although he believed the topic to be relevant to the study, his readers might deem his account too repetitive.<sup>135</sup> He explained, however, that this decision would not prevent him from defending the colonists:

It has, doubtless, been expected that I should take notice of the torrent of illiberal invective with which our mistaken, misinformed, transatlantic fellow-subjects continue to overwhelm a peaceful, unoffending community, with whose internal situation they are imperfectly acquainted; and that I should vindicate the character of my injured country, from the gross calumnies which are daily propagated, concerning the treatment of slaves.<sup>136</sup>

He believed that the planters were too far away to be heard and so he chose to fill much of his preface with excerpts of first-hand knowledge and testimonies as to the true nature of colonial slavery that were designed to counter the accusations being regularly made against the colonists. Between those excerpts, Poyer asked his readers to consider why Africans should be the only race of men exempt from work.<sup>137</sup> He concluded that, if Britons would not believe the testimony of the learned men presented there (including two ministers, a doctor, and the duke of Clarence), he had little chance of persuading anyone of his own views.

Unlike Poyer's study, J. Stewart's *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica*, published in 1823, devoted more space to discussing the inhabitants of Jamaica than to the island's history, climate, trade, government, and defence, because he believed these topics would be more interesting to readers and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>135</sup> John Poyer, *The History of Barbados, from the First Discovery of the Island, in the year 1605, till the Accession of Lord Seaforth in 1801* (London: J. Mawman, 1808), xiv. This also implies Poyer's belief that the majority of his readers would have read Edwards' account.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., xiv-xv.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., xxi.

were more worthy of taking up space.<sup>138</sup> Stewart noted that he had lived in Jamaica for many years, giving him a unique, impartial outlook and the ability to provide new information for his readers.<sup>139</sup> He devoted several chapters to the white, coloured, and black populations of the island; five out of the twenty chapters focused on the island's slaves. Stewart stated that he was in favour of amelioration, but against immediate emancipation, because the slaves were not yet ready for freedom and, if they were emancipated, they would soon find themselves suffering under the tyrannical rule of black masters.<sup>140</sup> He also argued that Britain would need to provide almost £100 million in compensation to her colonists, her trade and navy would suffer, and the maritime industry would experience severe job losses.<sup>141</sup> All of these reasons, however, did not make Poyer a believer in perpetual slavery; he maintained that time and gradual improvements would bring about all the changes in the colonies desired by abolitionists.<sup>142</sup> As in the other histories discussed here, Poyer's thoughts on slavery and the slave trade informed his views on the island's history and inhabitants, shaped the structure of the study, and was written for the benefit of sceptical, politically-minded readers.

Plantation manuals were officially written and published in Great Britain for the benefit of West Indian plantation owners living in Britain. They also, however, emphasised and promoted the current satisfactory level of care that planters were supposedly providing for their slaves.<sup>143</sup> The two manuals discussed here were not overtly proslavery, but rather their authors accepted and promoted the enslavement of Africans in the West Indies as necessary to the welfare and survival of the colonies.<sup>144</sup> The authors were not opposed to slavery, but to bad slave owners and managers. Both argued for the adequate care and treatment of the slaves and provided a manual for the everyday management of the slaves that was meant to benefit both the slaves (through better health, working conditions, and provisions) and their owners (through increased production, greater revenues, and less loss of life). Due to their instructional approach, plantation manuals helped West Indians

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<sup>138</sup> J. Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica; with remarks on the moral and physical condition of the slaves, and on the abolition of slavery in the colonies* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1823), v-vi.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, vi-vii.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 243-4.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>143</sup> Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 69.

<sup>144</sup> George Boulukos has identified a widespread colonist mentality that, while slaves were human and slavery unfortunate, it was also necessary. See George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The emergence of race in eighteenth-century British and American culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6-7.

argue that adequate attention could be paid to the slaves' welfare without the additional interference of Parliament or the abolitionists.<sup>145</sup>

James Grainger, M.D., first published his manual anonymously, *An Essay on the More Common West-India Diseases*, in 1764, but it was reprinted under the author's name in a second edition in 1802 in the midst of the abolition debate. The manual was originally meant for planters and managers in Britain's West Indian islands, but the second edition notes that medical practitioners also used it.<sup>146</sup> The author stated that he wrote the manual because hundreds of slaves were dying needlessly each year in the colonies and there was no adequate manual on how to care for them.<sup>147</sup> He also warned his readers that, while he had attempted to provide all necessary instructions for the adequate care of slaves, this was not a manual to be used by the inexperienced, newly arrived Briton.<sup>148</sup> Grainger's manual was organised into four sections: how to choose from a selection of newly-arrived slaves; how to treat diseases that slaves were exposed to in the islands; which 'distempers' affected the slaves; and what provisions (particularly food, clothing, and medical attention) were necessary for their survival. In the first section he provided specific information on the different tribes from which African slaves were taken and the impact that these different cultures and habits had on a slave's temper and productivity. Grainger argued that slaves should be purchased as young as possible for the benefit of the entire plantation.<sup>149</sup> He warned planters against overworking newly arrived slaves as in Grainger's experience it took a full twelve months for them to adjust or 'season'.<sup>150</sup> He insisted that slaves required discipline if deserving of punishment:

As Negroes are ignorant, they must be vicious; they ought always to be attended to in their punishments. Thirty-nine is the lash of the law; half that number is, in my opinion, a sufficient punishment for any offence they can commit. Negroes must be punished for their own as well as their master's sake; but lenity should always temper justice. A Negroe should never be struck with a stick, nor ever punished in a passion.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> David Lambert has also recognised the creation of plantation manuals as a way to undermine and counter abolitionist attacks. See Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 66.

<sup>146</sup> James Grainger, *An Essay on the More Common West-India Diseases; and the Remedies which that Country itself Produces: to which are added, Some Hints on the Management, etc. of Negroes*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Mundell & Son, and London: Longman & Rees, 1802), v-vi.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, v-vi.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

Throughout his study, Grainger placed a great deal of responsibility upon the planter to care for his slaves and see that they worked, thrived, and reproduced. In the concluding pages of the manual Grainger acknowledged the existence of inhumane planters in the colonies and carefully reminded his interested readers that, if they abused or ignored a sick slave in their care, they would have to answer to God.<sup>152</sup>

The second manual to be examined here is *Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves, in the Sugar Colonies* (1803). Having been written during the slave trade debates, much of this anonymously authored manual's introduction was devoted to a discussion of the current debates and the effects of the shipping regulations of the 1790s. The manual was divided into two sections. The first was a guide to managing healthy slaves from their first arrival in the colonies. The second was a guide to treating sick slaves. The author began by justifying the legitimacy and validity of his manual by pointing to his twenty years of experience directing 'a pretty large gang of negroes' in whose lives he had invested and who rarely died.<sup>153</sup> He stated that he began writing the manual as a guide for his own manager while he was away, but then decided to expand it to make it suitable for wider distribution. Like Grainger, this author viewed slavery as a necessity and believed that with humane treatment both the slaves and the planters would reap rewards. The author argued that, in fact, being a planter was an excellent way to exercise philanthropy.<sup>154</sup> Good planters, he argued, were able to remove every negative element of slavery from their plantations except for the name 'slavery'.<sup>155</sup> He disagreed with the abolitionists' assertions that plantations could be worked using free labour by arguing that the climate of the colonies significantly affected the ability of men from temperate climates to work: 'I will venture to say, there is not a regiment in the service, that could have resisted the fatigue a twelvemonth, and have had a twentieth part of their number on their legs at the end of that time. Let us hear no more then of white men working, where they have so much difficulty to exist, even without work.'<sup>156</sup> The goal of his first chapter was to show why colonial slavery was necessary.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>153</sup> A Professional Planter, *Practical Rules for the Management and Medical Treatment of Negro Slaves, in the Sugar Colonies* (London: J. Barfield, 1803), 9-10.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 49.

Like Grainger, the author of this manual examined various elements of plantation life and gave specific advice on the choosing, caring for, and managing of slaves. He discussed the defining characteristics of the different tribes from which slaves originated and also promoted the buying of young boys and girls, seeing them as an investment for a planter considering his long-term profits and labour needs.<sup>158</sup> He covered numerous topics, including seasoning slaves, diet, clothing, lodging, breeding, labour, discipline, and religion, and provided specific advice on each. He believed that, overall, if they followed his advice, the planters would find that they only lost as many newly-arrived slaves as they did seasoned ones.<sup>159</sup> Specific numbers, however, were not provided.

West Indians could uphold the existence and content of these manuals to prove that their fellow planters were informed about caring for slaves, their needs, their habits, and their illnesses. Both authors implied that slavery was a vital element in maintaining stability and production in the islands. Through their advice and guidance the authors highlighted the humanity of the planters and the true nature of colonial slavery. They provided numerous examples of diseases to which the slaves were exposed, and which anti-abolitionists could hold up as legitimate reasons for population decline. The authors also discussed the dangers of importing older African slaves that anti-abolitionists could use to defend themselves against accusations of poor treatment being the cause of rebellion or death. Both authors commended the colonists and, to some extent, the abolitionists on meliorating conditions on the plantations and aboard the slave ships, but neither was providing a manual meant to allow for the eventual transition to freedom.

Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scientific studies of mankind, its origins, and its varieties from this period provide fascinating insights into contemporary beliefs about European superiority which have long since been undermined by modern study and scientific evidence. As the Bible's authority on the history of man weakened, investigators developed new theories with which to understand the differences in mankind. This resulted in new forms of scientific racism.<sup>160</sup> In some of these studies European culture, language, and appearance were placed in direct opposition to that of African nations to highlight the apparent

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-8.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>160</sup> Kitson, "'Candid Reflections': The Idea of Race in the Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteen and Early Nineteenth Century", 22.

backwardness and lack of civilisation of the African people.<sup>161</sup> Peter Kitson has recognised that scientific and literary discourses from the mid-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth centuries affirmed that mankind could be divided into distinct physical (and often moral and intellectual) groups.<sup>162</sup> He also notes that the planters did not have to justify slavery by overtly using biological theories and findings because it was enough to show that men were all of one species, but with Africans on a lower level than Europeans.<sup>163</sup> Craniologists emphasised the smaller brain capacity of African men and women, reflecting nineteenth-century racial theories that mental ability and physiognomy were linked and directly contributed to racial characteristics.<sup>164</sup> Some racial theorists supported the contested theory of polygenism, a belief in the separate origins of African, European, and other peoples around the world.<sup>165</sup> Proslavery authors highlighted the superior physical strength of the Africans and their ability to handle extreme tropical climates in which Europeans suffered. Others stressed the environment's darkening and thickening of their skin that allowed them to tolerate hard labour and whipping.<sup>166</sup> These theories directly challenged abolitionist efforts to depict Africans and black slaves as men and brothers.<sup>167</sup> Anti-abolitionists were able to employ these pseudo-scientific findings to promote their cause and support their positions.

Three studies that attempted to trace the history of mankind and its different races and characteristics were Charles White's *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables*, originally a series of readings given to Manchester's Literary and Philosophical Society in 1795; James Cowles

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<sup>161</sup> George Boulukos has argued that these differences had to be emphasised; if Africans were seen to be too similar to Europeans, enslaving them would be problematic. See Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The emergence of race in eighteenth-century British and American culture*, 202.

<sup>162</sup> Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>164</sup> H.F. Augstein, 'Introduction', in *Race: The Origins of An Idea, 1760-1850*, ed. H.F. Augstein (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), ix-x. Phrenology became increasingly popular in Britain after Johann Gasper Spurzheim's series of lectures in Edinburgh in 1816. See Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 451. The scientific community has since disregarded their findings due to obvious racist motivations, bias, and questionable methodology. It would be wrong, however, to assume that these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas have completely disappeared from modern scientific and psychological research. Racial difference and theories of African inferiority, for example, continue to be promoted by psychologist Prof. J. Phillippe Rushton of the University of Western Ontario. See J. Phillippe Rushton, *Race, Evolution, and Behaviour: A Life History Perspective*, 2nd abridged edn. (Port Huron, MI: Charles Darwin Research Institute, 2000), Chs. 1 and 4.

<sup>165</sup> Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould have argued that the slavery debates helped develop and define new racial theories such as polygenism. See Carretta and Gould, 'Introduction', 5.

<sup>166</sup> Kitson, "'Candid Reflections": The Idea of Race in the Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century', 20.

<sup>167</sup> Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom 1776-1838*, 24.

Prichard's *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (1813); and John Bigland's *An Historical Display of the Effects of Physical and Moral Causes on the Character and Circumstances of Nations* (1816). White provided his readers with a polygenesis worldview that he supported using supposedly scientific evidence.<sup>168</sup> He focused on Europeans and Africans, placing Europeans at the top of his rankings of the races of mankind and Africans at the bottom, just above apes. Throughout his work, White made a number of comparisons between Africans and apes to highlight their similarities. Phrenology had noticeably influenced White's study; he admitted to having been inspired by John Hunter's talk, 'Remarks on the Gradation of Skulls', delivered in Manchester in 1794.<sup>169</sup> Hunter's ranking of skulls descended from European to Asiatic, American, African, monkey, and so on.<sup>170</sup> White focused on certain elements of Hunter's findings when comparing skulls, noting that Africans had less internal capacity for a brain, a more prominent jaw, a receding chin (particularly important because this made it more like an ape's skull), a less prominent nose, and bigger front teeth, which led him to conclude: 'In all these points it differed from the European, and approached to the ape'.<sup>171</sup> By relating Africans to animals, such authors and scientists were contributing to the dehumanisation of the African and the slave.<sup>172</sup>

In his conclusion, White included a page examining how Europeans were the best of all the races and argued for at least four different species of man. He voiced his belief that Africans might be of more than one species. He justified this assessment of the African race(s), as well as their low position on his scale of mankind, through a brief, derogatory summary of their varied appearance: 'perhaps the lowest degree of the human race resides there. I am inclined to think that hair, rather than colour, ought to guide us in that quarter; and that it is not the blackest inhabitants, but those with extremely short hair, and a most ungracious appearance,

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<sup>168</sup> Ian Barrett has argued that such polygenetic arguments were both rare and suppressed. See Barrett, 'Cultures of Pro-Slavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c. 1787-1807', 109. Peter Kitson agrees that polygenist theory was neither influential nor was it able to satisfactorily justify the slave trade and slavery to contemporary readers. He also notes that planters resisted the theory even though it might have been their best defence. See Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*, 19, 93. Interestingly, both mono- and polygenist theories rank Africans lower down the list of the races of mankind. See Carretta and Gould, 'Introduction', 5.

<sup>169</sup> Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables; and from the Former to the Latter* (London: C. Dilly, 1799), iii. Early phrenologists emphasised the differences and inferiority of African skulls and therefore their intellect and abilities.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>172</sup> Andrew Wells, 'Sex and Racial Theory in Britain, 1690-1833' (Unpublished Oxford University D. Phil. thesis, 2009), 285.

as the Hottentots, who may be reckoned the lowest on the scale of humanity'.<sup>173</sup> Finally, White emphasised that this study was not intended to contribute to the abolition debate, but that his work might unintentionally help the anti-abolitionist cause by providing a negative portrayal of Africans; if asked, he would support abolition.<sup>174</sup>

James Cowles Prichard was a medical practitioner who promoted a monogenist world-view and wrote his study with the intention of proving that all men came from a single point and moment of origin.<sup>175</sup> His extensive survey of mankind covered numerous groups from around the world, but began with an in-depth analysis of African peoples. He brought together published reports and eyewitness accounts of the various African tribes to describe the men, women, and children of Africa with a particular focus on their appearance. Prichard noted in the first chapter of the third book that his goals were to explore the different physical characteristics of the races and attempt to account for these differences.<sup>176</sup> He did not believe that climate explained the varied appearance of the different races of man because generations of Africans had lived in the Americas and remained black in colour.<sup>177</sup> Prichard was very influential in Britain in supporting a theory of heredity to explain diversity.<sup>178</sup> He also argued that Africans could not live well in cooler climates; otherwise they would have done so for centuries.<sup>179</sup> As with White's reports of Hunter's findings, Prichard reported that he had also found some similarities between African and ape skulls.<sup>180</sup> Both White's and Prichard's decisions to emphasise innate, unchangeable physical differences in both natural ability (physical strength, brain capacity) and appearance (dark skin, ape-like features) allowed the West Indian interest to use their studies to argue that these differences were important, natural, permanent, and scientifically recognised. The permanence of the differences meant (to them) that not only would it take a great deal of time to change the natural behaviour of the African slaves, but that even as

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<sup>173</sup> White, *Account of the Regular Gradation in Man*, 134.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>175</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (London: John and Arthur Arch, 1826), vol. 1, 2.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 240.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 533. Climate had been the Enlightenment's answer to the different physical appearances of mankind even though all men were believed to have descended from Noah. See Augstein, 'Introduction', xiii.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>179</sup> Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History*, vol. 1, 363.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 337.

former slaves they would never be able to assimilate fully into white colonial society.<sup>181</sup>

In contrast to White's and Prichard's studies, John Bigland concluded that geography and climate had been the two greatest influences on the different races of mankind. According to his findings, Africans were to be pitied because from the beginning they were exposed to an inferior landscape and climate; this affected all other aspects of their lives, bodies, and culture, as well as cementing their current position as the world's slaves. In particular, Bigland believed that Africans and Asians were disadvantaged from the earliest period because they did not have an inland sea around which to settle and become civilised.<sup>182</sup> In his discussion of a tropical climate's effects on the different races, he noted that Africans (as well as some Asians): 'under the influence of an ardent sun, are fiery, sensual, and vindictive'.<sup>183</sup> Bigland believed that hot, tropical climates bred stronger, 'livelier' animals as well as men.<sup>184</sup> He noted the great physical strength of certain African tribes, remarking: 'Black men of Guinea are also robust and can handle a lot of hard work and fatigue'.<sup>185</sup> It was with some regret that Bigland commented on the longstanding reliance of other nations on black slave labour: 'Unfeeling avarice long endeavoured to propagate and establish an opinion, that the unfortunate negroes were beings of an inferior class, formed by nature, and designed by providence, for a state of perpetual slavery.'<sup>186</sup> His findings on the natural strength and long tradition by many nations to enslave Africans supported the anti-abolitionists' arguments that African labour was necessary and that others had enslaved Africans long before they arrived in the West Indies.

#### 4. Art and Creative Writing

This section focuses on the genres of art, literature, drama, song, and poetry that contributed to the slavery debate and have often been overlooked. This category of proslavery and anti-abolition works had the potential to reach many more Britons

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<sup>181</sup> The issue of whether black and white individuals in the colonies could ever live together peacefully was also discussed in the slavery debates in Parliament. See, for example, Sir Robert Peel's concerns on page 174.

<sup>182</sup> John Bigland, *An Historical Display of the Effects of Physical and Moral Causes on the Character and Circumstances of Nations: Including a comparison of the ancients and moderns in regard to their intellectual and social state* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), 4.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

than the propaganda and studies discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. The audience/viewer/reader of these works, however, would have to have had a good understanding of the slavery debate and contemporary politics to understand fully the content, messages, and intentions of these products and their creators. Many of the works discussed here were intended for a politically-informed elite aware of Caribbean slavery, the slavery debate in Parliament, and the wider anti-slavery movement (including its major players such as Wilberforce). Due to the nature of these genres illiterate individuals could potentially have perceived each of these genres other than literature (in a gallery, a concert hall, or a theatre, although the common practice of reading aloud might have allowed wider access to literature), but in order to ‘read’ the pieces a wider knowledge of the political circumstances of their creation and therefore their intention would have been necessary. These works could therefore have contributed to the slavery debate if the audience or viewer was aware of the political landscape and debate going on in and out of Parliament, but they could also claim to be simply pieces of art (or music or drama) meant to provide entertainment and enjoyment to their urban audiences. They provided pro-slavery images to the public (both literally, as in a piece of artwork or a scene on stage, and figuratively, within the mind of the reader or listener) by focusing on the benefits of slavery for everyone involved or disproving the abolitionists’ arguments and motives. They were also aimed at an urban public, as performance spaces and public displays were centred in Britain’s cities, particularly London. The creators of these pro-slavery pieces used sentiment and feeling as well as reason and logic to persuade their audiences of the benefits of the slave trade and Caribbean slavery and to warn them of the dangers of the anti-slavery movement. They also used their imaginations, creative license, and personal beliefs about Africans and Caribbean slavery to inform their works and add drama and interest, making them significantly different in their style, form, and intentions from the genres discussed in the previous two sections.

Art became more public and less courtly in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>187</sup> Art was rarely on public display in England prior to the 1760s. It was not until the latter half of the eighteenth century that artwork was displayed in public spaces in England and made accessible to the urban upper classes.<sup>188</sup> The Royal Academy opened its doors to the viewing public and numerous other galleries opened. Going out to see

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<sup>187</sup> Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, xvii.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

pictures became a fashionable pastime for the upper classes. Important pieces of art were supposed to instruct observers.<sup>189</sup> Approximately one quarter of England's population was comprised of the middle classes, ranging from minor gentlemen to well-off artisans making between £50 and £200 per year.<sup>190</sup> These men and women made up most of the new audience for the arts. They could afford to buy books and prints and attend the theatre.<sup>191</sup>

Visual images and artwork can act as powerful propaganda.<sup>192</sup> Black people are found in various genres of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British art. Art historians have agreed that art helps shape ideas and cement stereotypes.<sup>193</sup> Once the concept and colour of 'black' was used to describe a group of people, this group could be placed in opposition to white European subjects in art as well as in other genres.<sup>194</sup> In the era of abolition some black subjects played the role of servant or slave to the aristocratic subject of individual or family portraits, demonstrating and enforcing a clear hierarchy between the subjects,<sup>195</sup> while others were themselves subjects of portraits. Their rigid set of roles in Western art loosened after 1780.<sup>196</sup> It is noteworthy that this is the first period in which blacks were depicted as familiar rather than foreign subjects in British prints.<sup>197</sup>

Both pro- and anti-slavery supporters created and viewed visual propaganda during the era of abolition. Anti-slavery paintings and prints concentrated on showing the British public the hardships and abuse slaves were subjected to on the plantations and during the Middle Passage. Proslavery art was not as prevalent at the time, nor has its images made a lasting impact on popular culture, yet proslavery art did attack abolition and challenge the abolitionists' public image and credibility. Portraits and political prints will be examined in this section of the chapter to assess the meaning as well as the content of the selected works. As in the analysis of any

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., xxvi.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Roy Porter, 'Review: Seeing the Past', *Past & Present*, 118 (1988), 186.

<sup>193</sup> Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), xiii. Caricatures in particular have been recognised for helping define and spread stereotypes of colonial slavery. See Pascal Dupuy, 'Informations et désinformations: Les tentatives d'abolition de l'esclavage en Angleterre à travers la caricature anglaise, 1760-1810', *Actes de Colloque de 1999*, 25 (2001), 184.

<sup>194</sup> Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century*, 1-2.

<sup>195</sup> David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (Kingston-Upon-Thames, Surrey: Dangaroo Press, 1985), 21-7.

<sup>196</sup> These set roles included labourer, entertainer, a member of a crowd of the British poor, or the exotic element or pet/toy in a portrait. See Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865*, 154.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 153.

art, it must be kept in mind that any created image is already an interpretation of its subject, and thus the analysis below is the author's interpretation of an interpretation.<sup>198</sup>

Portraiture was the most common genre of art in eighteenth-century England.<sup>199</sup> At the Royal Academy exhibition in 1787, Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of the Prince of Wales with a black servant was the highlight of the annual show that was regularly dominated by portraits (Figure 2).<sup>200</sup> In this painting, the black servant who is already physically smaller than the prince leans forward to adjust the prince's clothing, thus making him even shorter by comparison and placing him in a servile stance. In the background are two large stone columns that might place the picture in ancient Greece or Rome. The servant is completely dominated by the prince in his formal robes, attire, sashes, and decorations. The prince looks off to his left rather than down towards his servant, thus ignoring his presence and assistance. The prince's robes and outstretched arm add to his width and heeled shoes to his height, further establishing his dominance of the scene and the portrait. Their relative positioning and size allows the artist and viewer to easily contrast the two men.

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<sup>198</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 141.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>200</sup> It is interesting to note that the exhibition was held the same month that the abolition campaign was launched. See Jan Marsh, 'The Black Presence in British Art 1800-1900: Introduction and Overview', in *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art 1800-1900*, ed. Jan Marsh (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2005), 17.



**Figure 2 -- Portrait of George IV while Prince of Wales by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c. 1787** (image from the Bridgeman Art Library)

While a number of aristocratic Britons had their portraits painted with black servants at their sides, this particular painting was displayed at the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy, the centre of London's artistic world.<sup>201</sup> The portrait could be interpreted as demonstrating Britain's domination over its colonies (represented by the servant, a non-white British subject, being physically dominated by British royalty). Through the boy's lower position the prince is empowered imperially as well as physically.<sup>202</sup> As the servant in the portrait is actively helping the prince to look his best, the portrait might also be an illustration of Britain's reliance on her colonial residents to maintain her greatness and strength. It demonstrates a firm belief in white European (in this case British) domination and superiority over the rest of the world.<sup>203</sup> It also displays the boy's slavish devotion to the painting's white subject, a common image and idea in contemporary portraiture.<sup>204</sup> Columns that might allude to the great Roman Empire and Rome's domination over inferior

<sup>201</sup> Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, 38.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>203</sup> This sense of superiority was commonly displayed in artwork with subjects of different races. See Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art*, 30.

<sup>204</sup> Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, 146.

tribal groups reinforce this interpretation. Britain's (and Europe's) long-established domination over 'inferior' groups benefited all white Britons and legitimised slavery for many British and colonial subjects.

Portraiture in the eighteenth century was a key element in making an individual recognisable to the public.<sup>205</sup> A print's success depended on the ability of the viewers to recognise the faces of the artist's subjects.<sup>206</sup> While artistic genres such as portraiture and history painting depicted idealised British or European bodies, caricatures and satirical prints showed deformities, vices, and in particular individuals who had lost control of their bodies due to their passions.<sup>207</sup> Because initial runs of prints were usually in the hundreds, art historians believe they must have been in high demand.<sup>208</sup> It has been difficult, however, for historians to calculate the impact of caricatures on the British public.<sup>209</sup> Their production centred on London, but they were widely disseminated and read.<sup>210</sup>

All classes enjoyed the mocking, bawdy humour of satirical prints, but only the middle and upper classes could afford to buy them.<sup>211</sup> There is little evidence of exposure through public displays or private circulation outside of London to the lower classes.<sup>212</sup> Political prints also often included writing which further limited their viewers to the literate, politically-aware elites.<sup>213</sup> Some political prints were likely put on display in shop windows in London, but viewers required some knowledge of current political events in Westminster or at court to understand them.<sup>214</sup> There were fewer than ten shops with large window displays for the viewing public to enjoy and all of these were in London.<sup>215</sup> While caricature became an important element of the political print after 1780, the viewer still needed to have

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>207</sup> Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*, 79.

<sup>208</sup> Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>209</sup> Dupuy, 'Informations et désinformations: Les tentatives d'abolition de l'esclavage en Angleterre à travers la caricature anglaise, 1760-1810', 182.

<sup>210</sup> Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, 19-20.

<sup>211</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London*, 7.

<sup>212</sup> Eirwen E.C. Nicholson, 'Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England', *History*, 81 (1996), 19.

<sup>213</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 15.

<sup>214</sup> Nicholson, 'Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England', 17.

<sup>215</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 15.

knowledge of the characteristics and actions of the individuals being portrayed in the prints.<sup>216</sup>

Most prints probably circulated amongst a small circle of political elites and propertied men in London.<sup>217</sup> They were generally made by men for a male audience.<sup>218</sup> Buyers' preferences were likely taken into account in the production and content of prints; the images and opinions contained within the prints therefore do not necessarily reflect the artist's beliefs.<sup>219</sup> This awareness of public opinion also allowed prints to reflect public opinion and provide feedback to politicians on opinions out-of-doors.<sup>220</sup> Most political prints were likely made for an audience of politicians because they were usually produced while Parliament was in session and their content reflected the thoughts and activities of political insiders.<sup>221</sup> They could also have a political impact and help shape public opinion.<sup>222</sup> Political movements used prints to promote their cause and the political elite and their supporters subsidised and encouraged print production.<sup>223</sup> Criticisms were made using physical distortions and by including sex, violence, wit, and pornographic imagery in the depicted scenes.<sup>224</sup> Graphic satires reflected contemporary issues and illustrated opinions that people might not have put into words for fear of prosecution for libel.<sup>225</sup> Almost all political prints were signed by the 1820s, demonstrating acceptance of this form of criticism.<sup>226</sup> The artists and their backers wanted grievances to be addressed rather than revolution or radical reforms; this meant that they were not subjected to prosecution or stamp duties in the same manner as the authors of pamphlets and newspapers.<sup>227</sup>

Little is known about the print runs, circulation, or influence of specific prints. Vic Gatrell has estimated that approximately 20,000 satirical and humorous prints were printed in London between 1770 and 1830.<sup>228</sup> About half of these commented on politics, whereas the other half focused on social and personal issues,

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<sup>216</sup> Nicholson, 'Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England', 18.

<sup>217</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 13.

<sup>218</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London*, 14.

<sup>219</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 19.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>221</sup> Nicholson, 'Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England', 14.

<sup>222</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 16-7.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-8.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>225</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London*, 11.

<sup>226</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 13.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>228</sup> Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London*, 9.

including scandals, gossip, and sex.<sup>229</sup> Rates of production varied through the year, with most appearing in late fall and early spring to coincide with parliamentary sessions, but on average production grew from four per week between the 1780s and early 1800s to seven to ten per week between 1830 and 1832.<sup>230</sup> Eirwen E.C. Nicholson, however, has found that while the number of political prints increased after 1770, the size of the print runs for each image remained steady due to their increased size, complexity, and colouring.<sup>231</sup> First print runs by popular artists probably ranged from 100 to 600 copies.<sup>232</sup> Most political prints probably sold around 500 copies.<sup>233</sup> In an average year approximately 50,000 political prints might have been produced in England.<sup>234</sup>

The period 1780 to 1832 saw not only a heightened awareness of and action on slavery and abolition, but also the rise and fall of the popularity of British satirical prints.<sup>235</sup> Through satirical caricatures, artists were able to depict reformers and anti-slavery activists as dangerous, devious, and even Jacobins.<sup>236</sup> James Gillray's<sup>237</sup> *Philanthropic Consolations on the Loss of the Slave Bill* (1796) (Figure 3) shows William Wilberforce and the Bishop of Westminster being consoled by two large women of African descent for having lost the bill. Wilberforce is depicted in profile, allowing the viewer to easily recognise him visually (although the title of the print, by mentioning the slave bill, would likely link the image to Wilberforce's constant drive for abolition in the minds of politically-aware viewers). He is perched at the end of a couch, enjoying his pipe with a bare-breasted woman at the far end of the couch who leans her head invitingly towards him as she smokes her pipe. The Bishop of Westminster has his back to the viewer, making him harder to recognise. He has been depicted in a much more compromising position with his arms around the other women and his lips puckered for a kiss. Hanging on the wall are a number

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>230</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 13.

<sup>231</sup> Nicholson, 'Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Political Print in Eighteenth-Century England', 10.

<sup>232</sup> The average number is therefore low relative to the several thousand copies of newspapers and around 500 copies of pamphlets printed in first runs. See Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>233</sup> Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760-1832*, 13.

<sup>234</sup> Again this is low in comparison to newspapers, with 16 million printed in 1801 and 30 million in the 1830s. See Ibid., 14.

<sup>235</sup> Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865*, 152. Growing demand for satirical prints demonstrates both an increase in British print culture and an increase in the public's interest in politics. See Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, 2.

<sup>236</sup> Dupuy, 'Informations et désinformations: Les tentatives d'abolition de l'esclavage en Angleterre à travers la caricature anglaise, 1760-1810', 190.

<sup>237</sup> One of the most powerful print satirists of his time.

of caricatures, including *Inkle & Yarico* and *Captn. Kimber in the Cells of Newgate*. On a small table to one side of the image lie a number of papers and books, including an unrolled scroll reading 'Defence of Orthodoxy, better late than never', and a book opened to the page 'Charity covereth a Multitude of Sins'. On the floor lies a torn copy of the trial of Captain Kimber. The entire scene is modelled on Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (1732).<sup>238</sup> Although it is supposedly set in a London brothel, there are numerous allusions to the orient throughout the print.



**Figure 3 -- *Philanthropic Consolations on the Loss of the Slave Bill* by James Gillray, 1796 (image from the British Museum)**

Wilberforce is depicted as a skinny, tiny man who is physically dominated by the woman beside him. The large hat on top of her turban, her overweight body, and her large, exposed breasts further emphasise their contrasting sizes.<sup>239</sup> Rather than sticking to their traditional roles prior to 1780 of servant, exotic element, or toy of the elites, images of blacks in British art were becoming increasingly sexualised in the late eighteenth century as a way of emphasising the socially compromised

<sup>238</sup> Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*, 99-100.

<sup>239</sup> By emphasizing a black woman's sexuality (particularly when it was that of a slave's), artists and authors were able to redirect blame for illicit behaviour from the colonists onto the woman. This countered abolitionist arguments that white male force and domination were responsible for sexual deviancy and misconduct in the colonies. See Henrice Altink, 'Deviant and Dangerous: Pro-Slavery Representations of Jamaican Slave Women's Sexuality, c. 1780-1834', *Slavery & Abolition*, 26 (2005), 272-5.

position of the work's subjects.<sup>240</sup> While the Bishop of Westminster is a large man in his white robes, the woman with him has her hand around his shoulder, controlling him as much as he is controlling her. The scene depicts the men as hypocrites, driven by desire rather than humanity or reason.<sup>241</sup> It also criticises Wilberforce for being a Pitt supporter.<sup>242</sup>

Political prints that satirised or attacked individuals were often sponsored anonymously; the subjects of the prints might look foolish if they were to get upset about their depiction.<sup>243</sup> The two references to Captain Kimber questioned Wilberforce's credibility by highlighting the faith he and his fellow abolitionists in Parliament had placed upon the story of Captain Kimber as evidence of the mistreatment and horrors suffered by slaves on the Middle Passage, for which Kimber was later acquitted. The scene's oriental elements allude to excess: excess sex, excess money, and excessive political control (despotism).<sup>244</sup> Images of large, sexualised black women had become so commonly associated with the West Indies that the location of the scene did not need to be specified.<sup>245</sup> The men here are shown to be under the dangerous influence of black women, basing their arguments on false information and stories, and driven by passion rather than reason. The artist thus questioned and satirised their motives, logic, and credibility in this one image; contemporary viewers in London would have recognised these criticisms.

The second print to be examined here is Isaac Robert Cruikshank's *John Bull Taking a Clear View of the Negro Slavery Question* (1826) (Figure 4). This print contains many characters and a great deal of anti-abolitionist imagery. The setting for the scene is an East India sugar warehouse on a British dock. The central figures are John Bull,<sup>246</sup> representing every Englishman, and an abolitionist, dressed here as

<sup>240</sup> Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865*, 154.

<sup>241</sup> Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*, 100.

<sup>242</sup> Some radicals interpreted the support of abolition by Pitt and his government as a way to distract the public's attention from the miseries of British workers. Noting the inclusion of the phrase, 'Charity covereth a Multitude of Sins' in this print, this particular argument might be being made here. See Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865*, 156.

<sup>243</sup> Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, 15.

<sup>244</sup> Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*, 99-100.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 106. Black women rarely appeared in British art outside of depictions of slavery, abolition, and emancipation. See Charmaine Nelson, 'Venus Africaine: Race, Beauty and African-ness', in *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art 1800-1900*, ed. Jan Marsh (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2005), 47.

<sup>246</sup> John Bull first appeared in print in the 1760s. In the late-1820s and early 1830s his image was used to represent the strengths and weaknesses of British politics. See Miles Taylor, 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c. 1712-1929', *Past & Present*, 134 (1992), 106.

a Quaker. John Bull is looking through a telescope towards a tropical island inhabited by black slaves, but his view of the island's happy slaves is blocked by an image of plantation cruelty being held up by the abolitionist in front of the telescope's lens. Kneeling below the abolitionist Quaker is a smiling overweight man searching through a box labelled, 'Pictures of Negro Slavery – Box N<sup>o</sup> 3957'. Behind John Bull sit members of an impoverished British family who have been left out of the recent calls for charity and humanity. A dog relieves himself on their sign asking for assistance. Young boys are forced to sign petitions against duties on East India sugar to be sent to Parliament. A stack of papers, labelled 'Pamphlets against Negro Slavery', lean against the side of the sugar warehouse where another fanatical Quaker abolitionist holds up an image of cruelty as he preaches to the crowds. Near the front of the scene the artist has included a Quaker holding a sign reading, 'Buy only East India sugar – tis sinful to buy any other'; as he has his back to the viewer one can clearly see the invoice for East India sugar sticking out of his back pocket. Further images of cruelties against the slaves are posted against walls in the background, as is the notice, 'Just Published. Sierra Leone A FARCE as performed for the benefit of Signor Hum Bamboozle'.

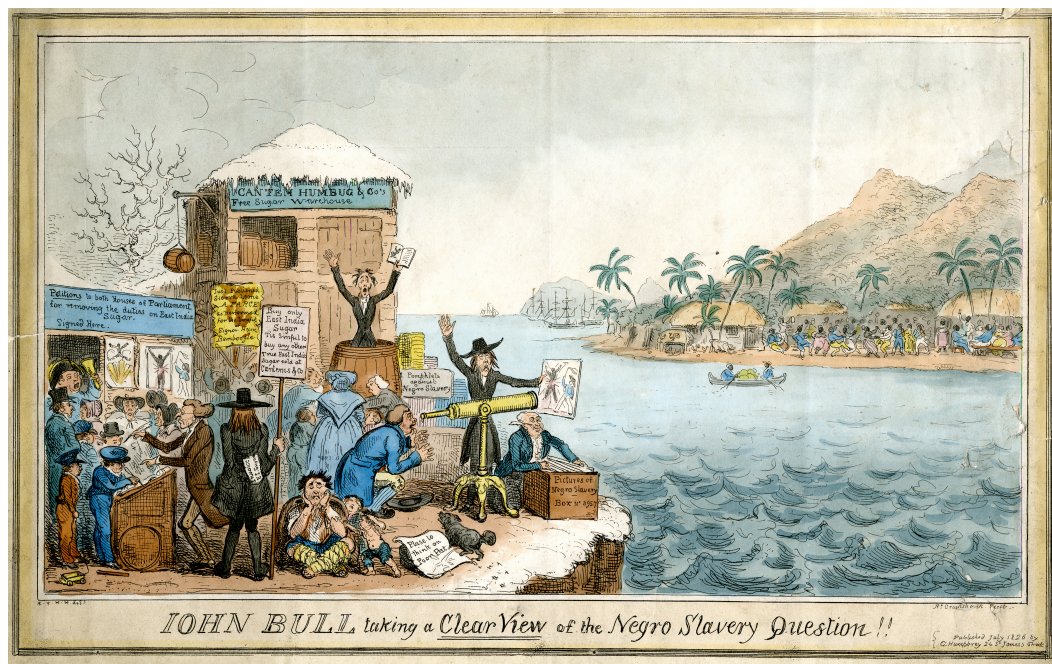
Cruikshank was highlighting and satirising a number of relevant issues with this print. By wanting to monopolise the sale of sugar, he suggested that East Indians were acting out of self-interest rather than the good of the people. The image also suggested that abolitionists were intentionally distorting the average Briton's understanding of colonial slavery. Abolitionists, here dressed as fanatical, untrustworthy, business-focused Quakers, had to resort to underhand means to convince Britons of the need to boycott West Indian produce and emancipate the slaves from their state of bondage. In the process, they created an excessive amount of misleading anti-slavery propaganda as signified by the box of images and the stacks of pamphlets.<sup>247</sup> The abolitionists' production and use of prints in this image reminds the viewer that prints helped form public opinion rather than simply reflect it.<sup>248</sup> Instead of being objective or uncontaminated by outside influences, as perhaps the abolitionists wished their viewing public to believe, all prints were value-laden.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*, 1.

<sup>248</sup> Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, 44.

<sup>249</sup> Porter, 'Review: Seeing the Past', 200.



**Figure 4 -- *John Bull Taking a Clear View of the Negro Slavery Question* by Isaac Robert Cruikshank, 1826 (image from the British Library)**

Elsewhere in the image, far from being the subject of humanitarian efforts, the British poor are left to suffer and fend for themselves even though they are seated in front of the supposed humanitarians.<sup>250</sup> The slaves off on their distant tropical island are shown to be playing music and dancing, eating, drinking and toasting their companions, but the abolitionists refuse to let Britons see this happy scene. Instead they have produced thousands of images depicting the cruelties of the plantation system. Kay Dian Kriz has noted that this print demonstrates how abolitionists were able to dominate the slavery debate in print with better production and circulation of images.<sup>251</sup> While the exact proportion of pro- to anti-slavery prints remains to be studied, Kriz has argued that the dominance of anti-slavery imagery in the era of abolition continues to be reflected in how little scholarship has since been devoted to pro-West Indian and pro-colonial imagery.<sup>252</sup> Returning to the print, the abolitionists also have to rely on the signatures of young boys and the words of fanatical Quakers to convince Britons of the slaves' plight. This multi-layered caricature of abolitionist deception is perhaps one of the best visual compilations of anti-abolitionist arguments and beliefs to be created in the era of abolition. While black subjects were important to all three of the pieces discussed here, at no time were they the

<sup>250</sup> George Cruikshank's *The New Union Club of 1819* (1819) also condemns abolitionists for ignoring the poor at home while championing the plight of the slaves abroad.

<sup>251</sup> Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*, 2.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

central focus of the proslavery or anti-abolitionist message, but instead served to support or reinforce the dominance of the white figures (and therefore of Britain) in the world contained within these images.

The satirical print, *Cruelty and Oppression Abroad*, (Figure 5) published by William Holland in 1792, also charges abolitionists with falsifying evidence and possessing ulterior motives.<sup>253</sup> At the centre of the image are a large number of brightly dressed African and mixed-race individuals dancing, singing, playing instruments, and laughing with one another while being watched by three European observers. The female observer holds a parasol, indicating that the location is hot and sunny. There are no clouds in the clear blue sky. Little white houses with bright orange roofs and green trees dot this picturesque landscape. On the right-hand side of the image are two men commenting not only on the happy scene in front of them, but on the abolitionist movement and abolitionists' use of vivid imagery of plantation life to gain support for their cause.

This simpler, hand-coloured image contains much more text than the other two prints examined here. This text is perhaps the most important element of the piece as it clearly explains the image's anti-abolitionist argument. Filling the entire upper right corner of the image are two large text bubbles in which the abolitionist, dressed in black clothing as in *John Bull Taking a Clear View...* (Figure 4), admits that the images of cruelty and oppression he employs to gain financial support for abolition originated in his own 'wild imagination'. The man in uniform argues that such happy scenes are everyday occurrences on Britain's plantations in the Caribbean. He also believes that, even though the abolition movement benefits from some excellent orators, slave owners and traders will be successful in keeping public opinion on their side simply by being honest: 'not one half the nation believe you or your party. You have most of the good speakers on your side, the other side have relied on the justice of their cause and their own innocence, and the abuse of you and your tribe becomes daily more and more contemptible'.

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<sup>253</sup> This print was published by Holland as part of a set of three prints relating to the slave trade six weeks after Wilberforce moved for the slave trade to be abolished. These prints are frequently attributed to caricaturist Richard Newton. The others in the set included *Justice and Humanity at Home*, in which Wilberforce ignores the issue of flogging sailors to focus on the cruelties of the slave trade for transported Africans, and *The Blind Enthusiast* (Figure 1, in Chapter One above) in which Wilberforce's abolitionist sentiment sets fire to the colonies. The set sold for half a guinea.



Theatre Royal Haymarket in London and published in 1789. J.W. Orderson's *The Fair Barbadian and Faithful Black; or, A Cure for the Gout*, was a three-act comedy performed in Barbados in 1832 before being published in Liverpool in 1835. The different formats, genres, audiences, and historical contexts have noticeably shaped these two defences of slavery.

Bellamy's *The Benevolent Planters* is a short piece that revolved around the efforts of three planters to make the lives of two African slaves happier through a surprise reunion. Bellamy was against slavery, but in his play he promoted a paternalistic slave society and gradual melioration.<sup>257</sup> In the play the planters have such a close relationship to their slaves that the slaves in question, Oran and Selima, confided in them about their heartache at having been separated from one another by the transatlantic slave trade. It is quickly noted, however, that a warring party of Africans would have killed Oran had the Europeans not arrived to save him by taking him to the West Indies.<sup>258</sup> The planters were thankful that, through their enslavement, Oran and Selina received the knowledge and comforts of Christianity to help them overcome their devastating losses.<sup>259</sup> Oran and Selina in return were grateful slaves.<sup>260</sup> Throughout the piece, the playwright praised the benefits of religious education in the colonies and promoted kind, benevolent actions towards the slaves. As Oran declared in the final speech of the play: 'for ourselves, and for our surrounding brethren, we declare, that you have proved yourself *The Benevolent Planters*, and that under subjection like yours, SLAVERY IS BUT A NAME'.<sup>261</sup>

Orderson's *The Fair Barbadian and Faithful Black* is a complex piece with main and sub-plots, more than twice as many characters, and a more overt stance on colonial slavery. This was in response to the threat of impending emancipation its audience faced in 1832.<sup>262</sup> As in Bellamy's work, only two slaves played a role in the plot of the story, although just one was given a name. The main storyline revolved around the impending marriage of the planter's daughter, Emily, to her evil

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<sup>257</sup> James G. Basker, ed., *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 380.

<sup>258</sup> Thomas Bellamy, *The Benevolent Planters* (London: J. Debrett, 1789), 3.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>260</sup> The commonly used image of the grateful slave challenges the idea that slavery is necessarily cruel or evil. As a result, it calls for amelioration and not emancipation. See Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The emergence of race in eighteenth-century British and American culture*, 9-13.

<sup>261</sup> Bellamy, *The Benevolent Planters*, 13.

<sup>262</sup> According to an advertisement written by Orderson in Bridgetown in 1835, the play was meant to record real master-slave relationships before emancipation. See J.W. Orderson, *The Fair Barbadian and Faithful Black; or, A Cure for the Gout. A Comedy in Three Acts* (Liverpool: Ross and Nightingale, 1835), in *Creoleana and The Fair Barbadian and Faithful Black*, ed. John Gilmore (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2002), 158.

cousin, Tom, when she instead loved Captain Carlove.<sup>263</sup> Hampshire, the favourite slave, faced numerous threats and comedic physical abuse<sup>264</sup> as his master, Judge Errington, became increasingly forgetful while struggling with gout. Despite this violence, Hampshire was happy to help solve the mysterious circumstances regarding Emily's betrothal and was eventually awarded his freedom.<sup>265</sup>

Both plays acknowledged the negative impact abolitionists had in the islands and on the perception of the colonies and colonists. In *The Benevolent Planters*, a short prologue was given by the same actor who played Oran, but in the character of an African sailor. He comments on his happy life in Africa and then his awful experience at the hands of a tyrannical master before remarking that he was now in the service of a kind master and no longer experienced the hardships of being a slave.<sup>266</sup> The sailor then remarked on the abolition movement in Britain. In *The Fair Barbadian*, Emily and Captain Carlove have recently arrived from England after being exposed to abolitionist sentiment. This then allows for numerous discussions of slavery to take place between the new arrivals and the planters. In Act Two, Scene Two, for example, a small group visits the plantation estate and witnesses a happy, animated scene of slaves hard at work. While Emily has remained secure in the knowledge that her father was a humane planter, the Captain and his associate Major Chider are surprised and astonished at the happy image of plantation life and apologetic for having believed otherwise. Both admitted that the abolitionists had tried to mislead them as they had been misleading all Britons. As Chider confesses to the Judge's sister Alice:

It were too trite an observation, Madam, merely to say that our own experience leads to a corrector judgement than the report or opinion of

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<sup>263</sup> Tom threatens and attacks Hampshire early in the play, helping to establish him as an evil, uncaring member of the plantation family. George Boulukos argues that such examples of planter cruelty could help create sympathy for the character of the slave, as it does here. See Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The emergence of race in eighteenth-century British and American culture*, 156.

<sup>264</sup> This violence is always framed by a misunderstanding. Heather Nathans argues that playwrights did not want to go too far towards portraying actual discipline or overly sentimentalising slavery because the audience might begin to see the situation from the slave's point of view or replace the slave's emotional experience with their own. See Nathans, *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787-1861: Lifting the Veil of Black*, 6. This might also partly explain why, in the prologue to *The Benevolent Planters*, Oran's recollections of his time under a ruthless master is quickly countered by him recalling how thankful he is for his current owner.

<sup>265</sup> It is important to note that Hampshire at first refuses to accept his freedom and only does so after the Judge assures him that he will continue to work for the family in the same capacity as before, except now he will earn a wage. To David Lambert, the play emphasises that white supremacy will remain after slavery is abolished. See Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 202.

<sup>266</sup> Some anti-abolitionist writers argued that slaves would only be grateful to their paternalist masters if they had experienced evil, violent rule. See Boulukos, 'Maria Edgeworth's "Grateful Negro" and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery', 23.

others of less information than ourselves; I will, therefore, now in honest candour confess, that I have been, like thousands of others, so deceived by the artifices and false philanthropy of Aldermanbury, as to be brought to believe that I should only see in West India slavery a race of half-starved, ill-clothed, miserable-looking, lacerated and degraded Africans.<sup>267</sup>

His confession provides the Judge and his sister with an opportunity to call for all those who had seen the true state of slavery in the colonies to speak out and fight back against the abolitionists. As Alice exclaimed: ‘Yes! people will talk of things they know nothing about! – but then those that know the truth, should speak out!’<sup>268</sup> While Bellamy restricted his commentary on slavery and abolition to a few specific benefits of the slave trade and slavery, Orderson took an overtly political stance against immediate emancipation which he believed to be based on false information being spread by uninformed or lying abolitionists. Through the nature of theatre, both were able to share their views with a wider audience and were also able to present dynamic visual images to support the spoken dialogue.

Hundreds of poems were written about slavery between 1660 and the early 1800s.<sup>269</sup> Only around five or ten per cent of these, however, condoned or defended the institution.<sup>270</sup> Brycchan Carey has hypothesised that because the nature of poetry is sentimental and feminine (a direct contrast to the logical, reasonable, masculine appearance anti-abolitionists tried to put forth in their writings) very few proslavery poems emerged during the slavery debates.<sup>271</sup> Karen O’Brien maintains that West Indian poets intentionally focused on the land rather than the people in the West Indies in the era of abolition in order to show that the true value of the colonies was the abundant fertile land, not the slaves.<sup>272</sup> They portrayed an idealised vision of West Indian slavery for their British readers. Contemporary proslavery poetry and verse came in a number of styles. These included a love story, a reply to an abolition pamphlet, and songs that could be sung by the slaves or were based upon slave music. They varied greatly in form, length, authorship, and initial publication.

‘The Field Negroe; or the Effect of Civilization’, was originally published anonymously in the 1783 collection, *Poems, on Subjects Arising in England, and the*

<sup>267</sup> Orderson, *The Fair Barbadian and Faithful Black*, 181.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Basker, ed., *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery*, xxxiii.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., xlvii.

<sup>271</sup> Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760-1807*, 92.

<sup>272</sup> Karen O’Brien, ‘Imperial Georgic, 1660-1789’, in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. Gerald Maclean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 174-5.

*West Indies*. This long piece told the story of a young overseer's meeting with a slave, Arthur, who had paused to take a break from working in the fields on a hot day. Arthur tells the overseer his life story that succinctly summarises many positive elements and benefits of enslavement in the West Indian colonies. His story demonstrates how an African can become more civilised through plantation labour and life as well as becoming stronger, happier, and more fulfilled:

And now the rank of *baba*<sup>273</sup> he throws  
From off his polish'd limbs,  
And every day he nicer grows,  
Improving in his whims.<sup>274</sup>

Arthur now possessed a home, a plot of land, and a family. He could participate in games and holiday festivities. Perhaps most important for the author, Arthur continued to grow in his devotion to his master:

Now faithful to his master's side,  
And takes his nimble course:  
He braids his hair, with decent pride,  
And runs beside his horse.

And now we daily hear him sing,  
The merriest and the best<sup>275</sup>

By presenting a narrative of the fictional Arthur's life in 'The Field Negroe', the author provided numerous examples of how to assess the slaves' happiness and was able to demonstrate the range of benefits that slavery bestowed upon Africans.

The lawyer James Boswell dedicated his proslavery poem, *No Abolition of Slavery*, to the West Indian merchants and planters. He intentionally wrote this piece, as well as several other defences of slavery, to contribute to the slavery debates.<sup>276</sup> *No Abolition of Slavery* is a love poem that mocks specific abolitionists while demonstrating numerous reasons why the institution of slavery should not be tampered with. Boswell was particularly hostile towards Wilberforce's efforts to achieve abolition by wooing the public and Parliament:

Go, W-----, with narrow scull,  
Go home, and preach away at Hull,  
No longer to the Senate cackle,  
In strains which suit the Tabernacle;  
I hate your little wittling sneer,  
Your pert and self-sufficient leer,

<sup>273</sup> According to the author, a *baba* is a covering used by the meanest slaves.

<sup>274</sup> Anon, 'The Field Negro, or the Effect of Civilization,' in *Poems, on Subjects arising in England, and the West Indies* (London: R. Faulder, 1783), 15.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-6.

<sup>276</sup> Basker, ed., *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery*, 237.

Mischief to Trade sits on thy lip,  
 Insects will gnaw the noblest ship;  
 Go, W-----, be gone, for shame,  
 Thou dwarf with a big-sounding name.<sup>277</sup>

He argued that slavery was ordained in the Bible and that man could not change this fact.<sup>278</sup> Boswell then presented images of happy slaves who were protected and provided for, before proceeding to inform MPs that abolition would be a mistake:

Lo then, in yonder fragrant isle  
 Where Nature ever seems to smile,  
 The cheerful *gang!*—the negroes see  
 Perform the task of industry:  
 Ev'n at their labour hear them sing,  
 While time flies quick on downy wing;  
 Finish'd the bus'ness of the day,  
 No human beings are more gay:  
 Of food, clothes, cleanly lodging sure,  
 Each has his property secure;  
 Their wives and children are protected,  
 In sickness they are not neglected;  
 And when old age brings a release,  
 Their grateful days they end in peace.

But should our Wrongheads have their will,  
 Should Parliament approve their bill,  
 Pernicious as th'effect would be,  
 T'abolish negro slavery,  
 Such partial freedom would be vain,  
 Since Love's strong empire must remain.<sup>279</sup>

The poem was bookended by the idea that any man is susceptible to becoming enslaved by his love for a woman. Throughout the piece, Boswell attacked numerous MPs for their anti-slavery views and argued that, overall, slavery was a permanent institution that benefited all those involved.

As stated in the poem's dedication, Henry Holder Evans' *Fragments of a Poem* was published in 1792 to defend West Indian planters and merchants against the slander and accusations aimed at them by British abolitionists. Evans' intention was to attempt to refute the information contained within John Marjoribanks' abolitionist work, *Slavery: An Essay in Verse* (1792). Evan's poem included a thorough introduction to the topic and Majoribanks' pamphlet, all the while

<sup>277</sup> James Boswell, *No Abolition of Slavery; or the Universal Empire of Love* (London: R. Faulder, 1791), 8.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-2.

vindicating the planters, before moving onto his short fragments of poetry. Within the verses, Evans charges the abolitionists with being motivated by self-interest:

But after all, when this great work is done,  
When you have fill'd this hemisphere with rage,  
Against the children of the Western world,  
Can you look up to GOD, and boldly say,  
My motive was to serve his creatures,  
And further his designs of genial love?<sup>280</sup>

He also argues against any outside interference with plantation slavery by reminding Marjoribanks and his readers that everything a planter had was invested in his slaves:

But who, you'll say, shall guard the wretched slave  
From tyrant-cruelty and bloody scourge?  
Believe me he requires no hand to guard,  
No interference from your mad'ning zeal

...

The voice of interest will be heard aloud,  
Nor yet in any state of life more loud,  
Than when she teaches ev'ry master's heart,  
That all his wealth is center'd in his slave.<sup>281</sup>

Evans claims that the planter was constantly motivated to maintain his slaves' health and wellbeing and, as a result, no abolitionist interference was necessary.<sup>282</sup> He argues overall that the abolitionists, caught up in the emotional rhetoric of party that they had created, were incorrect in their assumptions and goals and had been misled by their own self-interest.

An Englishwoman purportedly sent five anonymously written poems to Sir Phillip Gibbes who included them in the 1797 edition of his *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes*. The first three pieces were meant for slaves to sing as they worked in the fields to lift their spirits. The words advise them to be grateful to their masters and God for what they had. In her untitled first poem, she reminds her readers and the slaves that God watches over them and will now be able to receive them as Christians after death:

See! The Great God sends forth his Sun  
To ripen all the fields of canes:  
'Tis just as if he said, "Well done

<sup>280</sup> Rev. H.E. Holder, *Fragments of a Poem, Intended to have been Written in Consequence of Reading Major Majoribanks's Slavery* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1792), 19.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>282</sup> George Boulukos has argued that a crucial element of both proslavery and some abolitionist arguments in the 1780s was that the planters' self-interest would protect the slaves (as Evans has said here). In the proslavery case, planters would be benevolent masters and meliorate conditions depending on the specific needs of their slaves. Abolitionists argued that planters would have to treat their slaves kindly if the supply of new slaves from Africa was cut off. See Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The emergence of race in eighteenth-century British and American culture*, 163.

Good negroes! I'll reward your pains.”

And so he will:—a little while  
We have to labour here below,  
And for our honest faithful toil  
God will his heaven bestow.<sup>283</sup>

The second untitled poem stressed the benefits of labour, but also focused on God's grace and redemption:

How useful is labour, how healthful and so good!  
It keeps us from mischief, procures wholesome food;  
It saves from much sickness and loathsome disease  
That fall on the idle and pamper'd with ease:

...  
God, the master we serve, knows for us what is best:  
And when life's toils are ended we sweetly shall rest;  
For ev'ry good deed in God's book is recorded.  
So faithful good negroes will be surely rewarded.<sup>284</sup>

The fourth piece, *A Negro's Address to His Fellows*, discusses how slaves are the cursed descendents of Ham. It informs the reader of several ways in which the slaves would be worse off in Africa had they not been taken to the West Indies, including the continued exposure to a pagan religion and tyrannical masters:

So that if to White Men now slaves you behold them,  
*White Men* had not bought, if *Black Men* had not sold them.<sup>285</sup>  
Nay, were we more happy, or felt we less evil,  
When snakes were our Gods, and we worship'd the devil?  
A servant of servants much more were we then:  
We labour'd for devils.—We now work for men.<sup>286</sup>

The author also argues that slaves should be thankful to their masters for the food they receive and that they must always remember that the opportunity to become a Christian is worth any amount of suffering. Throughout the poems the author's strong belief in the benefits of a Christian education allows her to promote the slave trade's continuance as being beneficial to all African slaves.<sup>287</sup>

C.F.D.'s 'Bonja Song' was published in London around 1802 as a piece of sheet music. The song's popularity is reflected in its numerous reprints throughout the nineteenth century. The author was probably Charlotte Dallas, a woman who

<sup>283</sup> [Sir Phillip Gibbes], *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes &c. &c. &c.*, 3rd edn. (London: Shepperson and Reynolds, 1797), 107.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-8.

<sup>285</sup> MPs also used the pre-existence of an internal African slave trade to justify the transatlantic slave trade during the slavery debates in Parliament. See pages 138-9.

<sup>286</sup> [Gibbes], *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes*, 133.

<sup>287</sup> See Section Five of Chapter Three for a discussion of MPs employing similar arguments in Parliament.

grew up in Jamaica, although the piece at one time was attributed to her brother Robert.<sup>288</sup> The author claims that the melody came from the slaves themselves, but that she added the harmony and the words. Using repetition and similar phrases, the lyrics contrast the worry-free life of the slave with the difficult life of the planter:

But White man's joys are not like mine,  
     'Dho he look smart and gay:  
 He great, he proud, he haughty, fine,  
     While I my Bonja play.  
 He sleep all day, he wake all night,  
 He full of care, his heart no light,  
 He great deal want, he little get,  
     He sorry, so he fret.

Me envy not dhe White man dhen,  
     Me poor, but me is gay;  
 Me glad at heart, me happy when  
     Me on my Bonja play.  
 Me sing all day, me sleep all night,  
 Me hab no care, my heart is light.  
 Me tink not what to-morrow bring,  
     Me happy, so me sing.<sup>289</sup>

The author emphasises the happy, carefree life of the slave throughout the song. This proslavery song presents a very different view of plantation life to Britons than the images abolitionists were simultaneously promoting as true depictions of life in the West Indies.

M.J. Chapman's 1833 poem, *Barbadoes*, is an extended argument against immediate emancipation woven throughout a description of Barbados. He states in the introduction to the piece that he opposes emancipation because it would ruin the colonies and the empire.<sup>290</sup> His verses paint contented scenes of plantation life in the West Indies and contrasts them with images of the destruction that he believes would follow hasty emancipation. The conclusion to Part One of the poem demonstrates the author's regret at the abolitionists' actions and their consequences:

Our island-slaves once loved their father-friend,  
     Content with his their happiness to blend;  
 And still would love him; — but from England goes  
     A moving narrative of negro-woes;  
 Of brands and tortures, only known by name —  
 Of lawless power and slavery's damning shame.

...

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<sup>288</sup> C.F.D., 'Bonja Song,' in *Contrary Voices: Representations of West Indian Slavery, 1657-1834*, ed. Karina Williamson (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2008), 491.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>290</sup> M.J. Chapman, *Barbadoes, and Other Poems* (London: James Fraser, 1833), vii-viii.

Hence comes the plot, the agony of strife,  
 The toil of treason, the waste of life;  
 The sound of battles, rushing through the trees;  
 The hurried tramp of frantic savages!  
 The slave, infuriate, pants for Freedom's smiles,  
 And Hayti's fate attends our Eden-isles.<sup>291</sup>

Like the anonymous author of the poems in Gibbes' manual, Chapman argues that the slaves are far better off under the direction of the West Indian planters than if they were back in Africa:

No more he thinks upon his Libyan skies;  
 His native rites a purer faith supplies.  
 He looks with gladness for the promised day,  
 And horrid superstition flies away.  
 His life, his home, his property secure,  
 He knows his lot is better than before.<sup>292</sup>

Chapman stresses the benefits of slavery to Britain as well as to the slaves and chastises the abolitionists for threatening the stability of the colonies and destroying the benefits of their production. All of these poets were able to present and promote positive images of slavery through their use of verse (and, in some cases, song). Their appeals to the British public, the abolitionists, and the government to halt the anti-slavery movement are at times compelling, convincing, and entertaining. Together these pieces form a unique way of sharing the proslavery position with a wider public.

The production and distribution of novels<sup>293</sup> in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain was part of a wider movement in which literature changed from being produced for and read by an elite to bringing enjoyment to a much larger readership.<sup>294</sup> Most of the poor, if they could read, would have remained unable to afford literature. They could, however, borrow novels from a circulating library or come together to purchase items. Two very different novels published in the 1820s reflect their authors' sympathy for the West Indian planter. *Hamel, The Obeah Man*, was published anonymously<sup>295</sup> in two volumes in London in 1827. *Marly; or, A*

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>293</sup> These were known as histories, tales, memoirs, and romances until the late eighteenth century when the genre now known as the novel began to be classed as such. See Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, gender and commerce in the sentimental novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>295</sup> According to Janina Nordius, contemporary readers would likely have known that the author was Cynric R. Williams, author of *A Tour through the Island of Jamaica, from the Western to the Eastern End, in the Year 1823* (1826). See Janina Nordius, 'Racism and Radicalism in Jamaican Gothic: Cynric R. Williams's *Hamel, The Obeah Man*', *ELH*, 73 (2006), 674-5.

*Planter's Life in Jamaica*, was published anonymously in Glasgow in 1828. These proslavery novels promoted the established system of slavery in Jamaica. While the author of *Marly* acknowledges the possibility of further melioration, *Hamel* vividly depicts the destruction and violence that can result from outside (British anti-slavery) interference. While their styles and plots greatly differ,<sup>296</sup> these two novels provide yet another example of how proslavery sentiment could be shared with a wider British readership.

The plot of *Hamel, The Obeah Man* centres on a mass rebellion that erupted in the politically unstable colony of Jamaica in the early 1820s. The island and its colonists were under threat by a number of sources: non-conformist missionaries; slaves continuing to practise Obeah;<sup>297</sup> government interference from London; radical emancipationists in Britain; rumours of emancipation spreading through the slave population; and nearby rebellions. The revolt is led by Combah, who hopes to become king of Jamaica, the title character Hamel, and Roland, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary. As part of the uprising, Combah and Roland plan to kidnap the beautiful planter's daughter, Joanna, but Hamel, upon the return of his master and friend, Fairfax, has a change of heart and instead helps to rescue Joanna. To conclude the story, Combah is struck by lightning and falls into a ravine, Roland has to contemplate his many sins while dying of a fever, and Hamel sets sail for Africa.

*Marly; or, A Planter's Life in Jamaica*, is the story of a Scot, George Marly, who arrives in Jamaica in 1816 and works as a bookkeeper. Over the course of the novel, he witnesses many aspects of plantation life, reclaims his lost inheritance, and wins the hand of the woman he loves. In conclusion, Marly resolves to meliorate conditions on his plantation so as to bring about a gradual end to slavery. From the intimate details of plantation life and the island of Jamaica that he provides it is likely that the author had visited the island himself.<sup>298</sup> The novel overall depicts an honest, hard-working man who became a benevolent planter. Rather than remaining

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<sup>296</sup> For example, *Hamel's* author has his characters speak in a clear English dialect that would be easily understood by his readers. In contrast, in *The Fair Barbadian*, Orderson provides a detailed record of realistic, Barbadian slave speech that provides a very different experience for the reader/audience and changes the ease with which the slaves can be understood. This intentional use of Barbadian slave speech might also reflect the early nineteenth century belief that the language one used revealed the workings of their mind and thus vulgar or unrefined language denoted an uncivilised speaker of a lower class. See Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, 3.

<sup>297</sup> Colonists viewed Obeah as alarming and dangerous. Slaves throughout Britain's West Indian colonies were banned from practising it. See Randy M. Browne, 'The "Bad Business" of Obeah: Power, Authority, and the Politics of Slave Culture in the British Caribbean', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 68 (2011), 455.

<sup>298</sup> Anon., *Marly; or, A Planter's Life in Jamaica* (Glasgow: Richard Griffin and Co., 1828); Reprint: Karina Williamson, ed. (Oxford: Macmillan, 2005), viii.

committed to perpetual slavery, Marly hopes that one day his slaves will be fit to receive their freedom.

The contrasting nature of these two novels is fascinating. *Hamel* is a colonial gothic novel that emphasised the dangers and anxieties present in colonial Jamaica in order to entertain its readers.<sup>299</sup> It centres on a bloody, violent revolt and makes the leaders of the revolt suffer for their actions. One slave succinctly summarises the origins of the revolt in the novel's conclusion:

many [slaves] ... had been induced by Roland and others to take up arms in support of the rights which Mr. Wilberforce had obtained for them. "They told us so, mistress [Joanna]; they told the Negroes so, who were slaves. They preached to us that the king of England had given liberty to all, had paid for their freedom; and they read out of the big books, and little books, and Scotch books, that we should put the knives to the throats of the buckras, who then would own it was true."<sup>300</sup>

It is mainly the misleading preaching of missionaries in the islands, who had encouraged the slaves to believe they have been freed by the British monarchy, that causes the revolt; therefore, even religious leaders in the colonies can not be relied upon to enlighten the slaves or ensure the safety of the planters.

In contrast to the violent, passionate language and imagery found in *Hamel*, *Marly* is a calm, realistic depiction of the minute details of everyday life in the colony and presents its readers with a happy and hopeful image of Jamaica and the future of its slaves. The author even informs his readers that he wants Britons to understand better the true nature of plantation slavery in the colonies.<sup>301</sup> Both authors also presented colonial life as preferable to that elsewhere. While in *Hamel* the author argues that the colonists are more modern and forward-thinking than the conservative Europeans back home,<sup>302</sup> in *Marly* the slaves are given a far more culturally-rich life than that of the planters.<sup>303</sup> These novels and the other forms of creative writing discussed here contributed to the slavery debate through their sympathetic portrayal of the planters as victims or as benevolent masters struggling to maintain control in a system under immediate threat from outside forces.

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<sup>299</sup> Nordius, 'Racism and Radicalism in Jamaican Gothic: Cynric R. Williams's *Hamel, The Obeah Man*', 673.

<sup>300</sup> [Cynric R. Williams], *Hamel, The Obeah Man*, 2 vols. (London: Hunt and Clark, 1827), vol. 2, 313.

<sup>301</sup> Anon., *Marly; or, A Planter's Life*, 2.

<sup>302</sup> Nordius, 'Racism and Radicalism in Jamaican Gothic: Cynric R. Williams's *Hamel, The Obeah Man*', 679.

<sup>303</sup> Anon., *Marly; or, A Planter's Life*, xxiv.

As shown above, a vast number of various types of sources defended the proslavery position of the West Indian interest in Britain in the era of abolition. The existence, number, and variety of these pieces demonstrates that the proslavery (and anti-abolitionist) argument was reaching the wider public. Their authorship varied greatly: politicians, writers, poets, and dramatists; colonists, absentees, and native Britons; those with direct interests, those who wished to help the interested, and those with no discernable interest in the trade or colonies; first-hand witnesses and those who had never been to the island or witnessed slavery; and active anti-abolitionists writing to oppose abolition versus those who professed wishing to only inform the discussion or to be coincidentally writing on the topic. Even those with first-hand experience with the trade or plantation slavery in the colonies varied, from plantation or slave owners, to merchants, traders, and bankers, to members of the military, to family members of colonists who had spent much of their lives in Britain. Yet with all these different backgrounds and these many different genres under study, proslavery, anti-abolitionist, pro-slave trade, and anti-African arguments can all be discerned. The proslavery position was made clear in print, on stage, and illustrated on the page to inform their readers/audiences/viewers and counter the abolitionist propaganda machine. They contributed to the wider debate on slavery and the slave trade. Proslavery/anti-abolitionist propaganda demonstrates the varied backgrounds of supporters for the trade and colonial slavery as well as for the West Indian interest in Britain and the many ways in which they reached out to the public to defend their positions, themselves, and their fellow interested men. The arguments and rhetoric contained within these pieces were utilised during the slavery debates in Parliament to hinder the legal arm of the abolitionist movement. It is the political stage of the debates to which this study will now turn.

## **Section Two: British Anti-Abolitionist Arguments and Rhetoric**

## Chapter Three

### Proslavery Arguments Presented in Parliament Prior to the Abolition of the Slave Trade

‘Gentlemen had displayed a great deal of eloquence in exhibiting, in horrid colours, the traffic in slaves. He acknowledged it was not an amiable trade, but neither was the trade of a butcher an amiable trade, and yet the mutton chop was, nevertheless, a very good thing.’

Thomas Grosvenor, 18 April 1791<sup>1</sup>

‘He said that the House by giving way to the clamours without doors, instead of firmly adhering to principles of wisdom and sound policy, might lay the foundation for the ruin of our happy constitution. Gentlemen ought to be on guard against a spirit of innovation. Liberty was not now in danger from its arch enemy despotism, but from those, who under the appearance of erecting a temple to liberty, were actually endeavouring to destroy it, to overturn all government, and establish anarchy upon its ruins.’

Robert John Buxton, 26 February 1793<sup>2</sup>

‘When he was in the West Indies, he perceived the negroes who were industrious for themselves to earn and have a right to what they earned, and to hold their houses and gardens as a property secured to them in a manner as full and as strong, as any peasantry in Europe, and they were in general in a better situation than the lower class of labourers in other countries.’

Sir William Young, 26 February 1795<sup>3</sup>

In the late-eighteenth century annual debates raged in the British houses of Parliament over whether or not to abolish the slave trade. Between 1783, when the Quakers presented a petition to Parliament requesting the abolition of the inhumane traffic in slaves, and 1807, when Britain abolished her participation in the transatlantic slave trade, nearly one hundred MPs defended Britain’s long-standing involvement in the slave trade. Many of these men had direct links to the West Indies. For some, their family fortune had been made in the islands; others had worked on or owned plantations themselves or were involved in trading enterprises. Those who represented the major ports of Liverpool and London spoke up on behalf

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<sup>1</sup> *PHE* XXIX (London: T.C. Hansard, 1817), col. 281. Grosvenor served as MP for Chester (1755-95).

<sup>2</sup> *PHE* XXX (London: T.C. Hansard, 1817), col. 515.

<sup>3</sup> *PHE* XXXI (London: T.C. Hansard, 1818), cols. 1344-5.

of their constituents regarding their respective city's need for the trade to continue. There were also many more MPs without obvious links to the trade or the colonies who defended Britain's colonists, merchants, and traders as they sought to hold back the growing surge of popular abolitionism.

Some MPs affiliated with the military showed concern for the safety of the British Empire in the debates over abolition. Little time had passed since Britain had lost the American colonies and Britain soon faced the French Revolution and then a closed-off Europe under Napoleon's army. Sailors learned their craft on the long, arduous transatlantic journeys which slaving vessels regularly attempted. This proved to be an important nursery for the Royal Navy. Revolutionary ideas regarding human rights were spreading on both sides of the Atlantic due to the American and French Revolutions and these ideas threatened to topple existing political systems. There were also concerns about the ramifications of Westminster exerting too much pressure on the colonial assemblies and interfering in the private property and enterprise of the West Indian colonists. After the humiliation of the American Revolution, Britons were fearful of losing their prized possessions in the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup>

Proslavery MPs could not comprehend the desire to end a profitable trade, while their European competitors continued trading in slaves in the Caribbean. Some stressed the crucial role that the slave trade played in maintaining the slave population in the West Indies. For example, on 12 June 1804, during a discussion on Wilberforce's proposed bill for abolishing the slave trade, William Young stressed the need to maintain the trade and blamed his plantation's losses on recent warfare: 'With respect to the importation of African slaves into the islands, he would be glad to learn how otherwise the gap was to be filled up in the population of the country, which war or the descents of the enemy's privateers so frequently created'.<sup>5</sup> Unlike in the American colonies, Britain's Caribbean slave population was not self-maintaining and planters relied upon regular slave imports to keep a sufficient workforce manning the sugar plantations. MPs and members of colonial assemblies hypothesised several reasons for the low levels of reproduction on West Indian plantations. Henry Dundas<sup>6</sup> noted on 1 March 1799, during a discussion of

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<sup>4</sup> Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860*, 52-4.

<sup>5</sup> *PD II* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1804), col. 660.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Dundas, MP for Edinburghshire (1774-82, 1783-90) and Edinburgh (1790-1802), held a number of important posts during his political career including Solicitor General for Scotland, Lord Advocate, Home Secretary (1791), Secretary of State for War (1794), as well as influencing 43 out of

Wilberforce's motion to bring in a bill for the abolition of the slave trade: 'The assembly of Jamaica, however, had adopted a regulation, by which no slaves above the age of 25, were to be introduced, because they were desirous to have such as would secure the population, and prevent the necessity of constant supplies by importation'.<sup>7</sup> Slave women in the West Indies had fewer children than those in North America and, although Jamaica's slave population was approximately forty to fifty per cent female, between one third and one half of slave women remained childless between the mid-seventeenth century and 1833.<sup>8</sup> Historians have advanced a number of theories about the low birth rate among slaves in Britain's sugar-producing Caribbean colonies,<sup>9</sup> but recent scholarship has proposed that the intensive labour demanded by sugar cultivation combined with physical discipline and the wealth of diseases affecting mother and child provide enough evidence to explain the low rates.<sup>10</sup> Sugar was the most physically demanding plantation crop to grow and harvest.<sup>11</sup> MPs argued that the trade would have to continue if slave women could not produce enough children to maintain the current population and meet Britain's demand for sugar.

Under close examination, two broad categories of arguments put forth at Westminster emerge. As Grosvenor's comments demonstrate, a number of MPs supported slavery and the slave trade and spoke out in favour of its continuance. Plantation owners and colonial representatives contributed to the debate, as did those who were concerned with upholding Parliament's prior decisions from previous centuries. Those in favour of continuing the trade and institution of slavery also espoused religious and racial defences. This category of argument I will term 'proslavery', because it focused on the benefits of plantation slavery rather than on the negative effects of impending abolition. Several prominent MPs voiced their strong opposition to abolition and listed reasons for their position. These included the timing of the bill or motion and the potential ramifications of violence and

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45 seats in Scotland by 1796. See Thorne, R.G., ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, 5 vols. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), vol. 3, 635-43.

<sup>7</sup> *PHE* XXXIV (London: T.C. Hansard, 1819), col. 536.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Morgan, 'Slave Women and Reproduction in Jamaica, ca. 1776-1834', in *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic*, ed. Gwyn Cambell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Theories include the brutal nature of plantation slavery, slave women making a political statement by avoiding pregnancy or by committing infanticide or aborting the pregnancy, and cultural practices such as prolonged lactation and avoiding sexual intercourse for a time after giving birth. For a more detailed examination of reproduction amongst the slave population in Britain's West Indian colonies, see Kenneth Morgan's 'Slave Women and Reproduction in Jamaica, ca. 1776-1834,' 27-53.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. Common diseases included small pox, measles, scarlet fever, syphilis, yaws, elephantiasis, and postnatal tetanus.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

economic devastation. I will label these arguments ‘anti-abolition’ arguments because they were directed at the proposed bills for abolition and the men who brought them forth. Some individuals, however, believed that the institution of slavery was necessary for the survival of the West Indian colonies, but also that, if enough warning was given to the planters to secure the necessary number of slaves to work their plantations, the slave trade could (or should) be abolished. This more nuanced argument weaves through many of the proslavery arguments identified below. Over time, anti-abolition arguments become the more common of the two. The decline of proslavery remarks could be related to the increased number of West Indians reporting incidents of attacks and slander in and outside Westminster as they faced growing public outrage at Britain’s participation in the slave trade and the use of African slaves in Britain’s West Indian colonies.

Certain arguments were utilised in Parliament at specific times in response to internal or external stimuli. For example, the assertion that abolition was based upon dangerous revolutionary principles was put forth five times in 1793 following Louis XVI’s execution and eleven times in the three years after Napoleon had been crowned emperor.<sup>12</sup> The number of incidences in which MPs praised the slave trade for its success as a nursery for the Royal Navy also rose during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter presents an analysis of proslavery arguments advanced in Westminster prior to the abolition of the British slave trade. The evidence used has been drawn from Cobbett’s and Hansard’s published parliamentary debates between 1783 and 1807. While not a complete record of all speeches nor a full report of any particular speech, these two sources provide us with the best available record of parliamentary debates. It is important to recognise that while the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire was becoming increasingly likely in the first decade of the 1800s, in 1807-8 the majority of MPs discussing the ramifications of abolition publicly opposed emancipation. Arguments advanced in the twenty-five-year period of debate following the abolition of the slave trade will be the focus of Chapter Four.

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<sup>12</sup> Overall, the argument of abolition being based upon revolutionary principles was brought up twenty-four times between 1783 and 1807: five times in 1793; once in 1794, 1796, and 1797; twice in 1798; three times in 1799; twice in 1804; once in 1805 and 1806; and seven times in 1807.

<sup>13</sup> The argument of the slave trade providing a nursery for seamen was advanced twelve times during the abolition debates held between 1783 and 1807: once in 1788 and 1789; twice in 1791; once in 1796; three times in 1805 during the War of the Third Coalition; and three times in 1806 during the War of the Fourth Coalition.

## 1. Economic Arguments

The British transatlantic slave trade made a significant contribution to Britain's financial prosperity and security. Money made in the plantations and through the trade was often invested in Britain, greatly improving the infrastructure of ports and providing funds for investment in other economic activities. Joseph Inikori has argued that transatlantic commerce was of central importance to Britain's international trade and international trade was a critical factor in Britain's industrialisation.<sup>14</sup> The transatlantic slave trade and the use of enslaved labour in the colonies also allowed for the increased consumption of cheap plantation produce.<sup>15</sup> Demand for plantation goods such as sugar, cotton, and coffee was growing in Britain and across Europe, and MPs were sceptical that sufficient production could continue in the Caribbean without slave labour or if limited to the colonies' current slave population. Vast numbers of men were employed in all stages of the trade, including British and West Indian merchants, plantation owners and managers, importers, ship-builders, and sailors. The amount of money tied up in the trade was vast, as was the value of Britain's imports from the colonies and its exports to Africa and the Caribbean. Proslavery and pro-slave trade MPs quoted statistics and emphasised the financial benefits during the debates in Westminster, helping strengthen the fight against abolition. In the early eighteenth century slavery was seen as an institution that supported the empire.<sup>16</sup> Slavery was also seen as the status quo. By the time the general British public became fully aware of the nature and the consequences of colonial slavery the institution was already being promoted as a necessary evil.<sup>17</sup>

West Indians continued to argue for the trade's necessity and its centrality to Britain's economic prosperity and empire into the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> In the late eighteenth century an estimated twenty per cent of all British imports came from the West Indies.<sup>19</sup> By the late 1780s the value of Bristol's West Indian cargo and trading ships was approximately £400,000 to £500,000 and the value of the produce imported from the Caribbean was approximately £750,000.<sup>20</sup> By 1805-6 the British

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<sup>14</sup> Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development*, 479.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>16</sup> Swaminathan, 'Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision', 41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, 127.

<sup>19</sup> Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture During the Era of Abolition*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Morgan, 'Bristol West India Merchants in the Eighteenth Century', 204.

West Indies' share of north Atlantic sugar was fifty-five per cent.<sup>21</sup> Despite growing calls for abolition in the early 1800s, the West Indian interest was able to argue convincingly that colonial slavery and the African trade were absolutely vital to the maintenance of Britain's financial stability, prosperity, and security.

On 5 July 1799, during a debate over a bill to limit the extent of slave trading on the African coast, the duke of Clarence highlighted the importance of the West Indies to Britain's commerce. The duke stressed the significant role the West Indian colonies had played in securing Britain's present financial position:

In 1788, the British West India capital amounted to seventy millions sterling; employing 689 vessels, 148,176 tons, navigated by 14,000 seamen. The gross duties to the British empire, 1,800,000*l.* In 1796, the trade required 350,230 tons, navigated by 24,000 seamen. If the value of the conquests from the French, Spaniards, and Dutch, amounting to at least 20,000,000*l.* be added, I may safely assert, that the present British capital on the West Indies, is equal to 100 millions sterling. A sum which demands your most serious considerations, before you consent to the abolition of the trade without which it could not exist.<sup>22</sup>

His statistics demonstrated significant growth over a period of eight years as the tonnage of goods doubled and the number of trained and employed men increased by over seventy per cent. He insisted that these benefits would be lost with abolition because the colonies would no longer have access to the workforce (slaves), defence (provided by seamen trained on slaving vessels), and transportation for plantation produce (on vessels returning home to Britain) which they relied upon to maintain production.

Specific constituencies enlisted MPs to support the trade on their behalf during the debates in Westminster. On 1 May 1806 Charles Price<sup>23</sup> spoke out against the abolition bill on behalf of 'several very respectable merchants of the City of London':

This bill, which if passed into law, would be injurious to the country in general, and to London in particular. This was not a time to shut a door by which we were enabled to export Manufactures to the annual amount of 2,800,000*l.* In the present circumstances of the country, trade ought to be encouraged instead of being shut from those places which were still open to us.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation*, 35-6.

<sup>22</sup> *PHE* XXXIV, col. 1105.

<sup>23</sup> MP for London (1802-12).

<sup>24</sup> *PD* VI (London: R. Bagshaw, 1806), col. 1023.

Price and the London merchants stressed the need to embrace any remaining opportunities for trade and economic development during such times of unrest. They would prefer to see the trade increased in order to add to Britain's prosperity and security.

Proslavery MPs braved critics in and outside of Westminster by declaring their desire to see the slave trade continued and increased. On 10 June 1806, during a discussion on Charles Fox's motion for abolition, General Isaac Gascoyne<sup>25</sup> highlighted the benefits of the trade and pledged his support for its continuance:

If we had new colonies to cultivate, and he was asked his opinion, in respect to encouraging the Slave Trade, he would certainly advise it; and why? because our commerce had derived such immense sources of wealth and prosperity from it, as had proved a great means of raising the country to its present state of aggrandisement and magnificence, and enabled us to contend with our enemies.<sup>26</sup>

To Gascoyne, participating in the slave trade meant financial prosperity. It had increased Britain's prestige and allowed her to defend herself in times of war by providing monetary resources and experienced sailors. From his perspective, this vital element of the nation's economy should therefore be encouraged and supported without caving into humanitarian concerns and popular pressure from uninformed individuals and pressure groups that did not understand the financial ramifications of abolition.

## **2. Strategic and Naval Importance**

While abolition was being debated in Parliament, outside of Westminster Britain faced revolutionary France, then Napoleon's army, and war with several European states. This instability caused great concern for the safety of Britain's empire and in particular for its vulnerable, wealth-creating colonies in the West Indies. Due to their close proximity to the Caribbean colonies of rival European nations and their great distance from Britain, the British West Indies were under threat throughout much of this period. A strong Royal Navy was seen as instrumental in defending the colonies and maintaining Britain's vital trade links. In the 1790s anti-abolitionist MPs successfully wove the need to defend the islands into their arguments for continuing the slave trade.

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<sup>25</sup> MP for Liverpool (1796-1831), after taking over the seat from his brother, Bamber, who had held it since 1780.

<sup>26</sup> *PD VII* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1806), col. 593.

To help defend its West Indian colonies Britain looked to its greatest source of manpower, slaves, and raised black regiments from the slave population. The British Army purchased an estimated 13,400 slaves in small quantities and paid between £60 and £70 for each.<sup>27</sup> This probably made them the largest single buyer of slaves in the Caribbean.<sup>28</sup> Some of these recruits were promised freedom after serving five years, but few were expected to live long enough to obtain their reward.<sup>29</sup> African slaves were considered a good alternative to European troops in the colonies because they were acclimatised to the tropical climate and prevalent diseases that attacked European regiments.<sup>30</sup> Some MPs saw abolition as a threat to the security of the colonies because it would decrease the available manpower and the supply of new potential troops (slaves). On 18 February 1796, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion to bring in a bill for abolition, General Banastre Tarleton<sup>31</sup> remarked: 'We ought rather to endeavour to increase the population, since it added to our defence, than depress it by stopping the importation of negroes'.<sup>32</sup> This controversial statement directly opposed the abolitionists' warnings of the great potential for mass slave revolts as the continuing trade boosted the colonies' slave population.

The proposed abolition contradicted existing methods of raising regiments and defending the colonies. On 7 March 1796, during a discussion of Wilberforce's proposed motion for abolition, Tarleton stressed to the Commons: 'Ministers had given commissions to many gentlemen for raising black regiments. By the bill these regiments would be emancipated'.<sup>33</sup> Abolition, in other words, would threaten the safety of the colonies and have serious ramifications for individuals, the islands, and the empire. Other MPs with military connections echoed Tarleton's concerns. On 28 February 1805, during a second reading of Wilberforce's bill for abolition, General Gascoyne challenged the abolitionists' position by listing measures already in place for the security of the colonies:

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<sup>27</sup> Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 275.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Roger N. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 78.

<sup>30</sup> Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves*, 276.

<sup>31</sup> Tarleton, MP for Liverpool (1782?-4, 1790-1806, 1807-12), was one of the most vocal and well-known opponents of abolition. He had gained first-hand experience working with black troops during his military service in the War of American Independence. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 5, 332-6.

<sup>32</sup> *PHE XXXII* (London: T.C. Hansard, 1818), col. 741.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 864.

He could not avoid considering it as a remarkable circumstance, that, notwithstanding this question of abolition was brought forward, government had contracted for 5000 slaves; a contract too which would not expire till February next. ... He agreed in the propriety of having corps of black troops in our service in our Colonial possessions, but when it was proposed to abolish the slave trade altogether, such a measure was certainly inconsistent with the object of the abolition.<sup>34</sup>

Gascoyne's comment on recent government legislation, which contradicted the abolitionist movement by contracting for slaves (and therefore encouraging the importation of more slaves), sparked a wave of denials and explanations from abolitionist MPs attempting to reconcile the proposed act with existing legislation. After years of debate regarding the legal status of black soldiers in the British Army, the Mutiny Act of 1807 granted freedom to all blacks in the King's Service.<sup>35</sup>

Another argument put forth regarding the strategic importance of the slave trade was its universal nature. MPs argued that, even if Britain relinquished her large stake in the slave trade, other nations would gain financially and defensively in proportion to her loss. On 7 June 1804, before the second reading of Wilberforce's bill for abolition, Lord Castlereagh<sup>36</sup> reported to the Commons:

Demand for colonial produce was daily increasing, and would continue to do so. In the end we should find that we had deprived ourselves of the means of accomplishing our object, and that the evil must subsist till terminated by other means. He would wish the trade to exist in favour of the commercial interest of our country, instead of being thrown into the hands of Denmark, Spain or any other country in Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Castlereagh stressed the slave trade's central role in several European nations' finances. He believed that if Britons continued to demand plantation produce after enacting abolition they would be forced to rely on foreign merchants and lose more money. He believed British merchants and producers rather than foreigners should be allowed to meet the British public's demands for colonial goods and foodstuffs.

The duke of Clarence agreed with this argument. Without a viable solution for tracking and prohibiting the transatlantic slave trade of other nations, the duke argued, he could not see how British abolition would affect the total number of slaves being transported across the Atlantic and between colonies. On 7 May 1806,

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<sup>34</sup> *PD III* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1805), col. 643.

<sup>35</sup> Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815*, 78.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Stewart, MP for Tregony (1794-6), Orford (1796-7 and 1821-2), County Down (1801-5 and 1812-21), Boroughbridge (1806), and Plympton Erle (1806-12).

<sup>37</sup> *PD II*, col. 554.

during a debate on a slave importation bill that would prevent British slave merchants from providing slaves to foreign colonies, the duke presented his case:

If we were enabled to prevent any supply of slaves from being carried to the enemy's colonies, then he would agree to the policy of preventing British subjects supplying them; but this was not the case: the colonies of the enemy would be supplied with slaves from other sources; and therefore he saw no reason why the profits arising from this trade should be taken out of the hands of British subjects.<sup>38</sup>

He depicted the trade's financial benefits to Britain as a happy consequence of preventing enemy access to the slave trade and controlling the inter-colonial supply of slaves.

On 6 March 1807, during a discussion of the bill for abolition, Sir Charles Pole<sup>39</sup> also expressed his concerns over handing British trade and profits over to rival nations. Sir Charles began his speech by reminding the house of the 1780 hurricane in which 'there were 15,000 persons destroyed'<sup>40</sup> who could not have been replaced without Britain's participation in the slave trade. If the slave trade was abolished and another hurricane struck, the colonists would not have the means to re-populate their estates and work their fields. He also noted another likely consequence of abolition:

If the trade was not permitted by parliament to be continued, it would be found almost impossible to prevent smuggling; or even if we did completely [*sic*] abandon the trade, it would be immediately taken up by the enemy, who would increase and strengthen his navy by those means, and we might soon expect to see the downfall of the British empire.<sup>41</sup>

Like the duke of Clarence, Sir Charles viewed abolition as an advantage to Britain's rivals and a significant disadvantage to Britain's economy and defence. He also alluded to the importance of the trade in the training of naval forces from which Britain had thus far benefited. This argument will be further examined below.

War with France had significant financial and defensive consequences for Britain. European trade links were disrupted during the wars, prompting some MPs to challenge the wisdom of severing the country's established transatlantic trade connections. On 10 February 1807, before the bill for abolition was read for the

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<sup>38</sup> *PD VII*, col. 33.

<sup>39</sup> MP for Newark (1802-6) and Plymouth (1806-17); groom of the bedchamber to the Duke of Clarence.

<sup>40</sup> *PD IX* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1807), col. 59.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

third time in the House of Lords, the earl of Westmorland<sup>42</sup> put forth such an argument:

It was thought, however, by some of the supporters of the bill, that by retaining these words [justice and humanity], foreign powers might be humbugged, if he might use the expression, into a concurrence in the abolition. This, however, he did not think at all practicable, and it was surely a consideration of expediency, whether at a time when the continent of Europe was nearly shut against us, we should put an end to our trade with the continent of Africa, and by doing so, greatly injure and distress many persons, and deprive many more of the means of subsistence.<sup>43</sup>

His appeal for British trade and financial security came during the final moments of the abolition debate. Westmorland pleaded on behalf of individuals involved in the African trade, but, by the end of the day, his fellow Lords had passed the bill for abolition.

The transatlantic slave trade was an important training ground for sailors in peacetime and provided manpower for Britain's naval vessels during wartime. According to recent calculations, approximately 735,000 slaves were carried on British ships from Africa to the British Caribbean between 1783 and 1808.<sup>44</sup> David Eltis has calculated that the number of slaves imported into the Americas nearly doubled while Britain and France were at war from approximately 100,000 between 1781 and 1790 to over 190,000 between 1791 and 1800.<sup>45</sup> Richard B. Sheridan's research has supported this claim that Anglo-French conflicts in the 1790s did not hinder the overall slave trade to Britain's West Indian colonies. During the war Britain captured Trinidad, Demerara, Essequibo, and Berbice. These provided new territories for British West Indian planters and new markets for Britain's slave traders.<sup>46</sup> Imports to Jamaica also increased in the 1790s, peaking in 1793 with a total of over 23,000 slaves imported into the island.<sup>47</sup> A coffee boom in the 1790s resulted in more slaves being transported across the Atlantic. An estimated 26,000 slaves worked 700 new settlements in Jamaica to meet the increased demand for

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<sup>42</sup> John Fane, tenth earl of Westmorland.

<sup>43</sup> *PD XIII* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1807), col. 702.

<sup>44</sup> Estimates Database, *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (Emory University, 2009) [[www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces](http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces), accessed 14 December 2012].

<sup>45</sup> David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 249.

<sup>46</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, 'Slave Demography in the British West Indies and the Abolition of the Slave Trade', in *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. David Eltis and James Walvin (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 269.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

coffee.<sup>48</sup> African slaves therefore continued to be transported to the West Indies and in unprecedented numbers throughout the 1790s despite war between England and France.

The craft of sailing took years to learn and when war erupted the Royal Navy could rely upon the slave trade to provide highly skilled men who had sailed some of the longest and most dangerous oceanic journeys. MPs with connections to port cities, the military, and the West Indies reminded Westminster of the slave trade's role in providing skilled seamen to defend their colonies, protect British trade routes, and maintain the safety of the empire. West Indian merchants claimed that the African trade employed 25,000 seamen annually.<sup>49</sup> On 28 February 1805, during a discussion on Wilberforce's proposed bill for abolition, Tarleton noted that his constituency, Liverpool, employed at least 5000 ships 'manned by a proper compliment of seamen, the best and most expert in the British Navy'.<sup>50</sup> According to Tarleton, abolition would bring about wide-scale job losses and damage the strength of the Royal Navy.

Tarleton was the most outspoken MP regarding the importance of the slave trade to Liverpool and to the navy. His support for the slave trade tended to focus on its central importance to Liverpool's economy, the country's economy, and the empire's defences. Tarleton brought forth this argument during a discussion of a bill to limit the importation of slaves into newly conquered and ceded territories on 25 April 1806:

We ought to take care of the interests of our navy, and commerce would take care of itself. The African trade had been the great cause of the prosperity and opulence of Liverpool. The sailors in this trade were the best that could be found, and the greatest supplies for our navy were obtained from the port of Liverpool. Although many were of opinion that the coasting trade was the chief nursery for our marine, yet he maintained that sailors were good in proportion to the length of their voyages, and those of the sailors in the African trade were certainly long ones.<sup>51</sup>

He insisted that the nature and length of the transatlantic voyages demanded by the slave trade turned ordinary sailors into 'the greatest supplies for our navy'.<sup>52</sup>

Britain's naval forces were critical to her strength and survival during war. Other

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>49</sup> Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 90.

<sup>50</sup> *PD* III, cols. 654-5.

<sup>51</sup> *PD* VI, col. 918.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

trades, however, were also considered nurseries for the Royal Navy. These included the coal trade from Newcastle to London and the deep-sea fisheries and whaling near Greenland and Newfoundland.<sup>53</sup> The Royal Navy drew upon all branches of Britain's strong merchant marine to gain much-needed manpower in wartime.

Two months later Tarleton again addressed the House with his concern about Liverpool's important role in Britain's overall prosperity. On 10 June 1806, during a discussion of Fox's motion for abolition, Tarleton reminded his fellow MPs of how Liverpool had grown from a small village to a thriving city through its involvement in the slave trade:

It [Liverpool] was eminent for the prosperity of its commerce, its wealth, its loyalty; for the important aid it furnished to the British marine, by affording at all times a numerous supply of seamen, through its African and West Indian trade. It was equally distinguished in its spirit in fitting out private ships of war, and by contributing annually three millions sterling in revenue to the public purse.<sup>54</sup>

He mentioned Liverpool's experience and success in building and outfitting ships for war as well as for use in the African slave trade. Warships would have been of vital importance during the Napoleonic Wars and the number and quality would have been significantly less without Liverpool's money and ship-building experience.

The duke of Clarence also commented on the slave trade's importance to Britain's economy and defence. On 16 May 1806, during a discussion of a bill to restrict the importation of slaves, the duke declared his belief that the transatlantic slave trade was a vital nursery for seamen:

He then adverted to the number of seamen employed, and for whom it proved a nursery; and the extensive drawback upon the slave trade itself which the bill would produce, might be conceived, when it was known, that out of upwards of 38,000 slaves, more than 22,000 were afterwards exported from the British islands to foreign colonies and settlements. When he reflected on the immense capital employed in the trade, the great quantities of British manufactures consumed in consequence of it, and the numbers of seamen employed, how strong must be his reprobation of a measure, which would diminish nearly two thirds of the whole!<sup>55</sup>

He downplayed the number of slaves being transported by insisting that two-thirds of them were soon sold to foreign colonies, contributing therefore to Britain's prosperity without the stigma of increasing her own slave population. The slave

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<sup>53</sup> Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> *PD VII*, col. 587.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 227-8.

trade performed the role of a nursery for seamen; this argument was seriously considered by MPs as Britain's naval power was continually tested by war during the era of abolition.

### 3. Historical Justification

One point that anti-abolitionists raised consistently over time was that of the British government's continual support of the slave trade and African slavery in the colonies. The trade had been regulated and encouraged by generations of politicians and monarchs for economic and imperial reasons, and some politicians in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries could not understand how public and political support had changed so dramatically and in such a short time. As Lord Chancellor Edward Thurlow<sup>56</sup> remarked on 8 May 1792, during a discussion of a bill for abolition: 'As to the iniquity and atrocity which had been so largely imputed to the slave trade, he could not imagine why those crimes had not been discovered by our ancestors, and were now to be so conspicuous in the year 1792'.<sup>57</sup> This surprise at the sudden fervour for abolition was echoed by a number of the Lord Chancellor's contemporaries and stirred up fears of rapid change and popular unrest.<sup>58</sup>

When it came to justifying the trade from an historical perspective, some MPs reminded the House of Africa's history of supplying slaves to various nations. The prior establishment of a slave trade within Africa and to the Middle East meant that Britons were taking advantage of an existing system of trade to gain needed workers, while being able to pass along the benefits of the Christian religion and European social norms to the Africans they transported. Thomas Hughan<sup>59</sup> put forth this argument on 27 February 1807 during a debate over the bill for abolition: 'The slave trade in Africa was the result of slavery, and slavery was produced by the barbarism of the inhabitants. History, ancient and modern, proved the universal

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<sup>56</sup> Edward Thurlow, MP for Tamworth borough, Staffordshire (1765-78), was made first Baron Thurlow of Ashfield in 1778.

<sup>57</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1354.

<sup>58</sup> The cause and timing of the rise of abolitionism continues to be debated by historians. According to David Brion Davis, the Enlightenment created a new widespread belief that liberty was a natural and fundamental right, supporting Quaker claims. See Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823*, 214. In contrast, Adam Hochschild has found that the specific events of the Zong massacre and the publication of Clarkson's essay were the foundational elements of the British abolition movement. See Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves*, 82. Christopher Leslie Brown believes that abolitionists had many (sometimes unique) reasons for their support, including care for the slaves, ridding oneself of guilt, concern over the loss of the American colonies, advancing class interests, etc. See Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, 25. A more detailed discussion of the historiography of British abolition can be found in the Introduction, above.

<sup>59</sup> MP for East Retford (1806-7) and Dundalk (1808-11).

existence of slavery in all the countries of Africa, inhabited by negroes, and that this system prevailed ages before the commencement of the European slave-trade'.<sup>60</sup> To Hughan, the pre-existence of an internal slave trade within Africa, instituted by Africans, justified European involvement in the trade, even though this involvement extended it beyond the African continent to the Americas. On 18 April 1791, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion to bring in a bill for abolition, Thomas Grosvenor remarked that while some elements of the slave trade such as kidnapping and 'other barbarous practices' were certainly immoral: 'it should be recollected, that these things were the consequence of the natural law of Africa, and that instead of declaiming against it, we should endeavour, like wise men, to turn it to our own advantage'.<sup>61</sup> He argued that the practice of slave trading and holding already existed in Africa; Britons, therefore, like their European neighbours, should take advantage of this existing internal infrastructure to maintain their stake in the profitable transatlantic trade.

One strategy used by anti-abolitionists throughout the decades of debate was to quote existing legislation that abolition would violate. On 7 March 1796, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion to abolish the slave trade, John Dent<sup>62</sup> invoked the authority of Magna Carta, long seen as the fundamental basis of English liberty, in his argument: 'the proceeding was contrary to the express declaration of Magna Carta, that "right shall neither be sold, delayed, or denied." Now, if this bill passed, would not right be sold, delayed and denied? What was the committee now doing?'<sup>63</sup> His outrage at a proposed abolition violating pre-existing British laws regarding private property, enterprise, and slavery was echoed by many MPs throughout the debates on abolition and emancipation.

The long history of government sanctions provided by proslavery MPs in Westminster typically began with the rule of Queen Elizabeth I. For example, during a debate regarding ameliorations on 6 April 1797, Bryan Edwards noted: 'The government of England, in the early part of queen Elizabeth's reign, encouraged and promoted the slave trade, and the queen herself participated in its profits. In 1564 she sent a squadron of men of war to purchase slaves on the coast of Africa, and to

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<sup>60</sup> *PD VIII*, col. 1043.

<sup>61</sup> *PHE XXIX*, col. 281.

<sup>62</sup> MP for the slaving port of Lancaster (1790-1812) and Poole (1818-1826); one of 18 MPs who voted against the bill for abolition in 1807. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 3, 586-90.

<sup>63</sup> *PHE XXXII*, col. 865.

convey them for sale to the Spanish West Indies'.<sup>64</sup> He continued, surveying the instructions of Charles II, William III, and James VII and II to their colonial governors, to further strengthen his claims of government support for the slave trade. Edwards read part of James VII and II's directions to West Indian governor Sir Phillip Howard in 1685, which he believed were copied and issued again by William III in 1689:

You are to give all possible encouragement and invitation to merchants and others, who shall bring trade unto our said island [Jamaica], or in any way contribute to its advantage, and particularly to the African company. And as we are willing to recommend unto the said company that the said island may have a constant and sufficient supply of merchantable negroes at moderate rates, so you are to take care that payment be made in money or commodities, within a competent time, according to agreement...<sup>65</sup>

This method of listing the various acts supporting the slave trade and colonial slavery over the previous three centuries was employed by several anti-abolitionist MPs during the slavery and slave trade debates in Parliament to legitimate their argument and challenge claims of inhumanity and illegality.<sup>66</sup>

George III opposed abolition and, like many of his contemporaries, believed that slavery was necessary for his empire's productivity and security. By continuing to accept legislation allowing for the slave trade in newly conquered islands,<sup>67</sup> George III created further obstacles for the abolitionists and provided anti-abolitionist MPs with further examples of legislation that abolition would violate. On 25 April 1806, during a discussion of a bill to stop importing slaves into newly conquered territories, Alderman John Prinsep<sup>68</sup> noted a recent royal proclamation that challenged support for abolition:

[Abolition] would interfere with the faith of his majesty, pledged to some of the conquered colonies, that they should be on equal footing with the British West India islands, as appeared from the terms of their capitulation; and wished to know if it would supercede the

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<sup>64</sup> *PHE* XXXIII (London: T.C. Hansard, 1818), cols. 279-80.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 280-1.

<sup>66</sup> For further examples of MPs and peers quoting acts that abolition would violate, see James Baillie on 2 April 1792 (*PHE* XXIX, col. 1080), the duke of Clarence on 5 July 1799 (*PHE* XXXIV, cols. 1092-3), Alderman John Prinsep on 25 April 1806 (*PD* VI, col. 919), and George Hibbert on 16 March 1807 (*PD* IX, cols. 117 and 128). Anti-abolitionists also referred generally to existing legislation that condoned and encouraged participation in the slave trade, including William Manning on 30 May 1804 (*PD* II, col. 470), George Rose on 27 June 1804 (*PD* II, cols. 867-8), the duke of Clarence on 3 July 1804 (*PD* II, col. 932), and Isaac Gascoyne and Manning on 10 June 1806 (*PD* VII, cols. 593 and 601).

<sup>67</sup> These islands and territories included Trinidad (surrendered to Britain in 1797), St. Vincent (1796), Demerara (1803) and Berbice (1803).

<sup>68</sup> MP for Queenborough (1802-6); alderman for the city of London.

proclamation of his majesty of the 15th of Aug. 1805, which admitted the supply of those islands with negroes...<sup>69</sup>

The *Parliamentary Debates* describes Prinsep as ‘apprehensive’ that abolition could occur without discriminating against recently conquered lands that had not yet been given adequate access to the British slave trade. Anti-abolitionists argued that without the importation of new workers the new colonies’ plantations might not be able to meet their potential, prove worthy of British investment, or provide an adequate amount of produce for eager British consumers.

Legal precedent was upheld by anti-abolitionists at all stages of the debates. Nearing the end of the long fight against abolition, George Hibbert<sup>70</sup> summarised his thoughts on the understanding and humanity of past MPs and insisted that Westminster had been aware of the need to regulate the slave trade and prevent abuses from occurring, but they allowed it to continue out of necessity. On 16 March 1807, before the third reading of the bill for abolition, Hibbert declared:

Our ancestors indeed distinguished betwixt the trade and its abuses; that they tolerated, these they reprobated; a sufficient proof of which is afforded in the act of 23 Geo. II c. 31, which, in its preamble, authorises the trade and its application to the West Indies; but, in one of its provisions, enacts penalties upon its abuses ... It is in vain then for us to say that we are not completely at issue with our ancestors upon this question, or that we know any thing which they did not know, when they gave repeated legal sanction to that which we seek to abolish.<sup>71</sup>

He believed that past legislation had already considered the potential for inhumane treatment during the middle passage and that clear penalties and regulations were already in place; prior legislation should therefore stand. After further discussion, however, the bill was read for the third time and passed.

#### **4. Paternalist Arguments**

Proslavery MPs argued that West Indian plantation owners were surrogate parents of their slaves, taking care of them in sickness and health, and providing all necessities throughout their slaves’ lives. Plantation owners in Parliament argued that their slaves had better living and working conditions than factory owners in Britain provided for British workers. They also provided evidence of slave loyalty to their

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<sup>69</sup> *PD VI*, col. 919.

<sup>70</sup> Hibbert was MP for Seaford (1806-12). He was educated in Liverpool and served as director of the West India Dock Company and chairman of the West India Committee. He was also an agent for Jamaica from 1812 to 1830. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 4, 193-4.

<sup>71</sup> *PD IX*, col. 117.

owners and to the crown to argue that the principle of humanity was fundamental to the institution of colonial slavery. Widespread paternalist beliefs and actions were central to the proslavery case for retaining British involvement in the slave trade.

MPs with direct involvement in the slave trade and colonial slavery countered abolitionist charges of inhumanity by highlighting the material benefits of importation and West Indian slavery for Africans and their descendants. On 2 April 1792, during a discussion of Wilberforce's bill for abolition, Benjamin Vaughan relayed to his fellow MPs a list of the benefits of slave life in the British Caribbean:

For clothes and fuel they could have little want on account of the climate; they had a house and land gratis; they suffered no imprisonment for debt, no fear of not being able to support a family to deter them from marrying; their orphans and widows were sure to be taken care of, as likewise themselves, when old, or meeting with accidents; they had medicines, surgery, midwifery, and attendance gratis; they had their private property, which no master ever took from them. They were perfectly resigned, at the time he was abroad, to their situation, and looked for nothing beyond it.<sup>72</sup>

He argued that life for transported African slaves in the British Caribbean was free from hardship. Here Vaughan employed a common construction of paternalist argument by backing up his claims with testimony of first-hand knowledge of plantation structure and life. Over time, however, MPs appear to become increasingly wary of claiming first-hand knowledge through plantation ownership. This hesitation was probably due to fear of being accused of 'interest' (and therefore bias) and hence incurring public condemnation.

Anti-abolitionists stressed the slaves' access to medical care on the plantations to defend the plantation system and the impossibility of the slave population maintaining itself without the continual importation of slaves into the colonies. By demonstrating the hands-on role of medical practitioners on the plantations, MPs refuted claims of inhumane treatment, excessive punishment, and torture that abolitionists insisted were familiar events on the plantations. On 6 April 1797, during a discussion of various methods for maintaining slave populations, Charles Rose Ellis insisted that proper medical care and inspections were already performed on all plantations:

The planters cannot be accused of inattention to their duty; no estate is without the advantage of constant medical care; and the legislature has taken a very efficient step to secure a strict attention to the health of the negroes, by exacting a list of the deaths and births on each estate,

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<sup>72</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1084.

accompanied by a statement of the causes of the deaths, given in by the surgeon on oath.<sup>73</sup>

He argued that even with constant access to medical practitioners the slave population was not able to maintain itself. According to Ellis, experts carefully assessed the actions of the plantation owners and managers upon the death of any slave. As Alderman Nathaniel Newnham<sup>74</sup> remarked on 7 February 1794 during a debate on Wilberforce's motion to abolish the practice of supplying foreign territories with slaves: 'There was a mutual interest between the planter and the slave, which enforced compassion and duty'.<sup>75</sup> According to Newnham, if the slave population was decreasing (which it was), the planters were not at fault. MPs reported that plantation owners disliked relying on the trade to maintain their slave populations, but no adequate alternative had been found.

Some MPs used the loyalty shown by slaves towards their masters and to Britain during war with France as further evidence of the paternal care provided by West Indians. On 1 March 1799, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion to abolish the slave trade, John Petrie<sup>76</sup> provided the Commons with a second-hand account of a loyal group of slaves:

He knew a gentleman who had lived as a governor on the coast of Africa for twenty years from whence he removed to Tobago: having lived in a patriarchal manner, his slaves were all attached to him, and voluntarily went along with him. ... When the enemy attacked Tobago, that island was saved by means of this gentleman's slaves having voluntarily taken up arms in defence of their master's property.<sup>77</sup>

In this case the slaves were supposedly so well cared for by their paternalistic master that they chose to follow him from Africa to the Caribbean. This kind of argument directly opposed abolitionist pressure to end the trade for the sake of the African slaves. Petrie's assertion that Tobago was saved from capture because of its slaves was given little weight however in the debate that followed.

MPs also argued that the transatlantic slave trade was little more than an extension of existing African trade routes. This helped anti-abolitionists draw favourable comparisons between the African slave trade and the export of Britain's criminals to penal colonies. On 12 June 1804, during a discussion of Wilberforce's

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<sup>73</sup> *PHE* XXXIII, col. 260.

<sup>74</sup> MP for London (1780-90) and Ludgershall (1793-96); alderman for the city of London.

<sup>75</sup> *PHE* XXX, cols. 1141-2.

<sup>76</sup> MP for Gattton (1796-1800); merchant.

<sup>77</sup> *PHE* XXXIV, col. 529.

motion for abolition, John Fuller<sup>78</sup> made such an assertion: ‘The African states were as competent to transport such offenders, as we were those who we sent to America or Botany Bay... This he merely stated to shew that the right of the African princes was recognized by the practice of our own country’.<sup>79</sup> The duke of Clarence made a similar comparison on 5 July 1799, during a discussion of a bill to limit trading on the coast of Africa: ‘As for crimes being the cause of slavery in Africa, it is, my lords, even no more than the law of this country; for what are the convicts that are annually transported to Botany Bay but slaves?’<sup>80</sup> Both men argued that there was little difference between Britain’s banishment of its criminals and Africa’s transportation of theirs. This argument could be used to remove any of the guilt or responsibility of Britons and colonists in establishing or increasing European involvement in the African trade.

One of the most controversial arguments put forth in favour of transporting African slaves to the British West Indian colonies and continuing to use slave labour was that African slaves received better treatment and benefits in the West Indies than the poorest classes did in Britain and on the European continent. Discussed by numerous MPs over decades of debate, the argument that slavery was beneficial for all parties incited personal attacks and outrage from abolitionist MPs and the wider public. This comparison, however, demonstrated the benefits of the institution of slavery rather than encouraging the continuance of the slave trade.

Plantation slavery as instituted by West Indians in British colonies did provide some protection and care for the slaves. According to evidence presented to parliamentary committees, African slaves received adequate medical care, shelter, food, and land on which to grow foodstuffs to supplement their own diet and sell for a profit. Britain’s poorest classes, in contrast, lacked these basic necessities. On 2 April 1792, in response to Wilberforce’s introduction to his motion for abolition, James Baillie, the agent for Grenada, stated: ‘I do declare, in the most solemn manner, that I consider the negroes in the British West India islands to be in as comfortable a state as the lower orders of mankind in any country in Europe’.<sup>81</sup> The testimony of witnesses and first-hand accounts from the West Indian lobby contrasted two ways of life of which few had any direct knowledge: the lives of

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<sup>78</sup> MP for Southampton (1780-84) and Sussex (1801-12); slave owner, having inherited a West Indian plantation. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 3, 845-8.

<sup>79</sup> *PD* II, col. 650.

<sup>80</sup> *PHE* XXXIV, col. 1097. It should be noted that this specific comparative argument was only recorded five times in the abolition debates between 1783 and 1807.

<sup>81</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1075.

slaves on West Indian plantations, and the lives of the European poor in workshops, on farms, or on the streets.

During a debate on 27 April 1792 over Dundas' resolutions for gradual abolition Lord Carhampton<sup>82</sup> compared the composition and habits of Kingston's and London's inhabitants:

With regard to the deaths of the negroes in the town of Kingston in Jamaica, their number was not to be wondered at, since Kingston was an unhealthy town. Even London itself had so many deaths from people's leading a dissolute and drunken life, that, were it not for the perpetual recruits from the other parts of the kingdom, it would be so depopulated, that we should have grass grow in our streets. He had heard that the recruits of London from the country stated at 15,000 a year.<sup>83</sup>

He believed that the death rates in Kingston were probably comparable to those of London when Britain's high rates of internal migration were considered.

Carhampton argued that it was not necessarily the poor treatment and inhumane living and working conditions of the plantations and West Indian settlements that created the need for immigration via the transatlantic slave trade, but perhaps it was the inevitable result of the poor living conditions and immoral activities which took place in any major city.

On 30 May 1804, during the discussion on Wilberforce's motion to introduce a bill for abolition, John Fuller commented on the benefits provided to slaves that were not offered to British labourers:

Mr. Fuller contended, that the situation of the negroes in West India colonies was equal, nay, superior to the condition of the labouring poor of this country. They were better fed and more comfortably accommodated. He maintained that their labour was not nearly so severe. The best of the negroes did not in general perform half as much labour as even the most indifferent of our labourers.<sup>84</sup>

He argued that slaves worked half as many hours and received better accommodation and food than the working poor in Britain. This controversial statement directly opposed abolitionists' assertions of the dangerous working conditions and inhumane treatment slaves received on West Indian plantations. As a plantation owner himself, Fuller had first-hand knowledge of plantation life and work, but consequently had a

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<sup>82</sup> Henry Lawes Luttrell, second earl of Carhampton, was MP for Bossiney, a Cornish borough (1768-9), Middlesex (1769-74), Plympton Erle (1790-94), and Ludgershall (1817-21).

<sup>83</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1285.

<sup>84</sup> *PD* II, col. 459.

vested interest in asserting the benefits of the slave trade and plantation life for the slaves in Britain's West Indian colonies.

Three years later, Fuller restated his belief that slaves in the colonies lived in better conditions than labourers in Britain. On 27 February 1807, before the bill for abolition was read a second time, Fuller again drew from personal experience to defend the implementation of slavery in the West Indies:

The negroes upon his estate were more comfortable than labourers in this country, and it would be his desire to place them upon the same footing in every respect. This, however, was impossible, because the fertility of the soil was such in many parts of the West Indies, that by the labour of a day and a half per week, one negro could procure support for a whole family, and in that case would not be disposed to work; so that it was necessary to keep them employed by moderate discipline.<sup>85</sup>

While his slaves were well taken care of, he insisted that 'moderate discipline' was necessary because of the natural inclination of Africans to perform only the minimal amount of work needed to survive and feed their families. Fuller insisted that this mindset, if allowed to prevail, would be catastrophic for Britain's economy, and thus African and Creole slavery were necessary for the continuance of West Indian agriculture.

A number of slave-owning MPs produced first-hand accounts of plantation life in print and in the houses of Parliament in order to defend the continuing enslavement and transportation of Africans to their West Indian colonies. They found support from the MPs representing towns whose prosperity depended on the African trade. According to a number of MPs with an interest in the colonies, Africans did not object to the institution of slavery. This was said to be the case throughout the West Indies and particularly if the plantation was owned and governed by the English. As John Fuller noted on 30 May 1804 during a discussion of Wilberforce's proposed motion for abolition: 'It was not, he argued, true that negroes felt themselves miserable under English masters. The very reverse was the case, for they felt themselves happy under an English master and an English govt'.<sup>86</sup> Thomas Hughan, who had spent several years in the colonies, shared a similar view. On 27 February 1807, during a discussion of a bill for abolition, Hughan declared: 'he would tell the hon. members, from his own personal observation, that there did not exist a more happy race than the slaves in our colonies, if any trust was to be

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<sup>85</sup> *PD VIII*, col. 1052.

<sup>86</sup> *PD II*, col. 459.

placed in outward appearances, which universally indicated cheerfulness and contentment'.<sup>87</sup> With various laws and amelioration legislated by the British Parliament in conjunction with the colonial assemblies, Hughan promoted English-owned plantations as the best possible destination for an African slave in the West Indies; in Fuller's estimation, the slaves agreed. Anti-abolitionists therefore argued that if Britain withdrew from the trade while their European counterparts continued their participation, future African slaves would face lives of enslavement in foreign territories without the legal protection, caring masters, or enlightenment found on British plantations.

## 5. Moral and Religious Arguments

Some MPs argued that, by bringing slaves to the New World to work on West Indian plantations, European plantation managers and ministers on the island could have a civilising influence on them. During a discussion of the benefits of the slave system in Grenada on 2 April 1792, James Baillie remarked upon the good religious instruction and conversion rates that had been achieved on the island's plantations:

Upon our taking possession of it [Grenada], the negroes were found baptised, and instructed in such principles of the Roman Catholic faith, as were suited to their humble capacities. That religion now universally prevails; for as new negroes were imported from Africa, they naturally adopted the religious principles of those they found upon the island, and the priests, who were always extremely industrious in their vocations, never failed of giving them the necessary instructions; so that, in the course of twelve months, they are generally impressed with very tolerable ideas of religious duties.<sup>88</sup>

He reported that new slaves imported from Africa were absorbed into an existing community of Christian slaves and received adequate religious instruction. By emphasising this education and enlightenment, Baillie was able to highlight the selfless benefits of the trade and colonial slavery instead of focusing on monetary benefits or strategic interests which benefited the empire rather than the slaves.

During a discussion on sustaining plantation slave populations, plantation owner Charles Rose Ellis commented on the negative effects polygamy supposedly had on population levels: 'in its best state, [polygamy] is supposed not to be favourable to population; in the West Indies, it has been found to be particularly fatal to it'.<sup>89</sup> He believed that instruction in the Christian faith would end this practice:

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<sup>87</sup> *PD* VIII, col. 1041.

<sup>88</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1076.

<sup>89</sup> *PHE* XXXIII, col. 257.

When I say that I consider a reform in the manners and morality of the negroes to be necessary, I must explain, that I do not mean to state them to be a vicious race: on the contrary, they are in their dispositions, good and tractable; highly sensible to kind treatment, and capable of very extraordinary attachment. The point in their morality to which I allude, does not proceed from any defect in their natural disposition; it is the effect of their manners, the prejudices, and the religion of the Africans. Their religion is either a corrupt Deism or Mahometanism, and natural passion has received the sanction of this religion, in establishing a system of polygamy.<sup>90</sup>

By theorising about how to encourage and promote natural increase over time, Ellis and others attempted to convince the House that eventually the slave trade would be unnecessary. They argued that it should therefore be allowed to come to a natural, gradual end without parliamentary interference.

During a debate over abolition on 27 June 1804, plantation owner John Foster Barham<sup>91</sup> made an intriguing claim combining the moral benefits and civilising power of Christian instruction with monetary gains that the plantation owners were always considering. While defending the success of West Indian missionaries, Barham remarked: 'Not fewer than 10,000 negroes had been converted in the island of Antigua, and their tempers and dispositions had been thereby rendered so much better, that they were entitled to an increased value of 10*l.*'<sup>92</sup> According to Barham, the calming influence of Christianity increased the value of slaves. This argument may have been advanced to encourage plantation owners to spend more money and energy on religious instruction for their slaves or to demonstrate the benefits of the slave trade and West Indian slavery for the slaves themselves. It promoted the continuance of slavery in the colonies, but it did not necessarily require the continuance of the trade. Barham rejected abolitionist claims of poor treatment on the plantations. He argued that if plantation owners would make money via the spread of the Christian faith, why would they refuse to provide religious instruction to their slaves?

Abolitionists called for justice and humanity to be instituted in the colonies and maintained that the fundamental basis for an ideal moral and humane society could be found in the Bible. Anti-abolitionists, however, were able to use passages from the Bible to defend the institution of slavery. On 19 April 1797, during a

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> MP for Stockbridge (1793-99, 1802-6, 1807-22) and Okehampton (1806-7).

<sup>92</sup> *PD* II, col. 865.

discussion of Wilberforce's motion for abolition, John Stanley<sup>93</sup> argued: 'slavery was not incompatible with christianity and religion, the opinions of the bishop of Gloucester, St. Paul, and several other saints, in their writings, made mention of bondsmen, without adducing any arguments against the commerce in slaves'.<sup>94</sup> Historically, as recorded in the Bible, slavery had been a sanctioned institution; MPs could therefore argue that the West Indians were not acting in an unchristian manner by possessing slaves. For example, during a debate on the slave trade limiting bill on 5 July 1799, Lord Thurlow contradicted the bishop of Rochester's<sup>95</sup> argument: 'He could not see that in the best system of morality and the purest system of religion which had ever appeared, the Christian religion, there was ever any prohibition against slavery like that which had been argued by the reverend prelate'.<sup>96</sup> These arguments again defended Britain's continuing use of slaves in the colonies, but not necessarily her participation in the African trade.

During a heated debate over abolition on 10 June 1806 Isaac Gascoyne gave a thoughtful speech regarding the history of slavery. He stated that learned men throughout history had endorsed the institution of slavery: 'it had been sanctioned by the authority of the wisest and most pious legislators'.<sup>97</sup> He also provided evidence from the Bible by reading Leviticus chapter twenty-five, verses forty-four through to forty-six, aloud to the Commons:

"Both the bondmen and thy bond-maids which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen, and bond-maids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land, and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever." The above clearly proved, that slavery had from the earliest times, been countenanced and authorised by religion itself. It was equally certain, it had been encouraged at various periods, during and since the reign of Elizabeth.<sup>98</sup>

In the Bible and in Westminster, owning slaves was considered to be an individual's right and a form of personal property providing a valuable inheritance for one's

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<sup>93</sup> Agent for Nevis; MP for Wootton Bassett (1790-6).

<sup>94</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 315.

<sup>95</sup> The bishop, Samuel Horsley, argued that while slavery was not specifically condemned in the Bible, certain methods of enslavement were condemned. These included 'man-stealing' which the bishop argued formed the basis of the slave trade: 'in this text of scripture the slave-trade is condemned and prohibited by name, as a thing abominable in the sight of God, and wicked in the next degree to sodomy.' See *PHE* XXXIV, cols. 1136-7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1138.

<sup>97</sup> *PD* VII, col. 592.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 592-3.

descendants. Gascoyne's argument combined biblical justification and historical evidence of the acceptance and encouragement of slavery.<sup>99</sup>

Biblical justifications for enslaving Africans continued to be advanced as abolition became more likely. On 23 February 1807, in response to Walter Fawkes'<sup>100</sup> declaration of slavery and the slave trade being forbidden by Divine law, George Hibbert shared his own research and understanding with the House:

Sir, I did not look for this part of the discussion; but as it has been brought forward, I must say, that in the sacred books I can find no such authority. In the Old Testament, the slave trade, or the sale of men, is spoken of indifferently just as other trades. ... I shall mention, that in the Epistle of Paul to Philemon, Paul sends back Onesimus (whose very name bespeaks his station), who was Philemon's slave, and had run away from his master – he sends him back, I say, to resume his station without one word expressive of his disapprobation of slavery, or in vindication of Onesimus, who had fled from it.<sup>101</sup>

Beginning with a broad overview of the biblical acceptance of slavery, he then utilised the specific example of Paul the Apostle returning a slave to his master to argue for the divine sanctioning of the institution of slavery. Biblical justifications for slavery were however unable to help the anti-abolitionist cause, perhaps because of the conflicting arguments of Christian charity and humanity that were brought forth in Parliament to counter them, or perhaps because of the number of other arguments available to the West Indian interest which were less controversial. They disappeared from the parliamentary debates on slavery in the years following the abolition of the slave trade.

## 6. Racial Arguments

Race was one of several arguments employed to justify black chattel slavery in the British West Indies during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Prior to the eighteenth century, theories about race stemmed from theological study, but in the late eighteenth century race began to be viewed scientifically (or pseudo-scientifically).<sup>102</sup> Africans and Europeans were studied, measured, tested, and compared; this type of scientific study continued throughout the nineteenth century. Scientists, doctors, priests, and philosophers explained and examined race using scientific evidence, visual evidence, and biblical evidence as they tried to determine

<sup>99</sup> The use of historical evidence is discussed above in Section Three of this chapter.

<sup>100</sup> Walter Ramsden Hawkesworth Fawkes was elected as an anti-slavery candidate in Yorkshire in 1806, sharing this platform with William Wilberforce.

<sup>101</sup> *PD* VIII, col. 982.

<sup>102</sup> Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116.

whether the human race stemmed from a single lineage (following the monogenesis story of Adam and Eve) or multiple lineages (polygenesis).<sup>103</sup> Many nineteenth-century racial beliefs, as well as the modern understanding and use of the terms ‘Caucasian’ and ‘Indo-European’, stemmed from the Enlightenment’s scientific and philosophical developments. Nineteenth-century racial theory explained that mankind was divisible into ‘races’ with fixed characteristics and varying moral and intellectual capacities. Because intellect and physiognomy were increasingly linked, physical characteristics were thought to reveal inner characteristics, nature, and ability.<sup>104</sup> It should be noted that while New World slavery did not create racism, it added a new dimension to it as multiple races suddenly lived in close proximity to each other within a distinct hierarchy.<sup>105</sup>

The prior existence of the slave trade and the lesser degree of ‘civilisation’ achieved in Africa as assessed by contemporaries supported the continuance of the transatlantic trade regardless of humanitarian claims and abolitionist fervour. West Indians used pre-Darwinite fixity of species theory to defend enslaving Africans.<sup>106</sup> On 30 May 1804, in response to Wilberforce’s motion to bring in a bill for abolition, Fuller made a number of generalisations about the African race. He first commented on their limited mental capacity: ‘He had never heard the Africans deny their mental inferiority. They had never hesitated to confess to him, that they could not vie with Europeans in talent or knowledge. In matters of ingenuity or calculation, they were no match for the inhabitants of the other quarters of the world’.<sup>107</sup> He suggested that Africans were of a lower order of men and were therefore in the best situation to perform slave labour in the modern world because they did not possess the mental capacity and drive of Europeans.<sup>108</sup> The fixity of species theory ranked Africans on a scale above apes but below Europeans. Each species was suited to specific tasks and faced restrictions imposed by Providence. According to this theory Africans did not possess the ability to reason; this disadvantage helped West Indians justify their enslavement and their participation in and extension of the African trade.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Augstein, ‘Introduction’, ix-x.

<sup>105</sup> Mervyn C. Alleyne, *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>106</sup> Lewis, ‘Proslavery Ideology’, 551.

<sup>107</sup> *PD* II, col. 460.

<sup>108</sup> Even major Enlightenment figures such as David Hume endorsed claims regarding the mental inferiority of Africans. See Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*, 80.

<sup>109</sup> Lewis, ‘Proslavery Ideology’, 551.

During his speech Fuller also discussed African civilisation and progress and concluded that it was the unique situation of the continent and governance of Africa, rather than the intrusion of European powers and traders, that had sparked the slave trade:

We had heard of the history of that country for 600 years, but we saw no rays of improvement or civilization. If the inhabitants had been capable of civilization, they could easily have been able to drive off their coasts a few African slave ships, and thus prevented the original establishment of the trade. Something in the internal circumstances of the country must then have favoured the establishment of the trade.<sup>110</sup>

This perspective released Britons from any responsibility regarding their involvement in the trade. He instead gave agency (and any blame) to the various participating African nations to demonstrate their reluctant acceptance of the trade and its legitimacy. Fuller argued that, although they had been given centuries in which to match Europe's level of advancement, Africans were still not civilised enough to put up a resistance to this profitable trade. He believed that there was therefore no reason for Europeans to dismantle it.

Drawing on their limited knowledge and understanding of African culture and practices, some MPs insisted that life for slaves on a West Indian plantation was better than their lives would have been in Africa. John Henniker-Major<sup>111</sup> insisted that the men and women who became slaves in the West Indies would otherwise have been killed. On 3 April 1798, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion to bring in a bill for abolition, Henniker-Major referred to evidence given to the House 'that the kings of the country, instead of slaughtering their captives, now sold them to the nations of Europe. They were conveyed from a country of barbarous superstition, to a land of civilization and humanity'.<sup>112</sup> Sir William Young expanded on this idea, painting a gruesome picture of African slavery on 28 February 1805: 'Are they not driven in their own country like cattle with irons about their necks? The humanity of the African master is cried up, while that of the British is deprecated. An African master, however, we are told, can coolly toss his slave, when half dead, into a ditch, and say "there is so much money lost."<sup>113</sup> MPs on both sides of the debate relied on second-hand evidence, vivid descriptions, and rumours to back up their claims about life in Africa. Anti-abolitionist MPs contrasted

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<sup>110</sup> *PD* II, col. 461.

<sup>111</sup> MP for New Romney (1785-90), Steyning (1794-1802), Rutland (1805-12), and Stamford, Lincolnshire (1812-18).

<sup>112</sup> *PHE* XXXIII, col. 1403.

<sup>113</sup> *PD* III, col. 650.

negative images of life in Africa with a rosy view of plantation life in Britain's colonies to stress the trade's utility in providing Africans with a better life.

The abolition debates in Westminster often became a site for racial debates where prevailing theories about the different races' capacity to work, survive harsh living conditions, and exert themselves in hotter climates were discussed. The hot Caribbean climate differed so greatly from the British climate that some MPs argued that it was impossible to work the plantations using European labour. On 2 April 1792, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion to abolish the slave trade, Tarleton provided an example to the Commons of a failed French experiment using a European labour force: 'Frequent attempts have been made to cultivate estates with white labourers. In this experiment the French are said to have lost 12,000 whites in 1763'.<sup>114</sup> The assumption that Europeans could not survive and work in tropical climates persisted throughout the debates. On 28 February 1805, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion to discuss a possible bill for abolition, Sir William Pulteney<sup>115</sup> insisted that an African labour force was required to work the plantations:

The real fact was agreed upon by all parties to be this: the West Indies cannot be cultivated by Europeans, whose constitutions will not bear fatigue in that climate. It is therefore necessary, if they are to be cultivated at all, that it must be by some other class of the human species, who being natives of warmer climates, are able to endure that degree of labour and fatigue which no Europeans could do in that climate.<sup>116</sup>

The slave trade would have to continue if the plantations were to be worked and the current slave population could not naturally maintain itself. Pulteney's use of the term 'class of the human species' is particularly interesting. It implies a distinct biological difference between Europeans and Africans that began to be studied during the Enlightenment. Fully-formed scientific racism and the theory of eugenics emerged later in the nineteenth century. They played an important role in defending American slavery following Britain's abolition.

On 10 June 1806, during a discussion of Charles Fox's<sup>117</sup> motion to bring in a bill for abolition, Gascoyne pointed to the great loss of military men stationed in the Caribbean due to the 'burning sun, and a continued sultry climate', before challenging his fellow MPs, 'Would any man say Europeans could cultivate the

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<sup>114</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1093.

<sup>115</sup> MP for Shrewsbury (1775-1805); plantation owner with family interests in the West Indies. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 4, 902-4.

<sup>116</sup> *PD* III, col. 658.

<sup>117</sup> MP for Midhurst, Sussex (1768-74), Malmesbury (1774-80), Westminster (1780-4 and 1785-1806), and Tain Burghs (1784-5).

colonies?'<sup>118</sup> Since the Caribbean climate was a proven threat to both the health and productivity of Europeans, most MPs accepted that African labour was the better, safer choice. Due in large part to the widespread acceptance of this theory, while the slave trade faced overpowering popular and parliamentary challenges in the early-nineteenth century, Britons were allowed to keep their black slaves in the colonies.

While Africans were considered fit to work in the hot, humid climate of the West Indies, they were not necessarily believed to be able or willing to work of their own volition. Proslavery MPs argued that a clear system of discipline was required for African labourers regardless of contemporary theories on labour and free market economics. Adam Smith<sup>119</sup> believed that wealth and liberty were the two greatest blessings that could be bestowed upon the individual and the nation.<sup>120</sup> Because free labour was central to Smith's economic theory, his followers and abolitionists condemned slavery as irrational and uneconomical.<sup>121</sup> On 28 February 1805, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion for the house to consider a bill for abolition, Pulteney challenged the theory that free labour was better for productivity:

The fact is known to be, that the natives of warm countries are not naturally disposed to labour. In warm countries the climate produces the means of subsistence with so little labour, that they have no necessity, and consequently no inclination, for laborious work; and for that species of labour which was necessary for raising sugar and other colonial produce, it was absolutely [*sic*] necessary to use something of compulsion.<sup>122</sup>

According to Pulteney, with supporting claims from other MPs, the unique climate and crops and the natural inclinations of imported Africans required a strictly enforced system of discipline to maintain both productivity and a workforce able to meet Britain's demands for colonial produce. His argument, while not expressly supporting Britain's slave trade, defends the existing institution of slavery and the methods planters and masters used to maintain production in the colonies.

A number of prevailing thoughts and attitudes towards African civilisation, culture, religion, and labour weave their way throughout these arguments supporting

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<sup>118</sup> *PD* VII, col. 593.

<sup>119</sup> Adam Smith was an influential economist of the late eighteenth century. He opposed the prevailing system of mercantilism practised throughout the British Empire which relied on protective tariffs, the colonial production of raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods from the mother country, and large bullion reserves. Smith's treatise, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), encouraged a free market economy guided by an invisible hand to produce the right amount of goods at the right price for optimum competition amongst manufacturers.

<sup>120</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations', *Slavery & Abolition*, 21 (2000), 42.

<sup>121</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 358.

<sup>122</sup> *PD* III, cols. 689-9.

the slave trade. A lack of seemingly ‘civilised’ behaviour, political organisation, and intellectual enlightenment, particularly with regards to European social norms such as monogamy and Christian practices, justified the enslavement of Africans for some MPs, while inciting empathy and paternal concern in others. Africans from across the continent were lumped together without an understanding of their individual religions, languages, and culture. As a group they were considered inferior to the European nations north of the Mediterranean. On 5 February 1807, during one of the final debates on abolition in the House of Lords, Earl St. Vincent’s<sup>123</sup> assertions summarised these derogatory views and added a dash of humour for emphasis:

But, from his own experience, he was enabled to state, that the West-India islands formed Paradise itself, to the negroes, in comparison with their native country. Knowing this, which, upon due enquiry, it was in the power of any noble lord to ascertain, he was surprised at the proposition before the house; and, considering the high character and intelligence of the noble proposer [Lord Grenville], he declared that he could account in no other way for his having brought it forward, but by supposing that some Obiman had cast his spell upon him. (A laugh).<sup>124</sup>

The earl stressed that as a result of the slave trade Africans were brought to a better place. His decision to depict this serious situation during this critical moment in British political history and human rights in a light-hearted, almost comical manner shows how dismissive politicians were of African culture, civilisation, and claims to fundamental rights, while arguing over whether to end what to some was simply a branch of their country’s commerce. Proslavery MPs, MPs who opposed immediate abolition, and the majority of the abolitionists in Parliament who fought to end the slave trade were content to keep Africans enslaved in their colonies for the immediate future. It was the manner in which they justified their continued enslavement that varied.

In the decades leading up to the abolition of the slave trade, members of the West Indian interest were confident that the long-established and encouraged trade in slaves would continue for the foreseeable future. They presented arguments to Parliament which extolled the benefits of the slave trade for Great Britain, her colonies, and her people, and which justified their participation in the trade. These arguments relied on assumptions of the contributions of the trade to Britain’s

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<sup>123</sup> MP for Launceston, a pocket borough (1783-84), Great Yarmouth (1784-90), Chipping/High Wycombe (1790-94); naval commander of an expedition to the West Indies in 1793.

<sup>124</sup> *PD* VIII, col. 669.

prosperity and industrialisation, the lesser capabilities and level of civilisation of the Africans beings exported, and that other nations would continue to trade in slaves regardless of a British abolition. Pro-slavery and pro-slave trade MPs also utilised timely arguments to defend their position by alluding to or directly referring to the French revolution, war with France, and the mass uprising and loss of St. Domingo. These convincing sentiments helped postpone, reverse, modify, and throw out numerous bills for abolition and amelioration throughout the 1790s and on into the early 1800s. After losing the debate over abolition in 1807, many proslavery MPs were unwilling to abandon their position. They continued to discuss the failings of abolition, including the government's inability to stop all other nations from trading in slaves and the loss of monetary benefits from other nations taking over their trade routes. Their confidence in the staying power of slavery, however, was shaken, and new conciliatory stances were taken up in the slavery debates in Parliament after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

## Chapter Four

### Intellectual Arguments Presented in Parliament Against the Abolition of Slavery, 1807-1833

‘To emancipate the negroes, would not be to add to their happiness, even if the legislature had a right to interfere with the property of the colonies. All that could be done by this country with safety and effect had already been done.’

Lord Henry Petty, 17 March 1807<sup>1</sup>

‘The hon. member denied that free labour would be so profitable as slave labour, and asked, who was to feed the negroes, provided they were emancipated; as in that case they assuredly would not work.’

Thomas Wilson, 16 March 1824<sup>2</sup>

‘When it was said that these petitioners could not recognise the principles of men having the property of men, let him tell them that the Apostles had recognised slavery, and he presumed that they did not pretend to be better Christians than the Apostles. The principle had in truth been recognised from the earliest ages.’

Lord Wynford, 17 May 1833<sup>3</sup>

West Indian affairs were frequently addressed by Parliament in the years following abolition. Discussions in the years immediately following the abolition of the slave trade regarding slavery and abolition centred on the international transatlantic slave trade being carried on by Britain’s European rivals. Slave registration, the defence of the colonies, and the enforcement of abolition were pressing issues during the Napoleonic Wars. Sugar duties angered the West Indian interest and advocates of free trade. In 1823, George Canning introduced a series of resolutions in the House of Commons meant to ameliorate the conditions of the slaves on the plantations.<sup>4</sup> The emancipation debates of the late 1820s and early 1830s took place amongst a

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<sup>1</sup> *PD IX*, col. 143. Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, third marquess of Lansdowne, was MP for Calne (1802-6), Cambridge University (1806-7), and Camelford (1807-9). His first cousin, Lord Holland, had inherited sugar plantations in 1800 through his wife’s family. See Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 4, 783-8.

<sup>2</sup> *PD New Series X* (London: Pater-noster-Row Press, 1824), col. 1193.

<sup>3</sup> *PD 3rd Series XVII* (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1833), col. 1341. William Draper Best, MP for Petersfield (1802-6), Bridport (1812-17), and Guildford (1818), was made Baron Wynford of Wynford Eagle in 1829.

<sup>4</sup> Historian David Lambert has argued that the process of amelioration was shaped by white supremacy. He believes the resolutions and colonial responses further dehumanised black slaves by focusing on rationalising slavery, improving production, and improving their breeding habits. See Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 61.

backdrop of reform and upheaval. Unrest at home, in the colonies, and across Europe troubled MPs, encouraging some to cling to tradition and others to push for reforms to prevent a full-scale revolution. Parliamentary reform extended the franchise to a limited extent and changed some electoral constituencies, thereby lessening the power of the landed classes (and thus the power of the planters). All of these external events had the potential to shape the nature of the arguments presented against calls for amelioration and emancipation in Parliament.

This chapter will focus on the arguments put forth by MPs and peers who advocated gradual emancipation and by those who believed that amelioration and emancipation should be enacted, but not at the expense of the white population in the colonies or in the United Kingdom. These MPs were not publicly against abolition and thus the definition of 'anti-abolitionist' has changed. For the purposes of this study, to be anti-abolitionist in the 1820s and 1830s is to be against the immediate abolition of slavery in the colonies. West Indian MPs were able to promote gradual, eventual abolition and join in the calls for the amelioration of conditions on the plantations while remaining opposed to some of the demands of the abolitionists. To be anti-abolitionist in this period therefore did not necessarily mean that one was opposed to the actions, motions and suggestions of the abolitionists, nor to the idea of abolition, but only to the immediate imposing of abolition upon Britain's West Indian colonies.

The examples have been drawn from the slavery debates as recorded in Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*. Six broad categories of arguments are discussed below. These are historical and legal, paternal, moral and religious, racial, and economic arguments, as well as fear of the threat of rebellion. There is a noticeable absence of what might be termed 'proslavery' arguments presented after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. While some MPs were willing to promote the institutions of colonial slavery and the slave trade as beneficial to Britain's colonists, Britain's economy, the African slaves and their descendants, or some combination of these three prior to 1807, after abolition their focus changed to ending the slave trade of other nations, defending the colonies against their enemies and revolts, protecting the West Indian trade in sugar, and securing adequate compensation for their property in the event of emancipation.

The West Indian interest in Parliament was faced with a determined, popular, well-organised abolitionist movement from 1823. It was at this point that they began publicly to consider and actively to participate in negotiations about ameliorating

conditions for the slaves in the colonies and securing compensation upon the granting of emancipation. This contrasts with the debates discussed in the previous chapter, in which MPs continued to promote the institution of slavery throughout the abolition debates up to and including 1807. After abolition every MP was expected to detest the institution of slavery; those who were interested in the institution, however, could call for gradual instead of immediate emancipation.

The majority of the evidence for this chapter will be drawn from the last ten years of the slavery debates. During this period the West Indian interest focused its efforts on defending itself, the colonists, and Britain's economy.<sup>5</sup> Members of the interest advocated gradual emancipation<sup>6</sup> and rejected accusations of being 'proslavery'. They insisted that the true state of slavery in the colonies had been grossly misrepresented and that time was needed to assess the actual state of the colonies.<sup>7</sup> Rather than continuing to rely on racial prejudice or biblical defences of slavery, the West Indian interest successfully employed legal and historical evidence to support its claims for compensation. These were also used to warn against major societal changes in light of the revolutionary atmosphere on the continent and at home in the early 1830s. In August 1833 the act for emancipation was passed. The West Indian interest received compensation of £20 million and the promise of labour by turning the slaves into apprentices who would remain tied to the land. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the analysis of specific intellectual arguments against emancipation brought forth in Parliament between 1807 and 1833.

## **1. Historical and Legal Justifications**

After the abolition of the slave trade the West Indian interest continued to defend slaveholding by using historical evidence and arguments to legitimate the practice and deflect accusations of inhumanity. The pre-existence of a slave trade within Africa was no longer relevant to the debate. With no new legal importations of slaves reaching the British West Indies after 1807, the body of slaves was largely made up of the descendants of African slaves who worked on plantations that in many cases had been passed down through generations of British landowners. Planters argued that the current owners were not to blame for possessing this

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<sup>5</sup> Proslavery ideology and literature has been generally characterised as defensive, although it has been argued that most defensive literature produced during the abolition and slavery debates was written by sympathetic publicists. See Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 549.

<sup>6</sup> This technique is also found in proslavery literature. See Boulukos, 'Maria Edgeworth's "Grateful Negro" and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery', 17-21.

<sup>7</sup> A select committee was formed in 1832, after the massive slave rebellion in Jamaica, with the intent of finding a fast but safe end to slavery in the colonies.

contested, inherited property. Some continued to blame Parliament, the monarchy, and British laws for the difficult position they now faced; successive monarchs and their governments had encouraged the British people and colonists to acquire, invest in, and utilise, slave labour. Planters could now point to examples of emancipated slaves in non-British territories to demonstrate the dangers of premature emancipation. Slaves were officially the private property of their masters, and thus the state could not remove or destroy this property without great difficulty, good reason, and some form of compensation. The West Indian lobby generally agreed that to consider any man to be another man's property was morally questionable, but that this was the present state of things in the colonies, long-established by law and custom, and it would probably take an equally long period of adjustment and a great amount of money to change the situation.

Abolitionist publications frequently attacked the West Indian planters to gain support from their readers. Members of the West Indian interest, who held seats in Parliament, countered these attacks in a variety of ways, including reminding the House and anyone who might read the reports of debates that the planters had not originally devised or encouraged colonial slavery. On 20 May 1818, during a discussion of Sir Samuel Romilly's<sup>8</sup> motion to assess the treatment of slaves in Nevis, plantation owner and colonial agent Joseph Marryat the elder argued:

When views of humanity were directed against the rights of the planters, and those planters were accused of being the authors of slavery, it ought to be told that they did not create the servitude which they were charged with the desire to perpetuate ... The slavery complained of was the work of the British government, and continued under British laws; and if the rights of the colonial proprietors, acquired under such guarantees, were to be interfered with, the parties ought in this case, as in others, to be indemnified.<sup>9</sup>

Marryat was one of several MPs with West Indian connections to stress the planters' right under English law to own property in slaves as well as land.

On 7 March 1826, during a discussion of the Commons' amelioration resolutions of 1823, Lord Chancellor Eldon noted that, prior to the abolition of the slave trade, some colonial legislatures had attempted to restrict the number of slaves being imported into the colonies, but 'this country herself would not allow any such limitation. Why, then, my lords, it is both absurd and unjust to lay the whole blame

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<sup>8</sup> MP for Queenborough (1806-7), Horsham (1807-8), Wareham (1808-12), Arundel (1812-8), and Westminster (1818). Sir Samuel also proposed limiting the number of lashes inflicted by the military in 1815. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 5, 36-43.

<sup>9</sup> *PD XXXVIII* (London: T.C. Hansard, 1818), col. 849.

of the existence of slavery on the West-India planters, as if they alone had been responsible for the existence of slavery'.<sup>10</sup> If the House had thought it correct to prevent Jamaica's legislature from limiting its imports, it would be inconsistent to contradict the principle of that decision. It would also be unreasonable to blame the colonies for inaction when their earlier attempts had been overruled.

The destruction of St. Domingo decades earlier was frequently used to illustrate the dangers of prematurely granting freedom to a large population of slaves.<sup>11</sup> Revolutions in France and elsewhere on the continent in the 1830s impacted on the Lords' willingness to tamper with the existing social order in the colonies. Lord Sandon<sup>12</sup> emphasised a distinct lack of encouraging examples of revolution and the granting of liberty to a large number of persons, even in areas that he considered to be civilised. On 3 June 1833, while members of the House continued to discuss the plan for emancipation, Sandon reflected on the dangers they were courting: 'The experiments made in Italy, in Greece, in South America, even the great experiment of the French revolution, proved that a sudden transition from political slavery to freedom was not very safe'.<sup>13</sup> In his arguments Sandon recalled harrowing elements of the recent revolutions: the working poor rising up, killing the land-owning upper classes, overthrowing the monarchy and instituting new systems of government.

Sir Robert Peel<sup>14</sup> employed an example of freed slaves in the Americas to stress further the negative effects of bestowing freedom on unprepared men and women. Following Sandon's reference to the revolutions and other such 'experiments', Sir Robert Peel discussed the consequences of freeing slaves in the United States: 'the emancipated slaves had every encouragement to labour; no prejudices existed against them as in other parts ... yet in these very States, such was the degradation and misery to which the emancipated slaves were reduced, that philanthropists saw no other remedy for the evil but sending them to a colony on the coast of Africa'.<sup>15</sup> This depressing scene was in direct contrast to the happy assertions of the abolitionists and humanitarians. Historical examples such as these

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<sup>10</sup> *PD* New Series XIV (London: Pater-noster-Row Press, 1826), col. 1157.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Patrick Stewart's assessment of the island from 30 May 1833, in *PD* 3rd Series XVIII (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1833), col. 156.

<sup>12</sup> Dudley Ryder, MP for Tiverton (1819-31) and Liverpool (1831-47).

<sup>13</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 321.

<sup>14</sup> MP for Cashel (1809-12), Chippenham (1812-7), Oxford University (1817-29), Westbury (1829-30), and Tamworth (1830-50). Sir Robert Peel was second baronet and Prime Minister (1834-5 and 1841-6).

<sup>15</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 354.

also strengthened the case for apprenticeship by showing other nations' inability to secure labour from freed slaves. Several nations had experienced the loss of labour, raw materials, profits, and land after the end of slavery; the West Indian interest was quick to remind Parliament of these dangerous and devastating outcomes.

One of the most commonly advanced arguments against immediate emancipation was the fact that slave ownership had been established and was protected by British law. Some MPs opposed the abolitionists' claims that no man could be the property of another man by referring to existing laws on the subject. On 23 March 1824, Joseph Hume<sup>16</sup> brought in an anti-slavery petition before asking to submit a motion asking the House not to proceed with emancipation without providing compensation to the planters. He commented on the legal status of the planters' property: 'The property in slaves was abominable; but that property had been acquired under the sanction of the law, and the legislature of the country only was to blame. The slave proprietor had as much right to be protected in the enjoyment of his undoubted property as the fundholder or the land owner'.<sup>17</sup> Hume redirected the charges abolitionists made against the planters towards the British legislature because it had initially legalised and encouraged the institution.

A key element of conservative arguments was hostility to 'abstract principle'. Many Britons construed abstract ideas as dangerous,<sup>18</sup> and anti-abolitionists capitalised on this by challenging the abolitionists' arguments for freedom that made use of abstract principles. On 13 July 1830, as MPs discussed whether to commit the House to addressing emancipation early in the next session, Sir George Murray<sup>19</sup> reminded his fellow politicians that slaves were technically property by arguing: 'What they had to consider was the actual state of things without reference to abstract principles. The property in a slave was as much property as any other denomination of property whatever'.<sup>20</sup> He called on the House to ignore calls for natural rights and humanity and to focus instead on the legal state of things in the colonies, thereby distancing the debate from the impassioned appeals of the abolitionists in favour of calm, logical, decision-making. The cries for humanity

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<sup>16</sup> MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (1812), Aberdeen Burghs (1818-30), Middlesex (1830-7), Kilkenny (1837-41), and Montrose Burghs (1842-55).

<sup>17</sup> *PD* New Series X, col. 1332.

<sup>18</sup> Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London: Longmans, 1962), 172.

<sup>19</sup> Sir George was MP for Perthshire (1824-32 and 1834), served in the West Indies, and was Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 6, 456-65.

<sup>20</sup> *PD* New Series XXV (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1830), col. 1201.

were difficult to overcome, but the slaves' legal status was (in the West Indian lobby's opinion) indisputable.

Other MPs also focused on the slave being private property. Lord Wynford<sup>21</sup> was concerned that emancipation or compulsory manumission would set a dangerous legal precedent. During discussions of West Indian distress that followed the presentation of a petition from the West Indian interest on 17 April 1832, he remarked: 'God forbid that there should be any thing like a forcing of the master to abandon his property in the slave! Once adopt that principle, and there was the end of all property'.<sup>22</sup> West Indian MPs echoed Lord Wynford's argument about the legitimacy of their property throughout the slavery debates. Some abolitionists also agreed that, right or wrong, under British law slaves were property. As such, the West Indian proprietors were due compensation if Parliament was to usurp their property.

According to the West Indian interest, if slaves were by law property, then the removal of said property by the state should be accompanied by a plan to compensate the owners. On 6 March 1828, Robert John Wilmot Horton used a familiar analogy to stress the need for compensation:

In this country, if a canal were cut, or a street built, the interest of the individuals was made to yield to the public interest; but then it was well known that individuals always received a compensation. Now, the West-Indian has property which he could only work by means of slave labour; and was he not, therefore, equally entitled to compensation, if deprived of that labour, as the man in this country was, who had his property destroyed, either by the building of a street or the construction of a canal?<sup>23</sup>

Wilmot Horton compared the removal of slave labour to the loss of one's property due to the installation of public works and infrastructure. This familiar illustration would have likely added weight to the West Indian interest's plea for compensation.

In 1833 compensation was debated at great length. The amount of compensation initially proposed by Edward George Geoffrey Smith Stanley was £15 million; this was raised to £20 million after further calculations were made. An additional £10 million was offered as a loan to be repaid once the colonies stabilised. These changes were made amidst heated debate from abolitionists, who denied that the West Indians had any legal claim to compensation, and the West Indians who

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<sup>21</sup> William Draper Best, Baron Wynford of Wynford Eagle, was MP for Petersfield (1802-6), Bridport (1812-17), and Guildford (1818).

<sup>22</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XII (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1832), col. 630.

<sup>23</sup> *PD* New Series XVIII, col. 1029.

argued that the losses would be far greater and much wider-reaching than the abolitionists had led the House to believe. On 24 July 1833, amidst questions about the legitimacy of the planters' property, Stanley defended the West Indians' claims for compensation:

He would tell him why the planter should be indemnified—because the principles of justice required that no man's property should be taken away without compensation—because the laws of England forbade taking away a man's property without the consent of the owner ... and, lastly, because, acting on the principles of justice, that House had declared, that emancipation and compensation should go together.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, the compensation clause was passed, granting an unprecedented amount of money to the West Indians in return for emancipation and, by that means, legitimating their property in slaves.

## 2. Paternalist Arguments

Paternalist arguments stressed the benefits of plantation slavery and the good work done by the planters in the slavery debates much as they had done prior to the abolition of the slave trade. This category of argument remained important to the anti-abolitionist faction throughout the entire period under study. Members of the West Indian interest continued to argue against external legislation and interference by demonstrating that the slaves were already cared for under the existing system. They stated that slaves were treated humanely and at least as well as British workers and soldiers. These paternalist arguments invoked humanitarian ideals throughout the debates by emphasising that the institution of slavery provided food, shelter, protection, and care, thus contradicting abolitionist claims of inhumane treatment.

John Cresset Pelham<sup>25</sup> was one MP who described the current treatment of the slaves in the West Indies in a positive light. On 24 May 1832, Pelham insisted that Thomas Fowell Buxton<sup>26</sup> had exaggerated the negative elements of slavery and refuted his claims regarding care and religious instruction:

he believed that there were more Christians among the blacks than in this metropolis. He remembered having seen a negro woman in England, who was asked to remain, but the idea was revolting to her, and she preferred going back to the West Indies and slavery where her

<sup>24</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIX (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1833), col. 1198.

<sup>25</sup> MP for Lewes (1796-1802), Shropshire (1822-32), and Shrewsbury (1835-7).

<sup>26</sup> MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (1818-37).

mistress had always treated her with kindness, to remaining in this land of freedom.<sup>27</sup>

This unsubstantiated and undated anecdote did not appear to convince anyone in the House that day, yet it contains an interesting and controversial example of a paternalist claim. The Somerset Case of 1772 had been popularly interpreted as freeing any slave who set foot on British soil, yet here, Pelham claimed, was a black woman choosing to return to a life of slavery in the West Indies due to her loyalty and love for her mistress, a love which Pelham implied was owing to the mistress's kind and caring treatment of her.

On 13 December 1830, plantation owner Ralph Bernal reminded the House that the slave population currently had protection, care, and job security from masters who were obliged to care for them.<sup>28</sup> If the role of slave master was to be taken over by the state, various laws, officials, and institutions would need to be established to protect the slaves from poverty, as well as to assist the colonists in coping with a great influx of destitute citizens. Similarly, on 25 June 1833, during the climax of the emancipation debates, Lord Ellenborough<sup>29</sup> asked the House to consider the actual state of the West Indian colonies. He suggested they imagine the lives of the slaves at present compared to their hypothetical situation following an immediate emancipation:

It would leave infancy unprotected, maturity without a guide and abandoned to debauchery and to vice, and age without a shelter and without refuge. What was the present state of the negroes? The child was reared and protected, the adult was provided for, and the aged had a sure and safe resting-place. They were as a body well governed, well protected, and happy in their station.<sup>30</sup>

Lord Ellenborough believed that at that point in history the slaves' working and living conditions had been ameliorated and that they were adequately cared for from birth to death. This care could not continue under the proposed scheme for emancipation, even when the years of apprenticeship were taken into consideration. Thus, emancipation would necessarily bring to an end the paternalist care shown for their colonies' slaves.

Some MPs asked the House to consider the possibility that slaves might not object to their situation, their working and living conditions, or to the institution of

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<sup>27</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIII (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1833), col. 49.

<sup>28</sup> *PD* 3rd Series I (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1831), col. 1057.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Law, MP for St. Michael's pocket borough (1813-8) and second baron Ellenborough, later served as the Governor-General of India.

<sup>30</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 1220.

slavery. In the debates leading up to emancipation in 1833, the West Indian lobby frequently depicted the current state of slavery as calm, content, and stable. On 3 June 1833, Sir Robert Peel questioned what would happen if some slaves chose not to become apprentices: ‘there would still be two classes—one of slaves and one of apprentices, and for the one the whole slave code would still have to be continued: would not that be a great and inconvenient anomaly?’<sup>31</sup> This prospect of some slaves choosing to remain as they were, in a state dictated by current legislation, and others choosing to go along with the stipulations of the emancipation act, would be a chaotic and unmanageable situation. It would inevitably cause conflict between the slaves and former slaves and create unimaginable difficulties for plantation managers, local administration and the justice system as they enforced two sets of labour guidelines. The abolitionists, however, considered this an unlikely outcome.

The West Indians in the House of Commons frequently advanced images of a happy and contented body of slaves when defending their occupations and objecting to abolitionists’ claims about the hardships and oppression slaves faced in the colonies. On 29 July 1833, during a discussion on how to limit the new apprentices’ working hours in order to allow them to earn and save money in their free time, plantation owner William James<sup>32</sup> noted that slaves in the West Indies already had sufficient opportunities to make their own money: ‘One slave of his alone at that moment had upwards of 200*l.* ... that very slave, although possessed of so much money, would not consent to receive his emancipation, if he thought it was to be at the loss of his trifling allotment of ground’.<sup>33</sup> James argued that at least one of his slaves would object to the abolition of slavery because of the many benefits he received though this now reviled institution. Few MPs chose to advance a happy image of slavery in the colonies as emancipation drew nearer, but those who did so swore on first-hand knowledge, published reports, and commonly-held racial theories that emancipation would negatively affect the slaves.

By contrasting carefully constructed images of life on Britain’s West Indian plantations with life in Britain’s factories and cities, some MPs continued to present a slave’s life as preferable to that of the impoverished paid worker in Britain or Europe. Historians such as David Brion Davis have theorised that abolitionism

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 351-2.

<sup>32</sup> MP for Carlisle (1820-6 and 1831-4) and Cumberland East (1836-47). James officially opposed slavery, but his grandfather had made his fortune as a West India merchant and, in 1798, James became the heir to a Jamaican estate and his family’s mercantile fortune. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 5, 839-44.

<sup>33</sup> *PD 3rd Series XX* (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1833), cols. 63-4.

played a role in diverting humanitarian effort and attention abroad to avoid threatening the existing social order and class structure at home.<sup>34</sup> Radicals were much more interested in the struggles of white factory workers than those experienced by black slaves on West Indian plantations. Influential journalist and radical William Cobbett,<sup>35</sup> for example, used proslavery language to defend English workers' rights and promoted images of plantation slavery that highlighted the greater suffering that Europeans experienced in factories.<sup>36</sup> Pamphlets and petitions brought this argument to the masses in the 1830s.<sup>37</sup> Proslavery literature of this era frequently commented on prevailing harsh working conditions found everywhere.<sup>38</sup> These comparisons were presented repeatedly as evidence of both the preferable, humane treatment and working conditions of the plantations, and the need to focus humanitarian efforts on the people of their own country and constituencies.

On 15 May 1823, during the amelioration debates, Alexander Baring<sup>39</sup> remarked: 'My own opinion is, that the condition of the slaves is undoubtedly, in many respects, superior to that of most of the European peasantry. They are well clothed, well fed, and, I believe, generally treated with justice and kindness'.<sup>40</sup> Baring's comment made reference to the fact that the slaves were fed, clothed and housed by their masters, unlike the working poor in England and abroad who had to pay for their own necessities. On 29 July 1833, William James expanded upon this idea by challenging the necessity of wages for apprentices after emancipation was enacted: 'Now, he would ask, what were they to receive money for? Was it for eating, drinking, lodging—all of which they at present had, free of expense, and an allotment of ground besides? ... That they were slaves it was true; but were there, he would ask, no such slaves in England—men who laboured and toiled to earn subsistence?'<sup>41</sup> MPs who were against emancipation often discussed the meaning of the word 'slave' and its negative connotations during the slavery debates. They argued that, like 'cart-whip', it was a term loaded with exaggerated tales and images of hardship and discipline, and that the debates would never be handled fairly and

<sup>34</sup> Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823*, 365-6.

<sup>35</sup> Cobbett was author and editor of the widely read *Political Register* and numerous other political books and tracts, including records of parliamentary debates. Cobbett sat for Oldham in the reformed Parliament.

<sup>36</sup> Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*, 151-3.

<sup>37</sup> For example, the anonymous pamphlet, *The Condition of the West Indian Slave Contrasted with that of the Infant Slave in our English Factories* (London: W. Kidd, 1833). See also Lewis, 'Proslavery Ideology', 558.

<sup>38</sup> Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> MP for Taunton (1806-26), Callington (1826-31), Thetford (1831-2) and Essex (1832-5).

<sup>40</sup> *PD* New Series IX, col. 344.

<sup>41</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XX, col. 64.

calmly as long as abolitionists continued to define the term ‘slave’ so negatively. Some MPs like James therefore challenged the common perception of the slave by comparing their working and living conditions to those of the lower classes of the British public.

The true state of working and living conditions on West Indian plantations was frequently debated in Parliament. Members of the West Indian lobby possessed first-hand knowledge of the subject, but their testimony was often dismissed as biased, self-interested, or untrue by the abolitionists. On 6 March 1828, during a heated debate on the state of the colonies and compulsory manumission, plantation owner James Wilson<sup>42</sup> remarked: ‘He was the owner of a small parish in the north of England, and he had an estate in the West Indies, containing nearly the same number of subjects; and he could say most conscientiously, that the condition of the black-coloured people was infinitely superior to that of the tenantry of his parish in England’.<sup>43</sup> Wilson was obviously proud to have taken care of his slaves and to have ensured their exposure to Christianity. He called upon the House to examine the state of their constituents at home first before passing judgement on plantations they had never seen. During the same debate, Alexander Baring commented on the religious knowledge of Antigua’s slaves: ‘the slaves of Antigua would, if examined as Christians by a set of catechists, be found to possess as much knowledge of christian doctrine as many classes of the population of the metropolis. He would take, for example, the large parish of St. Giles,<sup>44</sup> and would back the negro-population of Antigua against the labouring classes in that parish’.<sup>45</sup> Baring’s attack on the abolitionists’ judgements of the West Indians challenged them to examine first their own neighbourhoods and then ensure their fellow citizens were healthy, educated, good and moral before legislating any further on the slaves’ welfare.

A few MPs tried to reconcile the images of paternalist planters and managers and the administration of corporal punishment on Britain’s West Indian plantations. Extreme evangelicals supported severe punishments and the death penalty for murder while moderates preferred psychological intimidation rather than physical punishment.<sup>46</sup> Abolitionists emphasised the use of the whip to demonstrate the

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<sup>42</sup> Wilson, MP for York (1826-30), was the proprietor of a plantation in St. Vincent and may have sat on a West Indian assembly. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 7, 840-2.

<sup>43</sup> *PD New Series XVIII*, col. 1047.

<sup>44</sup> St Giles-in-the-Field was a growing parish in London with a reputation for crime and poverty.

<sup>45</sup> *PD New Series XVIII*, col. 1035.

<sup>46</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 215-7.

unnatural and oppressive regime planters maintained in the colonies. The planters and others continually refuted charges that this mode of discipline was inhumane, excessive or unnecessary. On 16 March 1824, Alexander Baring stated that it was irrational to argue that the use of the whip on colonial plantations was unnecessary, when the identical mode of punishment in Britain's military was upheld by Parliament.<sup>47</sup> During a debate regarding emancipation, on 7 June 1833, Joseph Hume argued that the whip or 'lash' was used more often in their own military than in the colonies:

The establishment of the army in 1827 consisted of 111,107 men. ... one in forty-eight received corporal punishment, and that taking 300 lashes as the average punishment, there had in that year been 687,000 lashes inflicted on British soldiers. [*No, no*] Well, then, supposing the average to be 200, it would appear that there had been 458,200 lashes inflicted during that year.<sup>48</sup>

Although hotly contested and subject to interpretation regarding the number of lashes allotted each man, Hume clung to his belief that through amelioration and the existing system of enslavement in the colonies, the slaves were treated in a fairer, more humane manner than British men were in their own army. If MPs were willing to allow corporal punishment to be inflicted on their fellow countrymen, it would be hypocritical of them to label the thoroughly scrutinised system of plantation discipline as inhumane. Overall, the West Indian lobby argued that Parliament should care for their fellow British subjects first, before considering legislating for the colonies.

### 3. Moral and Religious Arguments

Following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, slavery was rarely defended at Westminster by using the Bible. Biblical defences for possessing slaves and for using slaves of African descent were all but abandoned in this period. Anti-abolitionist arguments that centred on religion instead focused on efforts to provide Christian instruction to the slaves. Abolitionists frequently charged the colonists with having provided inadequate religious instruction that could have otherwise helped to ameliorate the conditions of the slaves, promote a peaceful atmosphere,<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *PD* New Series X, col. 1162.

<sup>48</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 470.

<sup>49</sup> The connection between church attendance and peace was also made at home: in 1818 Parliament attempted to attack falling numbers of church goers, and thereby lessen the threat of revolution, by voting £1,000,000 for the building of new churches. See D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 76.

and allow them to embrace the rights, privileges, and obligations attached to freedom. The West Indian interest denied these charges and reminded its peers that the Bible did not forbid slavery. Some also warned that freeing a great many slaves, without proper measures in place for their welfare and education, would cause more harm than good. Below is an examination of the moral and religious arguments that were advanced between 1807 and 1833.

Unlike during the slavery debates prior to abolition, proslavery arguments utilising Scripture are extremely rare after 1807. While some anti-slavery advocates declared slavery to be contrary to the Christian faith, few West Indians (or anyone else) chose to refute those charges publicly by using examples of condoned slavery found in the Bible, as had been done prior to abolition. On 15 May 1823, during a debate on his motion for resolving to ameliorate the conditions of the slaves, George Canning noted: ‘it is not true, that there is that in the Christian religion which makes it impossible that it should co-exist with slavery in the world. Slavery has been known at all times, and under all systems of religion, whether true or false’.<sup>50</sup> On 7 March 1826, as the House of Lords discussed the amelioration resolutions of 1823, Lord Chancellor Eldon advanced a similar view that slavery and Christianity had co-existed for centuries and noted that the wisest politicians had condoned it.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, during the discussion on a petition for compensation presented on 13 December 1830, Joseph Marryat the younger admitted that holding men in the state of slavery was contrary to the teachings of Christianity, but he argued that it would be morally wrong to release them onto an unprepared and vulnerable white population: ‘It was true that Christianity forbade slavery, but it was equally true that its doctrines forbade their letting loose a large slave-population, the inevitable consequence of which must be a general massacre’.<sup>52</sup> Here, Marryat stressed the House’s moral obligation to act cautiously while being conscious of the best interests of the entire colonial population.

Planters were frequently charged with preventing or undermining the religious education of their slaves. On 19 June 1816, during a discussion of William Wilberforce’s motion for papers from Jamaica, plantation owner Charles Nicholas Pallmer<sup>53</sup> explained that the lack of religious education of some of the West Indian

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<sup>50</sup> *PD* New Series IX, col. 279.

<sup>51</sup> *PD* New Series XIV, col. 1156.

<sup>52</sup> *PD* 3rd Series I, cols. 1048-9.

<sup>53</sup> MP for Ludgershall (1815-7) and Surrey (1826-30). Pallmer was born in Jamaica and boasted of owning a Jamaican plantation with 1000 slaves before being declared bankrupt in 1831. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 6, 621-4.

slaves was due to an insufficient number of ministers from the Church of England: ‘they entertained a predilection (which he hoped the House would not condemn) for instructors of the established church; and he would appeal to his majesty’s government for a confirmation of his assertion, that such instructors were not to be found’.<sup>54</sup> Charles Rose Ellis reiterated the colonists’ duty to provide a sound religious education for their slaves during the amelioration debates in 1823: ‘to prepare them, by religious instruction, by the gradual acquisition of civil rights, and by the habits of civilized life ... that they may become honest, peaceable, moral, and industrious members of a free society, and that the transition may take place without a convulsion’.<sup>55</sup> His speech demonstrated that planters recognised the necessity of religious instruction and thus this element of the amelioration resolutions was unnecessary. Ellis explained that the colonists saw religious instruction as a vital step towards the slaves receiving civil rights;<sup>56</sup> these could include, but were not necessarily confined to, emancipation.

Planters, politicians, and the British public alike looked down upon the native African religions, denouncing them as superstitious and barbaric in nature. The West Indian interest was able to capitalise on this prejudice by reminding their fellow Britons that exposure to the Christian faith through the institution of slavery had a beneficial civilising effect on the African slaves. On 7 March 1826, during discussion of the amelioration resolutions in the House of Lords, Lord Dudley and Ward<sup>57</sup> dismissed accusations that the planters had taken too long to provide a Christian education for their slaves: ‘It was to be recollected, however, that if they had never been brought from home, they would have been at least in equal darkness – slaves in body to their savage and tyrannical masters, and slaves in mind to a revolting superstition’.<sup>58</sup> Here Lord Dudley and Ward reiterated commonly held beliefs about African culture and religion.<sup>59</sup> This proslavery argument about the civilising effects of plantation slavery was advanced more often prior to the abolition of the slave trade, but does emerge occasionally during this period as well, often in combination with a defence of the West Indians’ actions.

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<sup>54</sup> *PD XXXIV* (London: T.C. Hansard, 1816), col. 1169.

<sup>55</sup> *PD New Series IX*, col. 299.

<sup>56</sup> The early slave evidence bills passed by colonial legislatures that allowed slaves with adequate religious instruction to provide evidence in court demonstrates this belief in the central importance of religious instruction.

<sup>57</sup> John William Ward, MP for Downton (1802-3), Worcestershire (1803-6), Petersfield (1806-7), Wareham (1807-12), Ilchester (1812-8), and Bossiney (1819-23), was made Viscount Dudley and Ward in 1823 and the Earl of Dudley in 1827.

<sup>58</sup> *PD New Series XIV*, col. 1162.

<sup>59</sup> Racial judgements will be analysed in Section Four.

William Burge<sup>60</sup> also stressed the need to civilise the African slaves prior to emancipation. In his opinion they required moral and religious instruction as well as a strong work ethic to handle freedom. These were elements that Burge and some of his fellow MPs believed to be lacking in the slaves due to two reasons: their race, and their situation. On 24 May 1832, he advanced this proposal: ‘First, let them improve his moral character; impart to him the truths of Christianity... Until he acquired the habit of industry, and which he would not possess until he was further advanced in civilization, the gift of freedom would be worse than useless to him’.<sup>61</sup> Burge and others argued that it would be immoral to emancipate the slaves before they were properly educated and prepared for their future participation in society. Immediate, premature emancipation would subject the entire population of the West Indies to unthinkable horrors; Westminster and the country’s abolitionists would be to blame for such a disaster.

#### 4. Racial Arguments

Racial arguments were put forth less frequently following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.<sup>62</sup> Most of the racial arguments advanced prior to abolition were presented to justify Britain’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade. They had previously pointed to the pre-existence of an internal African trade in slaves to justify shipping, trading, and utilising African labour in the West Indian colonies. There was no longer any reason to argue that Africans could withstand hard labour in hotter climates because they were not able legally to obtain new African slaves. In the slavery debates of the 1820s and 1830s anti-abolitionist racial arguments emphasised the negative aspects of emancipation, warned of the superior physical strength of African slaves and their descendants, and compared the civilised life in the colonies for the slaves with a supposedly uncivilised life in Africa.

MPs regularly questioned the African and Creole slaves’ current level of civilisation when debating their ability to handle freedom in the decades immediately following the abolition of the slave trade. Many MPs believed the African race to

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<sup>60</sup> Burge, MP for Eye (1831-2), also served as a colonial agent for Jamaica from 1830 and as Jamaica’s Attorney General. He was a member of London’s West India Planters and Merchants Committee and married into plantation ownership, becoming the owner of 130 slaves in Jamaica. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 1, 274, and vol. 4, 450-5. Press, 2009.

<sup>61</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIII, col. 85.

<sup>62</sup> Out of sixty-six recorded uses of racial arguments during the slave trade and slavery debates in Parliament, thirty-seven (fifty-six per cent) were made in the debates leading up to abolition and twenty-nine (forty-four per cent) were made following abolition.

be fundamentally and unchangeably different. This belief had far-reaching ramifications. It caused great concern over whether black and white members of the colonies could live together peacefully after emancipation. The West Indian interest maintained that due to their lesser level of civilisation, its slaves were comparable to children in intellect, but full-grown adults in physical strength: an alarming combination. They argued that physical punishment and discipline were necessary to control their African slaves. Following the abolition of the slave trade, the West Indians stressed that their concerted efforts to remove 'destructive' African practices (including native religious ceremonies and polygamy) were necessary to maintain order in the colonies and advance the slaves' level of civilisation. Emancipation, in contrast, would end any hope of advancement. This became the focus of their racial defences of slavery after 1807.

The slave as a child was a commonly advanced image in the pre-1807 debates on slavery and the slave trade, and was also alluded to during discussions about emancipation in the 1820s and 1830s. This image incorporated the need to care for and instruct slaves in a paternalistic manner, but it also depicted slaves as different and as requiring special instruction to raise them up towards the level of civilisation Europeans had already achieved.<sup>63</sup> On 16 March 1824, during a discussion of amelioration, Canning noted that, whereas some elements of the slave might be child-like, their physical stature was not:

In dealing with the negro, Sir, we must remember that we are dealing with a being possessing the form and strength of a man, but the intellect only of a child. To turn him loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance...<sup>64</sup>

This allusion to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*<sup>65</sup> is quite fascinating. In the novel Dr. Frankenstein created a monster who looked like a man, but was physically larger, more powerful and potentially more dangerous. Insurrections and slave rebellions occurred in the islands throughout this period; when the House considered the large number of African slaves and their descendants in the colonies and compared their greater physical strength and inferior civilisation to the much smaller population of white colonists, freeing the slaves *en masse* amounted to a dangerous experiment. One particularly relevant interpretation of the novel is that it reflected contemporary

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<sup>63</sup> See Wells, 'Sex and Racial Theory in Britain, 1690-1833', 282-7.

<sup>64</sup> *PD* New Series X, col. 1103.

<sup>65</sup> First published in 1818.

feelings of impatience to improve human nature.<sup>66</sup> The West Indian interest in Parliament certainly believed that the abolitionists' impatience bordered on recklessness and had the potential to produce widespread devastation as a consequence of immediate emancipation.

The physical differences between the slaves and the white West Indian colonists caused great concern in both Houses of Parliament. Some questioned whether free black and white men could live together in harmony, or if their racial differences, most obviously characterised by skin colour, but also considered to include cultural practices, intelligence, work ethic, and capacity for learning, would forever result in the races living at odds with one another.<sup>67</sup> On 3 June 1833, Sir Robert Peel discussed the problem of having two races living together as equals:

There was the distinction of colour. He did not allude to that as implying any inferiority between the black and the white—he merely alluded to it as a circumstance which threw a difficulty in amalgamating the slave population with the free, which did not exist in any country of Europe, or in any country of the East where slavery was extinguished.<sup>68</sup>

Peel stated that he did not believe that the African race was inferior, but that the difference in skin colour would likely prove to be a permanent obstacle in the way of assimilating the two groups. By this time there had been many generations of mixed-race children living and working in the colonies as free men and women and the issue of skin colour had become much more complex.<sup>69</sup> On 4 June 1833, the duke of Wellington<sup>70</sup> remarked on the state of society in the United States in areas where slaves had been liberated: 'It had been found in the United States that the two races of men could not live amicably together'.<sup>71</sup> On 10 June 1833 Thomas Frankland Lewis<sup>72</sup> challenged the assertion that the slaves might eventually form civilised communities in the West Indies upon receiving their freedom by drawing on

<sup>66</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, Dangerous People? England 1783-1846*, 477.

<sup>67</sup> Ideas of a natural hierarchy and racial superiority/inferiority infiltrated much of the discussions on human equality, inside and outside Westminster. For more on contemporary racial thought as utilised in the slavery debates, see Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*, Ch. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 342.

<sup>69</sup> West Indians continued to classify their fellow inhabitants by race and colour as illicit sexual relations resulted in the mixing of races and the blurring of legal rights. Hierarchies were established in the colonies that took into account the number of degrees children were from one race or the other in order to maintain the established order of rank, but these systems of classifications were mainly based on skin colour. For a brief overview, see Wells, 'Sex and Racial Theory in Britain, 1690-1833', 299.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur Wellesley, the first duke of Wellington, was MP for Rye (1806), Mitchell (1807) and Newport Isle of Wight (1807-9). He served as Prime Minister from 1828 to 1830.

<sup>71</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 369.

<sup>72</sup> MP for Beaumaris (1812-26), Ennis (1826-8), Radnorshire (1828-34), and New Radnor Boroughs (1847-55).

examples of permanent physical differences: ‘it was a remarkable fact, demonstrated from the remains left to us of the early temples of the Egyptians, that the civilized inhabitants there were long-haired, while the woolly-headed negroes were a degraded caste’.<sup>73</sup> He directly related physical differences such as hair texture to the respective levels of civilisation. The innate and unchangeable differences in the races of man were given a great deal of consideration in the nineteenth century as scientific racism developed and these theories were advanced in Parliament during the slavery debates.

Lord Althorp<sup>74</sup> appeared to take a slightly different view of African slaves and their children. On 24 July 1833, during the discussion of the modified abolition bill, Althorp admitted that much progress had been achieved towards civilising the slave population, but he also believed this change might be reversed without a substantial period of apprenticeship and further religious instruction: ‘it was his conviction that the transition state of apprenticeship was necessary to prevent the negro from relapsing into all but hopeless barbarism’.<sup>75</sup> Althorp believed that the slaves had come from barbaric beginnings and that their advancing level of civilisation would be jeopardised if they were released from their masters’ control without an intermediate period of instruction. Racial differences and their impact on working ability, civilisation, and the functioning of society continued to be debated in the halls of Westminster as well as in universities, colonial assemblies and meeting halls throughout this period.<sup>76</sup>

## 5. Economic Arguments

Prior to the abolition of the slave trade, anti-abolitionist MPs emphasised the African trade’s central importance to Britain’s overall trade and manufacturing. After abolition, it was the importance of duties and maintaining or improving colonial production levels that became the important economic arguments advanced in Parliament during the slavery debates. In the period leading up to emancipation, the West Indian interest fought to remind Parliament of the colonies’ important role in Britain’s prosperity. Some MPs believed that emancipation would result in the loss of the West Indian colonies. Others insisted that free labour would not match current

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<sup>73</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 525.

<sup>74</sup> John Charles Spencer, MP for Okehampton (1804-6), Northamptonshire (1806-32), and Northamptonshire South (1832-4), served as Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons (1830-4).

<sup>75</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIX, col. 1212.

<sup>76</sup> Fully-fledged biologically founded racial theories appear later, in the 1840s and 1850s, in France and Britain. See Augstein, 'Introduction', xxx.

levels of production. They argued that free non-white persons were naturally lazy and uncontrollable; freedom from idleness, therefore, could only be achieved within the existing institution of slavery.<sup>77</sup> Concerns about the financial state of the planters, the freed slaves, the colonies and Britain were all aired during the slavery debates of this period.

MPs regularly commented on the amount of revenue the colonies provided to the state in these debates. On 20 December 1830, during the discussion of an anti-slavery petition, Richard Hart Davis<sup>78</sup> listed important financial and strategic benefits of the colonies:

He did not intend to say more on the importance of the West Indies to the mother country, than that they paid a revenue of more than 5,000,000*l.*; that they received manufactures from England to more than the same amount. They were a great nursery for our seamen, and employed 260,000 tons of our shipping. No government, of whatever party, would be so unwise as to sacrifice these great advantages to an abstract principle, unless that principle was founded in justice and expediency...<sup>79</sup>

Davis objected to the House acting upon abstract principles and humane theories when the welfare of the country and her empire was at stake. Richard Godson<sup>80</sup> also produced relevant economic data on 31 May 1833, during a discussion of the plan for abolition, although he focused on customs duties as well as the worth of colonial imports and exports:

The annual amount of the Custom-duties imposed upon the West-India produce imported was between 5,000,000*l.* and 6,000,000*l.* The annual amount of the exports of home manufactures to the West-India colonies, was between 4,000,000*l.* and 5,000,000*l.* Besides this, the ships employed in the trade between England and the West-Indies amounted to 9,500; the aggregate amount of their tonnage being no less than 260,000 tons. These were the profits which England had derived from her colonists possessing the “shameless property.”<sup>81</sup>

Like Davis, Godson was sceptical of applying moral judgements to Britain's economy and feared that public opinion might injure the country's revenue and her market for manufactured goods.

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<sup>77</sup> Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 182.

<sup>78</sup> MP for Colchester (1807-12) and Bristol (1812-31). Davis inherited 1/8th of his father's West Indian estate. See Fisher, *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 4, 868-71.

<sup>79</sup> *PD* 3rd Series I, col. 1353.

<sup>80</sup> MP for St. Albans (1831-2) and Kidderminster (1832-4 and 1837-49). In 1825 Godson gained the mortgage of a West Indian estate through his marriage. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 5, 294-6.

<sup>81</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 213.

Slave produce was important to many sectors of Britain's industry in the early nineteenth century. Emancipation had the potential to affect citizens in cities and towns across the country if it caused a decline in production. On 2 July 1832, during the introduction of his motion to assess Britain's dependence on slave labour, plantation owner Keith Douglas reflected on the importance of slave-grown cotton: 'the material for the whole cotton manufacture of this country, of Manchester and Glasgow, as well as of every little village, was supplied by compulsory slave labour'.<sup>82</sup> Douglas reminded the House that if cotton production came to a halt because of emancipation, so too would Britain's cotton industry and the livelihoods of thousands of British workers.<sup>83</sup> In the absence of a suitable supplier of cotton grown using free labour, they would have to resort to importing slave-grown cotton from foreign nations in order to maintain current levels of production. Not only would this defeat the humanitarian goals of emancipation, but British capital would fall into the hands of foreign states and the price of cotton would probably rise.

Lord Sandon also stressed the far-reaching consequences that emancipation would have on the British economy, as well as on the West Indian planters, proprietors, and towns throughout Great Britain. On 3 June 1833, during a debate on emancipation, Sandon noted:

the total value of the sugar, molasses, &c. raised in our West-India plantations, amounted to 7,857,000*l.*; the exports from Great Britain to the West Indies in the shape of stores, was 2,500,000*l.*; and that the freight and sailing charges upon those stores, amounted to 1,600,000*l.* This made the total amount of exports to the West-India colonies 4,600,000*l.*, which being deducted from the imports, left a balance of 3,257,000*l.* ... it should be recollected that that three millions were almost wholly spent in this country.<sup>84</sup>

Sandon believed that by passing a measure aiming to change the plantation system through the implementation of free (apprenticed) labour, exports would be affected, the income of the West Indian proprietors would decrease, and less money would be spent on Britain's manufactured goods. Any loss, whether physical or financial, would impact adversely upon Britain's prosperity and welfare.

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<sup>82</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIII, col. 1243.

<sup>83</sup> For example, in 1824-6 cotton imports comprised almost 10 per cent of all British imports and would have been worth about £7,452,000 in 1980s money. Predominantly slaves grew 86 per cent of this cotton. From S. Drescher, 'The Decline Thesis of British Slavery since *Econocide* (1986)', in Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom: Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 103.

<sup>84</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, cols. 319-20.

The West Indian interest frequently drew on past examples of free black communities to support the argument that free labour would not be as productive as enslaved. Joseph Hume pointed to the failing colony of freed slaves in Sierra Leone<sup>85</sup> to warn against depending on free labour for production in their West Indian colonies. On 1 March 1826, during a discussion on the impact of amelioration, Hume produced his latest information on the colony: ‘At Sierra Leone there were 39,000 freed negroes, and of these 16,000 were furnished with houses, and clothes, and land to cultivate. ... general Turner, the governor, employed some of these negroes to work in the building of the new arsenal; but he was soon obliged to give them up, for he could get no work from them’.<sup>86</sup> Hume noted that although they were free, almost half of the former slaves had their basic needs provided for them by the British. With their needs met and land on which to grow their own food, they were unwilling to work and contribute to the colony’s safety.

Plantation owner Patrick Stewart<sup>87</sup> also employed specific examples of unproductive free labour to refute abolitionist assertions that the West Indian colonies would prosper after emancipation. On 15 April 1831, during a discussion of Thomas Fowell Buxton’s motion for abolition, Stewart referred to the current state of affairs in St. Domingo and in his own colony of Trinidad:

When the Americans sent cargoes to that island [St. Domingo], and were to receive timber in exchange, with which the island abounds, they were obliged to send men to cut it down and bring it to their ships. ... In Trinidad, it appeared by a despatch from Governor Woodford, in 1826, that 400 free negroes had been employed for no less than five years in building a barrack.<sup>88</sup>

He portrayed St. Domingo as a tragic loss in order to warn against the premature granting or violent taking of freedom by a large population of black slaves. Unable to procure the necessary labour to cut down trees to pay for goods they could no longer produce themselves, St. Domingo had become an uncivilised and unproductive disappointment. In contrast, Stewart noted that Trinidad’s freed slaves did take on employment opportunities, but they did not work at an acceptable pace.

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<sup>85</sup> For a brief overview of Britain’s efforts in Sierra Leone, see the introduction of Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>86</sup> *PD* New Series XIV, col. 994.

<sup>87</sup> Stewart, MP for Lancaster (1831-7) and Renfrewshire (1841-6), was colonial agent for Tobago (1826-46) although he was never fully ratified. Stewart and his family owned plantations in Tobago. He was a member of London’s West India Planters and Merchants Committee, where he was the nominee and successor of Keith Douglas. See Fisher, ed., *The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, vol. 7, 283-5.

<sup>88</sup> *PD* 3rd Series III (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1831), col. 1448.

There was also a school of thought that believed that freed slaves, or perhaps free men in general, would always choose to work as little as possible if the land was fruitful enough to provide easy subsistence.<sup>89</sup> Thus, according to the anti-abolitionists, colonial produce, and the management and possession of the colonies, would be endangered by emancipation. Alexander Baring did not believe that freed slaves would work in the islands for any wage. On 6 March 1828, during a discussion of the impact of amelioration on the West Indies, he remarked: ‘Where the land was rich, and the negro could procure with a little labour enough for the supply of his wants, no inducement which the colonists could hold out would be sufficient to make him work’.<sup>90</sup> Several MPs expanded upon this theory by arguing that men of any race, when faced with a warm climate and fertile ground, would prefer to spend their days relaxing rather than working. On 25 June 1833, the duke of Wellington noted: ‘There always was, and there ever would be, a difficulty in getting men to work in tropical climates more than would be sufficient to provide themselves with the common necessities of life. After they had got these, their great luxury was, to repose in the shade’.<sup>91</sup> On 24 July 1833 Ralph Bernal advanced a similar argument.<sup>92</sup> Thus, laziness in the colonies was not necessarily a racial problem, but a problem that could be solved only through coerced labour. The combination of highly fertile land, a warm climate, and a situation where freed slaves could suddenly work for themselves (or choose not to work) led to a number of theories about colonial life after emancipation. The West Indian interest believed that former slaves would not work in these conditions and therefore approved of the apprenticeship scheme in order to secure labour for several more years.

## 6. Threat of Rebellion

The threat of rebellion and violence in the West Indies was constantly on the minds of British politicians. Slave uprisings occurred throughout the period.<sup>93</sup> Members of the West Indian interest pointed to the devastating effects of St. Domingo’s rebellion as a warning of emancipation’s likely outcomes: revolt against the white colonists, mass bloodshed and uncontrollable violence, and the loss of entire colonies. Some

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<sup>89</sup> West Indians were concerned that the natural laziness inherent in their slaves would result in uncontrollable, unproductive plantations. See Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 182.

<sup>90</sup> *PD* New Series XVIII, col. 1037.

<sup>91</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 1886.

<sup>92</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIX, col. 1216.

<sup>93</sup> Large slave rebellions occurred in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823), and Jamaica (1831-2).

MPs maintained that merely debating emancipation in Parliament could provoke a rebellion. Colonial newspapers imposed self-censorship into the 1820s, thereby demonstrating the colonists' concerns about arming slaves with contradictory political information.<sup>94</sup> Rioting at home and abroad already terrified Britain's landed classes;<sup>95</sup> many believed that revolution was imminent.<sup>96</sup> These made a dramatic impression upon the ruling classes in Britain. It was in this unsettled revolutionary landscape that the West Indian interest painted vivid images of bloodshed and violence to postpone emancipation in the 1820s and early 1830s.

In the 1830s many MPs warned of the risk of violence breaking out immediately after emancipation. On 24 May 1832, during a discussion of two petitions from the West Indian interest in the midst of the reform crisis, Sir Charles Wetherell<sup>97</sup> stated: 'in the present state of the West Indies, a declaration of the House of Commons in favour of unqualified emancipation would be the signal for revolt'.<sup>98</sup> That same day William Burge also advanced such a warning: 'if they could that night succeed in obtaining a vote declaring slavery to be immediately abolished in Jamaica, they would desolate that colony—they would deluge it with blood'.<sup>99</sup> Burge argued that not only would emancipation result in death and destruction in the colonies, but that it would lead to freed slaves living in a state of desperation and poverty in a lawless land cut off from international aid. In this statement, Burge conjured up images of St. Domingo's downfall and its current state of hopelessness and despair. The threat of revolt would have seemed all the more real to a Parliament which some MPs believed had narrowly avoided revolution at home during the reform crisis of that very month.

Richard Vyvyan<sup>100</sup> made direct comparisons between enacting immediate emancipation in their West Indian colonies and the destruction that had taken place

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<sup>94</sup> Lewis, "'An Incendiary Press': British West Indian Newspapers during the Struggle for Abolition", 347-9.

<sup>95</sup> Between 1830 and 1832, revolution struck Paris and there were uprisings in Belgium, Poland, Austria, Portugal, and Spain, as well as in the south and east of England. For details on how radicalism, mass public meetings, and uprisings, including Luddism, the Captain Swing Riots, and 'Peterloo', threatened the established order, see Michael J. Turner, *The Age of Unease: Government and Reform in Britain, 1782-1832* (Midsomer Norton, Somerset: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2000), 161-8.

<sup>96</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, Dangerous People? England 1783-1846*, 417. See also Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832*, 103.

<sup>97</sup> MP for Rye (1812-3), Shaftesbury (1813-8), Oxford (1820-6), Hastings (1826), Plympton Erle (1826-30), and Boroughbridge. Sir Charles also served as Solicitor-General (1824-6) and Attorney-General (1826-7 and 1828-9).

<sup>98</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIII, col. 67.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 85.

<sup>100</sup> Sir Richard Rawlinson Vyvyan, eight baronet, was MP for Cornwall (1825-31), Okehampton (1831-2), Bristol (1832-7) and Helston (1841-57).

in St. Domingo. On 30 May 1833, Vyvyan brought in a petition calling for current laws and the property rights of West Indian proprietors to be respected. He asked the House to consider the current state of St. Domingo: ‘which was now in the hands of barbarians ... where emancipation was carried into effect by violence, where the greatest possible destruction of property occurred, where horror upon horror succeeded, and where subsequently an Agrarian law was passed by which every individual acted for himself!’<sup>101</sup> Vyvyan stressed that events might not unfold in a calm, safe manner, regardless of the time spent debating the matter. He reiterated the need to look at and learn from St. Domingo before they chose to emancipate all of their slaves.

Several MPs were also concerned that violence incited by the slavery debates or the passing of emancipation might result in the loss of the colonies altogether. On 15 May 1823, during a discussion of amelioration, Alexander Baring put forth the following warning: ‘It would be absurd to suppose that a free black population, so enlightened and cultivated as to value their rights, and duly appreciate their strength; that a population so instructed and so civilized, would consent to continue to devote their labours to proprietors, the greater portion of whom are resident in England’.<sup>102</sup> Baring’s somewhat sarcastic depiction of the consequences of granting freedom to slaves, who according to the abolitionists were fit to receive it, is quite fascinating. Britain had lost her American colonies only fifty years earlier to free men who had banded together to defend the right to govern themselves. If the slaves were as organised and learned as the abolitionists argued in their calls for immediate emancipation, why should they be content to remain under British rule? The continual threat of insurrection and the slave rebellions that took place in the colonies confirmed for the West Indian interest the need to proceed cautiously, but it also challenged the interest’s claims that the slaves were content.<sup>103</sup> Incidents of insurrection continued to be discussed in Parliament throughout the period, with little agreement between the two sides as to the underlying causes or the remedy. Meanwhile, those deemed responsible for inciting unrest at home were imprisoned, transported, or executed.

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<sup>101</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 130.

<sup>102</sup> *PD* New Series IX, col. 347.

<sup>103</sup> While the insurrections allowed the planters to apply for compensation and attempt to postpone slave registration, the West India interest could not agree on the causes or solutions amongst themselves. See Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition*, 111-24. Also see Petley, ‘Slavery, Emancipation and the Creole World View of Jamaican Colonists, 1800-1834’, 103.

1830 witnessed great upheaval at home and a series of revolutions on the continent. Edward Royle has argued that there was much instability in Britain that year due to rapid population increase, an agricultural depression, and industrial recession.<sup>104</sup> There was also political instability due to divisions in the Tory party following Catholic Emancipation, the death of George IV on 26 June, the beginning of the Swing riots, a general election, and the resignation of the Duke of Wellington in November.<sup>105</sup> Revolutionary fervour was sweeping across Europe in Belgium, France, and Poland. Amidst this backdrop of civil unrest, on 13 December 1830, during the discussion of a petition supporting the West Indian interest, Sir Robert Peel asked the House to proceed with caution: ‘What was at that moment passing in every part of the world must teach them the danger of tampering with such subjects’.<sup>106</sup> There was true fear amongst some MPs that revolt could happen at home and in the colonies as it had already happened on a small scale at home and a much larger scale on the continent to devastating consequences for the established system of rule.

Many MPs were reluctant to interfere with the internal legislation of their West Indian colonies. After the loss of their American colonies, British politicians were concerned that amelioration and emancipation would reduce the colonial assemblies’ powers, frustrate the colonists, and confuse the slaves. Total emancipation was a dangerous prospect: no one could be sure how the slaves or the colonists would react. Some MPs with ties to the colonies therefore attempted to delay such legislation by urging their counterparts to work with the colonists, rather than dictating to them from above. On 30 May 1816, Lord Holland<sup>107</sup> remarked that slave registration should be handled by the colonies, noting: ‘The utmost reluctance ought to be felt to legislate here in matters which concerned the internal regulations of the colonies; and such a mode of proceeding would have the strongest tendency to defeat the very object in view’.<sup>108</sup> He believed that forcing the colonies to enact legislation that they disagreed with would result in the legislation being ignored,

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<sup>104</sup> Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, 67.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *PD* 3rd Series I, col. 1063.

<sup>107</sup> Henry Richard Fox, the third Baron Holland of Holland and the third Baron Holland of Fowley; strong ally of his uncle, Charles James Fox; his wife inherited three Jamaican sugar plantations. See C.J. Wright, ‘Fox, Henry Richard, third Baron Holland of Holland and third Baron Holland of Foxley (1773-1840)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10035](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10035), accessed 3 December 2012].

<sup>108</sup> *PD* XXXIV, col. 909.

rejected or thwarted. Similarly, on 13 July 1830, after Henry Brougham<sup>109</sup> asserted that the colonists had not undertaken amelioration, Robert John Wilmot Horton argued that Parliament needed the colonists' help in order to implement the desired changes on the ground: 'nothing could be more unwise than to irritate the West-Indians by attempting to force laws upon them, – because he was sure that that attempt would not only be unjustifiable, but that it would fail entirely. He had heard a great deal ... about the impropriety and injustice of our interfering with the legislative assemblies of Canada'.<sup>110</sup> Wilmot Horton believed that they should therefore treat the colonists with respect if they hoped to accomplish emancipation at some point in the future. If the House had found it improper to interfere with Canada's legislative assemblies, surely it would be equally improper to interfere with those in the West Indies.

MPs also warned that by legislating for the colonies, they might be encouraging the colonists to rebel. On 6 March 1828, during discussion on the impact of amelioration in the colonies, Ralph Bernal warned the House: 'The West-Indians might be a weak body; but if driven and forced together, it might be found that they could muster both strength and courage to resist those opposed to them, and who attempted to destroy their just rights'.<sup>111</sup> Bernal believed that the West Indians would not allow their rights to be taken away. On 13 July 1830, Robert John Wilmot Horton and Sir Robert Peel compared the present situation to that which Parliament had faced in the previous century when dealing with their American colonies. Peel asked his fellow MPs: 'Could any one dwell for a moment on the horrors to be apprehended from being, in consequence of such an interference by Parliament with the internal concerns of these islands, forced to the awful emergency of waging war upon the white population of our own colonies and the colonial legislatures?'.<sup>112</sup> On 31 May 1833, Richard Godson challenged what right MPs had to legislate for people who were not represented in Parliament:

He would begin by denying the right of the Parliament in Great Britain to legislate for the internal regulation or taxation of the colonies which had Local Legislatures. The laws of Great Britain had ever recognised ... the right Jamaica acquired by charter to an independent legislature. The inhabitants of that island would insist

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<sup>109</sup> First Baron Brougham and Vaux, MP for Camelford (1810-12), Winchelsea (1815-30), Knaresborough and Yorkshire (1830), also served as Lord Chancellor.

<sup>110</sup> *PD* New Series XXV, col. 1198.

<sup>111</sup> *PD* New Series XXVIII, col. 1045.

<sup>112</sup> *PD* New Series XXV, col. 1209.

that the Legislature of England had no right to pass a law to bind them; and they would not receive it.<sup>113</sup>

These men were concerned that the colonists and their assemblies were not being treated as their equals. Regardless of whether Parliament could legitimately legislate for those colonies with their own assemblies, such action could be dangerous.

In late 1831, a highly controversial Order in Council was devised by the government and sent to the West Indian colonies specifying rules and regulations for the management of the colonial plantations without allowing for the colonies to adapt the policies to suit their individual circumstances. On 6 October 1831, while the Order was still being modified, Joseph Hume declared: ‘if the Government were anxious to excite a civil war between the colonies and the mother country, they could do no better than to adopt this Order in Council. He had not seen one individual connected with the West Indies who did not protest against such an Order being sent out’.<sup>114</sup> Hume believed that the colonists would revolt against this level of repression. On 9 March 1832, William Burge argued that the Order contained dangerous elements that negated the rights of the colonial assemblies:

No man who respected the rights of a legislative assembly, could by possibility approve of their conduct, when they made an Order in Council, and imperiously commanded what they were pleased to call a legislative assembly to register that Order, without the slightest alteration, as a law made, considered, and adopted by the assembly. Such a proceeding, he contended, was monstrous.<sup>115</sup>

The West Indian lobby strongly opposed the principles behind the Order in Council, as they implied British dominance over her West Indian colonies and proved that the Government lacked an understanding of each colony’s needs. While the Order became law in the Crown colonies, those colonies with local legislatures rejected it and fought back. The Order also decreed that the colonies which implemented them would receive financial benefits and those which rejected them would not. This situation allowed the West Indian lobby to draw a further connection to the American conflict by recalling the contentious issue of taxation without representation. Throughout the slavery debates, therefore, the West Indian interest was able to warn of impending rebellion and violence by drawing on past examples of both black and white rebellions and revolutions. With unrest at home and abroad,

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<sup>113</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 205.

<sup>114</sup> *PD* 3rd Series VIII (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1832), cols. 180-1.

<sup>115</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XI (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1832), col. 40.

the threat of rebellion remained a pressing issue and a convincing argument in Westminster for much of the early nineteenth century.

The language used by proslavery MPs in Parliament changed significantly after the slave trade was abolished. Rather than defending the institution of slavery in the abstract, the West Indian interest spent much more time defending itself, its fellow planters, and its property. Members no longer relied on racial prejudices or Bible passages to support slavery, nor did they overtly support the institution of slavery; on the contrary, they publicly stated their extreme dislike of slavery and the nature of their property before explaining why the institution of slavery needed to remain for the foreseeable future. Abolitionists immediately dismissed some of the West Indian interest's arguments as being biased and self-serving, but they could not overcome the legal basis and historical support for their claims to compensation. In contrast to their reluctant response to amelioration in the 1820s, in the early 1830s West Indian planters appeared more willing to agree to legislation as long as they received adequate compensation. This shift in rhetoric may be due to financial losses already incurred, the devastation caused by natural disasters and revolts in the colonies, or perhaps a sense that, after parliamentary reform, emancipation was inevitable and, by agreeing to some elements of the plan, they would be more likely to receive a favourable settlement. In the end, that was what happened. The emancipation act ensured that the planters were compensated for their losses and plantation production was maintained through forced labour for much of the remaining decade. The planters' arguments were listened to, their property rights were acknowledged, and their land continued to be worked by their (former) slaves.

## Chapter Five

### Anti-Abolitionist Rhetoric in Parliament

‘The Lord Chancellor presumed that the wish of their lordships was to pass some bill of regulation; but as the Bill stood, it was nonsense. He therefore concluded that some amendments would be proposed to connect the nonsense of one part of the Bill, with the nonsense of the other.’

Lord Chancellor Edward Thurlow, 25 June 1788<sup>1</sup>

‘We had, by want of temperance and of prudent conduct, lost America. The House should beware of being carried away by the meteors they had been dazzled with.’

William Drake, 19 April 1791<sup>2</sup>

‘He cautioned gentlemen, however, against being led away by false notions of popularity and humanity. ... We might as well say, Oh, we will not have our chimney swept, because it is a little troublesome to the boy, as that we should give up the benefit of the West Indies on account of the supposed hardships of the negro.’

John Fuller, 6 March 1807<sup>3</sup>

Anti-abolitionists in Parliament employed a number of rhetorical strategies to discredit the abolition movement. They attacked the abolitionists’ evidence, methods of gaining support, logic, and underlying ideology to undermine their position and discredit their reasoning. An analysis of the nature and language of these attacks reveals a proactive anti-abolitionist movement unwilling passively to watch abolitionist fervour sweep across Britain and influence parliamentary proceedings.

This chapter surveys a range of rhetorical strategies employed to discredit and halt the abolition movement in the context of war with France and challenges from reformers and radicals at home. Attacks on individual abolitionists, particularly William Wilberforce, provide evidence of a proactive anti-abolitionist segment in Parliament fighting to halt the growing support for the abolition of the slave trade. Anti-abolitionists ridiculed the methods abolitionists used to gain signatures and support and challenged the legitimacy of their evidence. This chapter will then include an examination of how anti-abolitionists were able to challenge the legality and logic of abolition in the context of war with France before looking at the

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<sup>1</sup> *PHE* XXVII (London: T.C. Hansard, 1816), col. 639.

<sup>2</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 358. William Drake junior was MP for Amersham (1768-95).

<sup>3</sup> *PD* IX, col. 60.

persuasive way in which they linked abolition to the infiltration of French revolutionary principles. Throughout the abolition debates anti-abolitionists challenged the legality of abolition, the sentimentality and humanitarian claims of the abolitionists, and the abolitionists' reliance on abstract principles. Parliament's anti-abolitionist MPs repeatedly challenged the abolitionists' logic, morality, and motives during the debates and were in turn rewarded with the postponement and defeat of numerous abolition motions prior to 1807. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an examination of anti-abolitionist rhetoric in Parliament after the abolition of the slave trade. Here it becomes evident that, having lost the fight against the abolition of the slave trade, the West Indian interest and its supporters in Parliament were forced to defend themselves and the continuance of slavery in the colonies. As in the years prior to abolition, they voiced attacks on abolitionists in Parliament and their methods of gaining support, but the interest was now able to show that British abolitionists had failed in their attempts to achieve a wide-spread, international abolition of the trade.

Anti-abolitionist rhetoric evolved over time. After the abolition of the slave trade, proslavery language all but disappeared from the parliamentary debates on slavery. While the benefits of plantation slavery for the African and Creole slaves were sometimes discussed, the West Indian interest used less provocative language as it began to agree openly to amelioration in return for maintaining the institution of slavery and gaining favourable concessions as the blueprint for emancipation took shape in 1832-3. Passionate, angry language was confined to defending planters against charges of inhumanity, warning against impending insurrections, and expressing frustration with their inability to convince fellow MPs of the 'true' state of plantation life. This was a significant shift in the nature and language of proslavery arguments from the debates prior to the abolition of the slave trade. Post-1807 rhetoric has therefore been analysed separately in the final section of this chapter.

As in the previous two chapters, this chapter utilises speeches recorded in the parliamentary debates. The focus, however, shifts to an analysis of the tone and language that anti-abolitionists employed in the debates rather than continuing to concentrate on the content of the arguments. Historians have yet to analyse the rhetorical strategies of anti-abolitionism for the entire period under study. By examining proslavery and anti-abolitionist rhetoric, it is possible to discern ways in which the West Indian interest constructed persuasive defences of its position and

attacked the growing abolition movement. This different perspective on the speeches also reveals more nuanced shifts in arguments over time as well as the impact of outside influences. It supports existing research into the abolition debates that recognised the intentionally logical, reasoned, masculine arguments of the anti-abolitionists that achieved some success in Parliament and it can be contrasted with the abolitionists' use of sentimental, feminine arguments for abolition and emancipation that were persuasive out-of-doors.<sup>4</sup> This chapter, then, provides a different perspective on the same material and recognises that it is not just what the politicians said that is important to our understanding of the nature of the slavery debate in Parliament, but how they phrased their arguments.

### **1. Attacks on Individual Abolitionists**

MPs who opposed changes to the institution of slavery and restrictions on the African trade actively attacked abolitionists who proposed and supported these changes in Parliament. Rather than listening passively to abolitionist rhetoric or responding in a purely defensive manner, anti-abolitionists attacked the motives, evidence, and character of the abolitionists whom they opposed. As the primary proposer of bills for abolition, Wilberforce became the target of most of these personal attacks. Through these personal attacks, anti-abolitionists created doubt among enough undecided MPs to defeat or modify most slave trade-related bills debated in the Houses of Parliament in the 1790s and early 1800s.

Many MPs took issue with Wilberforce's method of introducing his bills with long introductory speeches that lasted several hours. On 18 April 1791, during a discussion in the Commons on Wilberforce's bill for abolition, Thomas Grosvenor used Wilberforce's long introduction against him: 'it appeared to him that the hon. Gentleman [Wilberforce] himself must have great doubts of the propriety of his motion; for, if it was so clear a point as it was declared to be, it could not have needed either so much evidence or so much time'.<sup>5</sup> He questioned the validity and clarity of Wilberforce's arguments for abolition by remarking that, if their force were as self-evident as Wilberforce claimed, his bill would not have needed such a long and impassioned introduction.

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<sup>4</sup> Srividhya Swaminathan has examined the different rhetorical strategies employed by the pro- and anti-slavery lobbies both in Parliament and out-of-doors. See Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, Ch. 5. For examples of feminine versus masculine language in printed materials on the slavery debate, see Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760-1807*, 90-2.

<sup>5</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 281.

On 23 April 1792, during a debate on Dundas's resolutions for a gradual abolition, Lord Sheffield<sup>6</sup> attacked Charles Fox's assertion that popular support was with the abolitionists: 'Lord Sheffield imputed to the enthusiasm of his right hon. Friend (Mr. Fox), the notion he had got, that a majority of the public was in favour of an immediate abolition. He believed he had conversed with as many persons on that subject as any man; and he declared that he found an immense majority against an immediate abolition.'<sup>7</sup> Fox had used his views on public opinion to support his argument for abolition, but Lord Sheffield was easily able to counter the claim with a similar one of his own, thus negating the ability of his opponents to use public opinion as a powerful motive to vote for the bill. Lord Sheffield was also able to highlight Fox's 'enthusiasm' for abolition as undermining his ability to speak honestly about the public's views on the topic.

The duke of Clarence voiced his opinion of the abolitionists, and of Wilberforce in particular, to the House of Lords on 11 April 1793 during a discussion of the Commons' vote for gradual abolition:

His royal highness asserted that the promoters of the abolition were either fanatics or hypocrites, and in one of those classes he ranked Mr. Wilberforce. That French politics did interfere with the opinions and arguments of British senators, he should be able to prove by a letter from lord Stanhope to citizen Condorcet. ... It contained congratulations to the French republican on the turn which the slave trade was likely to take, and the victory obtained in the House of Commons over the opponents to freedom.<sup>8</sup>

The duke's efforts to link abolitionists to radicals and revolutionaries was unfair but effective. He insulted and demeaned Wilberforce and all his fellow abolitionists by stating that they were all fanatics or hypocrites. He then directly linked British abolitionists to dangerous French revolutionaries through the use of a letter, as well as through ideology, by showing that anti-abolitionists were being referred to as 'opponents to liberty'.<sup>9</sup>

Colonel John Fenton Cawthorne<sup>10</sup> openly questioned the abolitionists' motives during the slavery debates. On 7 February 1794, during a discussion of

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<sup>6</sup> John Baker Holroyd, MP for Coventry (1780 and 1781-4) and Bristol (1790-1802), was created Baron Sheffield in 1802 and first earl of Sheffield in 1816. He published *Observations on the Project for Abolishing the Slave Trade* in 1790.

<sup>7</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1225.

<sup>8</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 659.

<sup>9</sup> The connection between French revolutionary principles and abolition will be discussed in Section Five of this chapter.

<sup>10</sup> MP for Lincoln (1783-96) and Lancaster (1806-7, 1812-18, and 1820-31); may have had an interest in the slaving port of Lancaster. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons 1790-1829*, vol. 3, 737.

Wilberforce's motion to stop supplying foreign territories with slaves, he remarked: 'Whatever were the pretended motives of religion, justice, and humanity, he suspected the real motives of the abolitionists were attributable to their disaffection. Long had that party betrayed symptoms of their hatred towards the constitution of this country. It was our duty to counteract the premeditated evil.'<sup>11</sup> By challenging the professed motives of the abolitionists, Cawthorne promoted anti-abolitionism as a way to protect the constitution, a subject of prime importance for conservatives because for them the British constitution confirmed the role of the monarchy and upheld the existing social order.<sup>12</sup>

Lord Abingdon<sup>13</sup> also queried the abolitionists' motives. On 2 May 1794, as the House of Lords debated whether to abolish the practice of supplying foreign territories with slaves, Abingdon discussed the impropriety of casting aside 250 years of Parliament and common law sanctioned trading and feared the destruction of Britain's colonial possessions: 'And for what? Is it to obtain the votes and interest of any description of men in this country, in order to secure the seats of individual members in another house of parliament?'<sup>14</sup> He charged the abolitionists in the House of Lords with supporting such issues as a way of swaying voters and patrons to achieve a House of Commons favourable to bills that they wished to see passed.<sup>15</sup> Abingdon supposed that this was the real reason that modifications to the slave trade were being deemed safe and favourable by some of his peers.

A number of MPs with West Indian connections believed that the abolitionists were hiding their true intentions behind the guise of abolishing the slave

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<sup>11</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 1440.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27. After the French Revolution began, conservatives started to believe that if their constitution was successfully attacked, the fabric of society would be destroyed because social distinctions would be destroyed. See H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977), 289. Loyalist associations echoed the constitutionalist sentiment of the anti-abolitionists. Protecting the constitution was of prime importance in the era of the French Revolution because it ensured social and political stability. See Frank O'Gorman, 'Pitt and the "Tory" Reaction to the French Revolution, 1787-1815', in *Britain and the French Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 28-36.

<sup>13</sup> Willoughby Bertie, fourth earl of Abingdon, influenced seats in Oxford and Berkshire. He voted against abolition in 1792 and 1799, seeing it as a dangerous form of Jacobinism. See William C. Lowe, 'Bertie, Willoughby, fourth earl of Abingdon (1740-1799)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2280](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2280), accessed 3 December 2012].

<sup>14</sup> *PHE* XXXI, col. 468.

<sup>15</sup> Historians continue to debate whether antislavery was a means to help the classes to which the reformers belonged. For a brief discussion of this debate see Thomas L. Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Human Sensibility', *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), 345-50.

trade for humanitarian reasons. As Bryan Edwards remarked on 3 April 1798, during a discussion on allowing Wilberforce to bring in another motion for abolition:

What must the planters infer from such a procedure, but this either that the hon. gentleman [Wilberforce] is determined that, unless the measure of abolition is carried into effect by himself only, and upon his own terms, it shall not be carried at all; or that he has some other object in view, which he does not think proper in the present stage of the business, to openly avow. That object, Sir (as the planters suspect) is nothing less than to abolish not only the Slave trade, but the system of servitude which is established in the West Indies in consequence of it. The hon. gentleman thinks perhaps, that the planters have had the staff long enough in their own hands, and he now proposes to make them change situations with their negroes.<sup>16</sup>

He asserted that the abolitionists' true goal was likely to be the total emancipation of the slaves and the consequential destruction of all the power and land of the West Indian planters. Edwards charged the abolitionists with putting the interests of the slaves ahead of the safety of the colonists. He also implied that the abolitionists' true intention was so dangerous and so unpopular that it was intentionally hidden. Such ulterior motives continued to be discussed by anti-abolitionists throughout the abolition debates and was partly realised on 17 March 1807 when, immediately after achieving abolition, Hugh Percy requested leave to bring in a bill for gradual emancipation.<sup>17</sup>

The anti-abolitionists frequently attacked Wilberforce's knowledge and motivation. After the French abolished slavery throughout their empire it became easier for anti-abolitionists to connect British abolitionists with the resulting destruction ensured by French revolutionary principles. On 3 April 1798 Edwards made this connection: 'I should not have suspected the hon. gentleman [Wilberforce] was any great admirer of French politics or French principles. Perhaps he considers their proceedings in emancipating the slaves, as an exception to their general conduct. If so, I can satisfy him that he is grossly mistaken'.<sup>18</sup> He directly linked Wilberforce's motion for abolition to the application of French revolutionary principles and activities. He also challenged Wilberforce's knowledge of actual plantation conditions: 'I blush for the hon. gentleman [Wilberforce] more than for

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<sup>16</sup> *PHE XXXIII*, col. 1387.

<sup>17</sup> *PD IX*, cols. 142-6. Sir Charles Pole declared that this motion was proof that the planters' suspicions had been correct: 'he rejoiced that it had been brought forward thus early, because it shewed the cloven foot, which had been attempted to be concealed: he believed that this was one main object in view by the abolitionists. It was fraught with much evil, and he trusted it would open the eyes of the public, to the intentions of the promoters of those measures.' *Ibid.*, col. 143.

<sup>18</sup> *PHE XXXIII*, col. 1387.

the objects of his defamation, when I hear him quote two or three solitary instances of improper treatment of the negroes in a single island, and dwell on them as a just representation of the general behaviour of the planters throughout all the West Indies.’<sup>19</sup> These two statements demonstrate his confident assertions of Wilberforce’s lack of knowledge and the dangerous origins of his inspiration. This belittling of Wilberforce’s argument for abolition by one of the most famous planters in and authors on the West Indies must have inspired doubts as to Wilberforce’s motivation for pushing abolition on the House year after year.

Other abolitionists in and out of Parliament faced a number of attacks by anti-abolitionist MPs during this period. Their knowledge and motivations were questioned, as was the appropriateness of anyone getting involved in the matter who did not have a stake in the trade or first-hand knowledge of life in the West Indies. On 12 June 1804, during a debate on Wilberforce’s motion for abolition, Fuller declared:

Those who were the most violent in their outcries against the slave trade were the haters of the West India colonies. They hated them because they were the means of bringing such a mass of opulence into the mother country. They hated that opulence, because it tended to promote the dignity of the monarchy, and to uphold the constitution, the strength, and the glory of the country.<sup>20</sup>

Fuller classed the abolitionists as anti-monarchy, anti-British, and anti-empire. He accused them of basing their opinions upon personal distaste for the monarchy and wealth rather than on facts and reason. This dislike for the colonies and colonists, the anti-abolitionists argued, was not enough of a reason actively to destroy a branch of Britain’s commerce and risk their colonial possessions.

The evidence used to justify abolishing the slave trade (or lack thereof) was regularly scrutinised and challenged by anti-abolitionists during the slavery debates.<sup>21</sup> On 28 February 1805, during a discussion of Wilberforce’s motion for abolition, General Isaac Gascoyne commented on Wilberforce’s change of strategy:

he supposed the hon. mover [Wilberforce] to have great confidence in the measure, but that he now found himself absolutely deficient in the sources of those appeals to the feelings of the house, which he was wont to use on former occasions. He seemed to have nothing new to urge on the score of humanity and benevolence; nothing to say about the cruelty and oppression of the trade, and the inefficacy of all

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1388.

<sup>20</sup> *PD II*, col. 651.

<sup>21</sup> Attacks on the abolitionists’ evidence produced in Parliament will be discussed in Section Two, below.

regulations concerning it. . . . Since the last regulations were passed, not a solitary instance of their violation could the hon. gent. produce.<sup>22</sup>

He challenged Wilberforce to bring forward evidence of any remaining faults in the current state of the slave trade. As Wilberforce had regularly introduced his motions for abolition using grave examples of death and mistreatment suffered by the African slaves, Gascoyne was able to use the absence of these emotional examples as evidence that the trade had been sufficiently and humanely ameliorated.

Abolitionist rhetoric made great use of the term ‘humanity’ to serve their cause and gain support both in and out of Parliament. Members of the West Indian interest in Parliament, however, were not only able to refute charges of inhumane conditions and actions on the slave ships and the plantations, but were occasionally able to turn them against the abolitionists themselves. On 28 February 1805 John Fuller compared his own humanity to that of Wilberforce’s:

I have given permission to my own negroes to cultivate considerable spots of ground for themselves, and ample time for this purpose. I have lodged and clothed, and have engaged a physician to attend and prescribe to them. I have done every thing for their comfort. Can the hon. gent. [Wilberforce] say that he has done so much, with all his talk and noise about humanity, for the peasantry of Yorkshire?<sup>23</sup>

His mocking description of Wilberforce’s calls for abolition as simply ‘talk and noise’ (all talk and no action one might say today), contrasted with the actual actions he had taken to ensure the men and women in his care were looked after, made a striking comparison. No one doubted that Wilberforce was at least partly motivated by humanitarianism, but Fuller attempted to challenge his credibility by favourably comparing the state of slaves in the colonies to the lives of Wilberforce’s own Yorkshire poor.

## **2. Attacks on the Abolitionists’ Evidence**

Anti-abolitionists employed specific facts, statistics, and anecdotes to show the importance of the slave trade to Britain’s commercial and manufacturing interests as well as highlighting the improving or reasonable death rates for the voyages and in the plantations. They declared that the abolitionists’ anecdotes were falsified, exaggerated, impossible, or out-of-date. They drew comparisons between living conditions and mortality in the colonies and on the slave ships with life in Britain

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<sup>22</sup> *PD* III, col. 642.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 657.

and on other ocean-going vessels.<sup>24</sup> By attributing the emotional dependence of the abolitionists' arguments on exaggerated or falsified evidence, anti-abolitionists were able to discredit the abolitionists' stance and convince undecided MPs that they were not being given accurate descriptions of the state of the African trade and the lives of the slaves in the colonies.

The dangers of the middle passage and the need to regulate it were questioned by anti-abolitionists during a number of debates in the 1780s and 1790s. On 25 June 1788, during a discussion in the House of Lords on a bill to limit the slave trade, the earl of Sandwich noted: 'He had heard it declared, that the African Trade was the bane of British seamen, and that Africa was their grave. He knew, from experience, that a voyage to Africa was not less healthy than any other voyage. It was not the African climate that killed the seamen, but the spirituous liquors with which the captains of the merchant supplied them.'<sup>25</sup> He maintained that if sailors did die more frequently on ships participating in the African trade, it was the fault of alcohol and their superiors, rather than the nature of the voyage, the weather, or the ship's construction. This was a problem, therefore, that was unrelated to the trade, the merchants and traders, and the colonists. It was also an argument being presented by those without direct knowledge of the trade. He attempted to appeal to the logic of his audience by demonstrating that the passing of the bill would not solve this problem.

Anti-abolitionists also refuted the specific anecdotes of inhumane and unimaginable horrors advanced by abolitionists used to introduce and support bills for abolition. On 19 April 1791, during a discussion on Wilberforce's motion for abolition, John Fenton Cawthorne challenged the legitimacy of William Smith's<sup>26</sup> story of a ten-month-old baby, who was flogged, killed, and thrown overboard from a slave ship heading for the West Indies:

Mr. Cawthorne said, that the story of the child, from its enormity, was impossible, and many other parts of the evidence might be refuted on the same ground. Of this there were many instances; one man said that the captains of French slave ships, when they had not a sufficient quantity of water for the number on board, preferred giving them arsenick to throwing them into the sea; another believed that the

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<sup>24</sup> In the later eighteenth century a concerted effort was made to establish and track mortality rates. This trend allowed for a more accurate understanding of the population makeup of Britain and her colonies. See Julian Hoppit, 'Political arithmetic in eighteenth-century England', *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), 528-9.

<sup>25</sup> *PHE* XXVII, col. 644.

<sup>26</sup> MP for Sudbury (1784-90 and 1796-1802), Camelford borough (1791-6), and Norwich (1802-30).

religion of Angola was the Roman Catholic. Did evidence so absurd deserve the least attention?<sup>27</sup>

The Abolition Society based many of its arguments on moral and humanitarian grounds throughout this period and their publications were often devoted to the inhumane treatment of slaves and the terrible conditions aboard slave ships and on the plantations.<sup>28</sup> They also stressed the impolicy of the trade. Cawthorne argued that it would be foolish to believe everything the abolitionists said and published on the topic as much of their evidence appeared to be so exaggerated and outlandish that it could not be true.

On 7 February 1794, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion to stop supplying foreign territories with slaves, Alderman Nathaniel Newnham commented on the abolitionists' use of overly dramatic evidence:

Much had been urged of the shameless barbarities of their inhuman masters. History had been traced back for more than a century to select the records of these abominable crimes; and what had been thus diligently searched for, was aggregated and exaggerated, to serve the purposes of enthusiasm, and delude the weak and pitying multitude.<sup>29</sup>

He believed the abolitionists constructed and presented these stories in such a way as to persuade the wider public to join their cause.<sup>30</sup> Newnham depicted the public as the 'weak and pitying multitude', presumably uninformed and uneducated, which was in direct contrast with the wise and critical MPs in Parliament whose duty it was to act according to facts and from evidence rather than on emotion and exaggerated tales. Anti-abolitionists continued to challenge the legitimacy and accuracy of the abolitionists' evidence throughout the slave trade debates. Those with first-hand knowledge of the trade and of colonial slavery were able to do so in detail.

Anti-abolitionists compared life in Britain and her West Indian colonies to show that the abolitionists' claims about the inhumane treatment and environment in the West Indies were exaggerated and misleading. On 26 February 1793, during a discussion on Wilberforce's motion to address the trade shortly, Sir William Young noted:

It had often been said that by the irregularity of a number of males and females imported onto the islands, and the excessive labour to which they were exposed, very few children were reared, and that this was the reason it became necessary to import so many Africans every year.

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<sup>27</sup> *PHE* XXIX, cols. 331-2.

<sup>28</sup> Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade', 566.

<sup>29</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 1441.

<sup>30</sup> The anti-abolitionists' attack on the abolitionists' use of exaggerated stories to draw sympathy and support from the wider public will be also discussed in Section Three, below.

He declared, that having viewed the negro villages on many estates, he had seen as many children in each, as could be found in any village of the same size in England.<sup>31</sup>

He did not agree that the nature of the slave trade had impacted on the birth rates in Britain's West Indian colonies and that, by contrast, plantation slaves appeared to be raising as many children as England's villagers. Contrary to many of the abolitionists, Sir William had first-hand knowledge of life in the colonies. Anti-abolitionists were able to make favourable comparisons of conditions in the West Indies with those in Britain in order to diminish the abolitionists' claims of inferior treatment and harsher conditions in the colonies.

Anti-abolitionists defended themselves and the West Indian planters and merchants as they attacked the abolitionists' arguments. The personal attacks on the humanity and practices of the planters and merchants were difficult to refute without invoking a defensive tone and specific evidence to contradict the abolitionists' assertions. On 15 March 1796, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion for abolition, General Richard Smith<sup>32</sup> noted: 'Much abuse had been thrown out against the planters for their cruelty, &c.'<sup>33</sup> The term 'abuse' implied that the abolitionists were taking unnecessary and harmful actions against the West Indians; the abolitionists were frequently charged with this during the debates. On 15 May 1797, during a discussion of Wilberforce's request for the Commons to go into a committee to discuss abolition, Isaac Gascoyne challenged the stereotypes the abolitionists had been presenting:

the merchants who had been stigmatized with the epithets inhuman, cruel, &c. had conducted themselves in a very different manner; for at Liverpool a meeting had been called at which it was resolved, that no ship should be allowed to clear out, whose captain and owners had not entered into an engagement under a penalty of 1,000*l.*, that they would fulfil every part of the act that had been passed for the regulation of the middle passage, even after that act had expired.<sup>34</sup>

He argued that the image of the West Indian merchant being advanced by the abolitionists was false and he was able to demonstrate an instance of humane self-regulation. With such self-regulation and enforcement being undertaken by the merchants themselves, parliamentary interference might be deemed an unnecessary

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<sup>31</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 514.

<sup>32</sup> MP for Hindon (1774-5, 1776-7), Wendover (1780-4), and Wareham (1790-6).

<sup>33</sup> *PHE* XXXII, col. 869.

<sup>34</sup> *PHE* XXXIII, col. 573.

or improper interference with private business activities amongst humane Britons and West Indians. Following this logic, abolition was unnecessary.

Anti-abolitionists also denied the assertion that the slave trade was immoral or against God's will. Some abolitionists promoted the view that Britain had lost the American colonies because they participated in the evil practices of trading and holding slaves.<sup>35</sup> Abolition was then endorsed as the principal means of atonement. Anti-abolitionists highlighted the flaws in this logic. On 16 March 1807, during the third reading of the bill for abolition in the Commons, George Hibbert disproved the connection Lord Henry Petty had drawn between the slave trade and God's wrath:

The hon. member has intimated a conjecture, that the crimes attendant upon the Slave Trade in the West Indies have provoked the judgement of God, and that the hurricanes to which those climates are subject are the signals of his vengeance. Sir, there is much moral and physical evil in the world, but it is a bold and rash attempt by any mortal to impute that evil as a judgement of Providence upon the heads on which it may chance to fall. ... Jamaica has been for 20 years free from hurricanes, that period no way marked by a forbearance as to the purchase or labour of slaves.<sup>36</sup>

He showed that following Henry Petty's logic, Jamaica should be continuing to face an onslaught of destructive weather due to the increase in the trade, but, instead, she had experienced two decades of relative peace. Anti-abolitionists such as Hibbert continued to undermine the abolitionists' arguments throughout the era of abolition and, as demonstrated throughout this section, he and others were frequently able to cast doubt upon the evidence put forward in favour of abolition.

### **3. Attacks on the Abolitionists' Methods**

Anti-abolitionists and supporters of the slave trade and slavery took issue with some of the methods that abolitionists used to gain popular support for their cause. They questioned the propriety of making long speeches and presenting numerous petitions signed by thousands to both Houses of Parliament, the practice of making abolition an issue in elections, and the intentional spreading of abolitionist propaganda to the wider public through the use pamphlets, newspapers, and sermons. Anti-abolitionists did produce their own petitions and propaganda, but never to the same

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<sup>35</sup> Belief in Providence was widespread. If Britain had lost her American colonies due to a failure in God's eyes, the slave trade could be considered a liability for their future success. See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 373.

<sup>36</sup> *PD IX*, col. 115.

extent.<sup>37</sup> They wished the issue to be kept out of the churches, elections, and the wider public's consideration. Throughout the abolition debates anti-abolitionists attacked these practices in order to discredit the abolitionists in Parliament and their supporters out-of-doors.

The number of petitions submitted to Parliament that related to national issues rose dramatically in the late eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists used petitions to provide evidence of popular support for their respective sides. The abolitionists' methods of gaining signatures were challenged and even derided in the Commons. On 25 April 1792, during a debate on Dundas' resolutions for a gradual abolition, Lord Sheffield remarked: 'As to the petitions, they rather disinclined him to abolition... He knew they were not the voluntary expressions of the people, but far the greater part had been procured by associations, and he should ever condemn such attempts to control the deliberations of parliament, as he thought them highly unconstitutional'.<sup>39</sup> Sheffield argued that because the petitions had been organised by abolition societies, rather than being an autonomous expression of public support for the issue, they could not be trusted and might actually be illegal. Shortly after this statement, Colonel Henry Phipps<sup>40</sup> commented on the specific practices abolition societies reportedly used to collect signatures:

it was evident that gentlemen were not influenced so much by their own reason, as by the petitions on the table; petitions, which he would not hesitate to call ridiculous and contemptible. ... many knew not what they signed, nor were they capable of judging in a case of so much importance. Many of them were poor ignorant people; many others were just school-boys, and almost all deluded by persons who went about in search of signatures, and put these questions to the people: as freemen can you be friends to slavery? As christians, can you wish to tolerate murder? As Englishmen, must you not wish for the abolition of a trade which is attended with both?<sup>41</sup>

The exact language used in petitions was important in the late eighteenth century as politicians attempted to decide who was worthy of influencing decisions taken in Parliament.<sup>42</sup> Petitions calling for universal suffrage were regularly thrown out

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<sup>37</sup> Anti-abolitionist petitions focused on policy and concerns for the welfare of Britons, in contrast to petitions for abolition that listed humanity as the first ground for their argument. See Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade', 567. For further discussion of anti-abolitionist petitioning see Chapter One.

<sup>38</sup> Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 291.

<sup>39</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1229.

<sup>40</sup> MP for Totnes (1784-90) and Scarborough (1790-4).

<sup>41</sup> *PHE* XXIX, col. 1241.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, vii.

because of their informal language.<sup>43</sup> Phipps was concerned that the petitions were making too great an impact on the undecided members of the House. He wished to remind members of the emotionally charged, potentially misleading language abolitionists used to procure signatures, as well as the uninformed, uneducated, and possibly underage, individuals whose signatures were now playing too large a role in the debate. Both men believed that, instead of demonstrating the true wishes of the people, the petitions actually exposed the underhand methods that abolitionists employed to gain support for their cause.

The issue of the appropriateness of petitioning was frequently questioned during this period. Anti-abolitionists challenged the legality of the anti-slavery and anti-slave trade petitions presented to Parliament. On 11 April 1793, during a discussion on abolition in the House of Lords, the earl of Abingdon noted:

the ground of every petition to the king, or to either House of parliament (legal ground I mean) is and can only be for two causes – either against the infringement of a constitutional right by the legislature, or by any branch of it; or, that right being so infringed, for a redress of grievances. ... let us see whether the petitions that have been and may be again presented, for the abolition of the slave trade, are founded upon the infringement of any of those rights; and if not, whether they are not consequently illegal?<sup>44</sup>

Abingdon argued that because the issue was not related to any infringement of a constitutional right it was not an issue on which Parliament or the monarchy could be petitioned. The petitions brought forward by the abolitionists, therefore, were unconstitutional and those that had been laid on the table should not have been accepted. He believed that the abolitionists were acting improperly if not illegally by seeking this type of support for their cause.

Anti-abolitionists also objected to the nature of the abolitionists' speeches in Parliament during the slavery debates. On 27 April 1792, as debate continued on Dundas's resolutions, Lord Carhampton first commented on the abuse being hurled at West Indian merchants and planters in Britain and in the colonies, before questioning the abolitionists' notions of humanity:

Gentlemen might talk of inhumanity, but did he not know what right any one had to do so inhumane a thing, as to inflict a speech of four hours long on a set of innocent, worthy, and respectable men.

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<sup>43</sup> Janet Sorensen has interpreted this as a way of excluding commoners from having an influence on Parliament. See Janet Sorensen, 'Vulgar Tongues: Canting Dictionaries and the Language of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37 (2004), 436. It is interesting to note that Wilberforce was one of many objectors to the 'disrespectful language' contained within petitions for extending the franchise. See Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, 30-4.

<sup>44</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 657.

Gentlemen had continued this abuse day after day, both in their long and short speeches, some of which would have been equally proper for a House of Commons, a pulpit, or a conventicle. If there had not been a back door behind the Speaker's chair for infirm gentlemen to escape, he did believe, they would have died on the spot<sup>45</sup>

His somewhat sarcastic description of inhumanity challenged the supposedly humanitarian actions of some abolitionists by pointing to the negative impact of the slave trade debates on the politicians.

Slave trade debates sometimes lasted until three or four in the morning and some abolitionists (Wilberforce in particular) introduced bills for abolition with speeches that lasted for several hours. In 1796 these practices were used against the abolitionists to defend Parliament's decision to reverse their May 1792 decision gradually to abolish slavery. On 26 February Edward Hyde East<sup>46</sup> recalled the specific circumstances of their 1792 vote:

he wished gentlemen to recollect, that it had been passed at a very late hour of the night, after the original motion had been negatived by a great majority, and after several other intermediate motions for a speedier abolition had also been negatived. Several gentlemen had also given their vote for that resolution from a sort of implied compact, that by doing so, they should avoid the mischief of having so dangerous a question agitated in the interval; and therefore chose the less of two evils. Instead of fulfilling this engagement, he [Wilberforce] had brought forward the question every session since that period.<sup>47</sup>

He was able to show that the nature of the debate, its late hour, and the 'implied compact' had affected its outcome. East argued that it had been unfair to ask men to make such an important decision while deprived of sleep and confronted with many different motions. He stated that sense had since prevailed and, in the current climate of war, unrest, and financial strain, the House had decided it would be unwise to uphold its prior decision. He also pointed to Wilberforce's continual motions regarding the slave trade that may have contributed to the unrest in the colonies.<sup>48</sup> Parliament chose not to uphold its decision and, much to the anti-abolitionists' satisfaction, abolition was not enacted for another decade.

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<sup>45</sup> *PHE* XXIX, cols. 1281-2.

<sup>46</sup> East, MP for Great Bedwyn (1792-6) and Winchester (1823-31), was the great-grandson of an early Jamaican colonist and a teller for the West Indian lobby in 1793. He was also a life-long member of the West Indian planters' committee in London. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 3, 659-60.

<sup>47</sup> *PHE* XXXI, col. 1330.

<sup>48</sup> Parliament was concerned about the growing number of newspaper reports on parliamentary proceedings. They were afraid that their speeches, while acceptable within the Houses of Parliament, might be interpreted as seditious or dangerous by the lower classes who were outside the political

Abolitionists frequently used descriptions of the terrible conditions and unimaginable hardships experienced by slaves to introduce and support their bills for abolition. Anti-abolitionists attacked these appeals to the passions of the Houses and called on the abolitionists to speak openly about the probable outcomes and practical solutions needed to enact and enforce abolition.<sup>49</sup> On 5 July 1799 the earl of Westmorland noted:

It has been the practice upon this occasion to endeavour to work upon your lordships passions, by animated descriptions of the miseries of the slave trade and slavery, paying no great respect to your lordships – by insinuating that such pictures were necessary to rouse your feelings. But, in my judgement, the time would have been better spent if it had been employed in showing in what manner the bill before us would tend to remedy any one of the enormities complained of.<sup>50</sup>

He argued that by relying on this method of appealing to the emotions of the peers the abolitionists were actually insulting their intelligence and underestimating their level of understanding. He might also have been implying that the bill would be unable to achieve its stated goals, hence the abolitionists' unwillingness to expand upon the likely outcomes of the measure.

Anti-abolitionists also charged the abolitionists with inappropriate timing. After France declared war on Britain on 1 February 1793, anti-abolitionists and abolitionists alike commented on the dangers of discussing such an emotionally charged topic as abolition when the country was engaged in defending its colonies and trying to preserve its trade routes. On 26 February 1793, during a discussion of Wilberforce's request to address abolition, Sir William Young noted:

it would be prudent to defer the discussion of it to some more proper season. Men's minds, both at home and in the West-Indies, were at this moment too much heated for sober and cool deliberation. In England, and in that House, many exaggerated accounts had been given of the situation and treatment of the negroes... by these accounts the passions of the House had been excited against the dictates of judgment and sound policy.<sup>51</sup>

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arena. These fears could be extended to include slaves in the West Indies who were able to get news from English newspapers and by word of mouth. See Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, 162. It is important to note that the rhetoric contained within newspaper reports was also affected by each newspaper's rhetorical practices and political beliefs; this could lead to further confusion and misrepresentation. See Dror Warhman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', *Past and Present*, 136 (1992), 85.

<sup>49</sup> Anti-abolitionists in contrast frequently focused on probable outcomes. See Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade', 575.

<sup>50</sup> *PHE* XXXIV, col. 1110.

<sup>51</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 513.

Young was concerned that the current state of war, in combination with the exaggerated accounts of ill treatment of the slaves aboard their ships and on their colonial plantations, would impact on the House's judgement. Abolition supporter Lord Harrowby<sup>52</sup> expressed a similar concern about the timing of an abolition bill in 1804, but his concern was over the point in the session in which they found themselves discussing it. On 3 July he remarked:

he was apprehensive it had been introduced too late in the session, to afford reasonable expectation that it could be passed before the rising of parliament. He thought some blame was imputable to those who introduced it, for having delayed it to so advanced a period of the session. He did not see how it could be pressed through the house, keeping in view that rigid impartiality which it was the duty and the practice of their lordships to observe, whenever the fortunes of individuals were concerned.<sup>53</sup>

Harrowby was concerned that the Lords could not give the bill the time it required when it dealt with complex issues of property and wealth. He stressed the need for 'impartiality' and time to calmly reflect upon the matter. This need for cool-headed thinking was frequently stressed by anti-abolitionists in opposition to the emotionally driven arguments and sentiments of the abolitionist lobby in Parliament. Harrowby blamed Wilberforce for bringing in his bill for abolition at such a late date and forcing the Lords either to postpone the matter or to abandon the bill. Anti-abolitionist Earl St. Vincent shared this view: 'To pass such a measure as the present hastily, might, he said, eventually lead to consequences equally dreadful with those which had taken place in St. Domingo, and even to the extirpation of every white in the West India islands.'<sup>54</sup> He employed images of revolution and destruction to stress the need for lengthy discussion and deliberation on a bill of such importance; this could not be accomplished at this late stage in the session. The bill was consequently lost.

On 25 April 1806, during a discussion of a bill to prevent Britons from importing slaves into newly conquered territories in the West Indies, Tarleton challenged Wilberforce to declare his intentions to bring in a motion for abolition in the current session: 'Ever since he had a seat in parliament, we had an annual debate on the subject, and as the measure could not be carried in its general form, they were now coming by a sidewind on the planters.'<sup>55</sup> He accused the abolitionists of using

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<sup>52</sup> Dudley Ryder, MP for Tiverton (1784-1803).

<sup>53</sup> *PD* II, col. 873.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 931.

<sup>55</sup> *PD* XVI (London: R. Bagshaw, 1810), col. 919.

an underhand method to attack the livelihoods of the planters. He believed the bill under consideration was actually an attempt to enact abolition in the colonies because there was no other reason for Wilberforce to have refrained from bringing in his annual motion for abolition.

Anti-abolitionists in Parliament also attacked the methods abolitionists used to influence voters and elections. On 18 February 1796, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion for abolition, Sir William Young lamented the 'solicitations and undue influence that had been used to make a bad impression on the minds of gentlemen':

It had been custom to send a circular letter to the patrons of boroughs, to try to prejudice their minds, against the slave trade; and to corporations ... to instruct their members to vote for abolition. To counties and places where election was more general and in the hands of many, this circular was sent to leading characters, to influence the multitude, and induce them to petition against the trade.<sup>56</sup>

He believed that abolitionists were intentionally influencing rotten boroughs and the uneducated public to promote their cause. By directly encouraging the wider public to petition Parliament for abolition they were underhandedly influencing political debates and MPs' opinions. Gascoyne shared these concerns. On 10 February 1807, as the Commons debated the bill for abolition, he complained:

The attempts to make a popular clamour against this trade were never so conspicuous as during the late Election, when the public newspapers teemed with abuse of this trade, and when promises were required from the different candidates that they would oppose its continuance. There never had been any question agitated since that of parliamentary reform, in which so much industry had been exerted to raise a popular prejudice and clamour, and to make the trade an object of universal detestation.<sup>57</sup>

He highlighted the abolitionists' unfair requirement that politicians state their stance on the topic, the abuse and slander thrown at the planters to discredit their position and evidence, and the sheer amount of work and energy put into raising support for abolition and into demonising the African trade. Gascoyne's remarks emphasised how much work abolitionists had to perform in order to gain support for their cause. He suggested that this was perhaps a sign that, rather than being an obvious logical decision, individuals needed some convincing to take up the abolitionist cause.

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<sup>56</sup> *PHE* XXXII, col. 742.

<sup>57</sup> *PD* VIII, col. 719.

#### 4. Attacks on the Abolitionists' Logic

The logic and reasoning behind the call for abolition was charged with containing fatal flaws by anti-abolitionists throughout the debates. Anti-abolitionists challenged the legal basis for the bills, the absurdity of the abolitionists' accusations and evidence, and Britain's inability to enforce abolition. In contrast to the abolitionists, who focused on humanitarian aims, anti-abolitionists emphasised the likely outcomes of abolition in order to discredit abolitionist logic: they foresaw economic losses, weakened national defences, and great benefits for other trading nations to their own detriment.<sup>58</sup> They also attacked the supposed benefits for Africa that the bills were intended to produce. The anti-abolitionists were able to attack the logic behind abolition in a variety of ways; this helped them postpone abolition and defeat several abolition bills.

A number of anti-abolitionists emphasised the absurdity of the abolitionists' logic and evidence. On 26 May 1788, during a debate on William Dolben's<sup>59</sup> slave-limiting bill, Lord Penrhyn remarked: 'It was absurd to suppose that men, whose profit depended on the health and vigour of the African natives, would purposely torment and distress them during their passage, so as to endanger their lives'.<sup>60</sup> Penrhyn's argument, that the middle passage was not intentionally difficult or dangerous for the slaves, was deployed to oppose the need for the further shipping regulations. He reasoned that no one would intend a voyage to be particularly challenging or deadly for a ship's occupants. He also argued that the very nature of the master-slave relationship ensured that slave-owners would want to take care of their slaves as their livelihoods directly depended on them remaining healthy.<sup>61</sup> The way in which he phrased this defence, however, attacked the reasoning behind the abolitionist argument and claims that the middle passage was particularly difficult or inhumane.

The absurd nature of the abolitionists' logic was also emphasised by Henry Dundas on 15 March 1796. He argued, 'it was absurd to talk of a wish to serve the

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<sup>58</sup> Drescher, 'People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade', 575.

<sup>59</sup> MP for Oxford (1768 and 1780-1806) and Northamptonshire (1768-74).

<sup>60</sup> *PHE* XXVII, col. 578.

<sup>61</sup> In England there was a universal belief that by holding property men would take an interest in their workers' welfare and in their communities, providing relief and necessities as needed: anti-abolitionists argued that this paternalism should be being passed on by slave-owners in the West Indies. For more information on the application of paternalism in property owner-worker relationships, see O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832*, 227-32. On 19 April 1791, during a debate on Wilberforce's bill for abolition, John Stanley argued that it was in the best interest of the planters to care for their slaves. See *PHE* XXIX, col. 316.

cause of humanity, by throwing the trade into the hands of those who would not carry it on with so much mildness as we did'.<sup>62</sup> Not only did Dundas call the assumptions of the abolitionists 'absurd', but he advanced the claim that a likely outcome of abolition was that the Africans would face greater hardships on the increased number of foreign trading vessels which would step in to replace Britain's role in the trade. Both Penrhyn and Dundas focused on the innate paternalist nature of Britain's West Indian colonists and plantation owners, the master-slave relationship, and the shipping regulations already in place to weaken the abolitionists' accusations and challenge the likelihood that abolition and additional trading and shipping regulations would benefit the slaves.<sup>63</sup> Paternalists promoted the idea that workers should be treated fairly, with respect, and with kindness; not all paternalists, however, believed that workers should be considered as equals.<sup>64</sup> As John Stanley<sup>65</sup> emphasised, on 19 April 1791, during a debate on Wilberforce's motion for abolition: 'If slavery was abolished, the negroes would suppose themselves on a footing with their masters, and then an end would be put to all order, management and safety. If the measure was carried into execution, he thought we might as well give up our colonies and islands entirely in the same moment.'<sup>66</sup> In order to undermine further the abolitionists' position, he questioned the logic of modifying existing institutions that encouraged stability in the colonies. Although emancipation was not the main issue under discussion, Stanley and others believed that this was the abolitionists' true goal and were careful to emphasise this concern in the debates.

Anti-abolitionists emphasised wider-reaching effects of abolition to demonstrate the great number of negative consequences it would have on the country and the colonies and to refute the abolitionists' claims about its benefits. On 2 April 1792 James Baillie asked the House: 'how could compensation be made to the many thousand manufacturers, who at present find employment in providing the numberless articles that are daily wanted for use and consumption in the West India islands, and who must sooner or later experience the distress that will result from the

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<sup>62</sup> *PHE* XXXII, cols. 863-4.

<sup>63</sup> Anti-abolitionists argued that West Indian planters, as members of the landed class, shared the governing class's paternalist beliefs that society was naturally hierarchical. Wealthier men (such as the planters) were required to care for and guide the poorer classes (such as their slaves) and the poor were bound to serve the rich for their own advantage. See David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979), 4-6 and 22.

<sup>64</sup> Kim Lawes, *Paternalism & Politics: The Revival of Paternalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 25.

<sup>65</sup> MP for Wootton Bassett (1790-6).

<sup>66</sup> *PHE* XXIX, cols. 315-6.

present phrenzy, if the colonies should be suffered to go to ruin?’<sup>67</sup> He implied that the abolitionists were not providing them with sufficient information and were promoting a misleading image of abolition that emphasised its benefits for Africans instead of the hardships for their own colonists. The term ‘present phrenzy’ showed his distaste for abolition’s popular support and also implied a belief that the support might be fleeting.

General Smith stressed the House’s duty to care for the West Indian interest as well as for the African people. On 15 March 1796, during a debate on Wilberforce’s bill for abolition, he noted:

It had been said, that the continuation of the slave trade was contrary to justice and humanity; so was the act of pressing seamen; but if he attempted to abolish it, it would be defended upon the plea of necessity. Upon the same plea, then, he opposed the abolition of the slave trade. He wished to have justice and humanity shown towards the proprietors of lands in the West Indies, and to persons interested in the prosperity and cultivation of those lands in our own country, as well as to the negroes in the coast of Africa.<sup>68</sup>

His statement contained two important points that contradicted the logic of abolition. The first was that other practices, such as impressing seamen,<sup>69</sup> were condoned and upheld by Parliament, yet might also be considered ‘contrary to justice and humanity’; these principles on their own were therefore not enough to abolish long-standing, necessary practices.<sup>70</sup> His second point was that abolition would not promote the cause of humanity because it would benefit only one group of people while injuring several others.<sup>71</sup> The underlying logic of abolition was therefore flawed. As Tarleton remarked on 30 May 1804, during a discussion on Wilberforce’s motion for abolition: ‘Evils were to be met with in every direction; war was an evil of the greatest kind, and yet we were obliged to endure it. Many things were tolerated which could not be justified on strict principle. Though war was an evil, we still engaged in it; and though the national debt was a grievance, we still laid on new taxes, and contracted for loans.’<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1082.

<sup>68</sup> *PHE XXXII*, col. 869.

<sup>69</sup> On 1 March 1799, during a discussion on whether Wilberforce could bring in a bill for abolition, Colonel Gascoyne also used the analogy of impressing seamen to demonstrate that unjust or inhumane practices sometimes needed to be continued. See *PHE XXXIV*, col. 537.

<sup>70</sup> Abstract principles and their role in Parliament are discussed in Section Five, below.

<sup>71</sup> Conservatives attempted to argue that no government had the right to take away anyone’s possessions because it would mean the government was deciding that one man or group had too much and another too little. See Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 311-2.

<sup>72</sup> *PD II*, col. 469.

The legality of abolition was also challenged in Parliament. Some MPs stressed that the British government could not prescribe to the colonists or the colonial legislatures whether this labour should be free or enslaved. On 12 May 1789, during a debate on Wilberforce's resolutions, George Dempster<sup>73</sup> remarked: 'The House might, if it pleased, prevent any British subjects from becoming slaves, but they could not, with any pretence of right, prescribe to the gentlemen of the West Indies by what hands their plantations should be cultivated'.<sup>74</sup> He believed that abolition would be an unjustified and unenforceable interference in the private practices of plantations in the colonies because of the jurisdictional limits of the House's authority and the rights of the colonists. On 2 May 1794, during a debate on supplying foreign colonies with slaves, Lord Abingdon argued that abolition would directly violate the right to private property.<sup>75</sup> This was a very important point to consider, as conservatives believed the defence of private property was the legislature's most important task.<sup>76</sup> Slave merchants and planters were able to use this argument to appeal to other property owners for protection and depicted abolition as the first in what would be a dangerous chain of events leading to Britain's downfall.<sup>77</sup> On 15 March 1796 George Rose<sup>78</sup> challenged Britain's right to interfere with the trading practices of other nations:

If a Dane or a Swede, for instance, chose to carry on this trade, his ship and cargo were by the provision subjected to confiscation, and he himself to the punishment of transportation, inflicted on him be an English jury, and an English judge. Would not a measure of this kind be an unjustifiable interference with the legislature of other powers, and expose us to difficulties, and even war with neutral nations?<sup>79</sup>

He argued that it would be unjust to confiscate the property of foreigners and subject them to trial and punishment according to British laws. This meant that Britain could not stop the transatlantic slave trade. He also foresaw the danger of retribution that could result from such attempts. By advancing various legal reasons to support

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<sup>73</sup> Dempster, MP for the Perth Burghs (1760-88), married the daughter of a Jamaican sugar planter in 1774. See Andrew M. Lang, 'Dempster, George, of Dunnichen (1732-1818)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7472, accessed 3 December 2012].

<sup>74</sup> *PHE* XXVIII, col. 78.

<sup>75</sup> *PHE* XXXI, col. 468.

<sup>76</sup> This right was considered so important that even civil governments could not violate it for the greater good. See Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 280 and 310.

<sup>77</sup> Bass, 'An Efficient Humanitarianism: The British Slave Trade Debates, 1791-1792', 153.

<sup>78</sup> MP for Launceston (1784-8), Lymington (1788-90), and Christchurch (1790-1818). Rose was an agent for Dominica (1784-1805) in which his wife held property. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 5, 45-52.

<sup>79</sup> *PHE* XXXII, col. 890.

their position, anti-abolitionists were able to attack the logic of the bill and cast doubt on its legality and effectiveness.

Finally, anti-abolitionists used the intra-Africa slave trade to challenge the notion that abolition would make a difference to the African people. On 27 June 1804, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion for abolition, George Rose noted:

Many of these slaves were brought by the dealers from a great distance in the interior parts of Africa. Did the hon. gent. who supported this bill suppose that the slave dealers or merchants in that country would march these poor creatures back to the different places where they were born, or had been brought, and deliver them again to their parents or relatives?<sup>80</sup>

He argued that it would be impossible to return to their respective homelands the men, women and children who had already been taken to the coast. He depicted as both ridiculous and disheartening this sad group marching all over the continent trying to find the slaves' families. He certainly cast doubt on the logic of the abolitionists' demand for an immediate end to the transatlantic trade in slaves. Sir William Young also questioned the logic of leaving men and women who were already slaves at the mercy of their African masters during this debate.<sup>81</sup> He disagreed with the abolitionists' position that abolition would serve the cause of humanity and that this humanity would stretch to Africa. His use of vivid images and examples of barbaric practices in Africa countered the abolitionists' common practice of telling stories of abuse on the plantations to support their bills for abolition. He argued that, overall, abolition would in fact prevent West Indians from saving the slaves from their unfeeling African masters and thus defeat its supposed purpose of benefiting the slaves.

## **5. Attacks on Abolitionist Ideology**

Anti-abolitionists were quick to attack abolitionist rhetoric that focused on abstract principles such as liberty, equality, and humanity. In the era of the French Revolution they were able to link calls for liberty and equality with the dangerous uprisings and revolts in France and the West Indies. War with revolutionary France and Napoleon was different to earlier conflicts, in part, because it was based on ideological differences.<sup>82</sup> The link between abolition and revolution was made clearer after February 1794 when France abolished the slave trade and slavery in her

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<sup>80</sup> *PD* II, col. 868-9.

<sup>81</sup> See *PD* III, col. 650.

<sup>82</sup> Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 2-3.

own West Indian colonies. Some MPs argued that small concessions such as abolition would be the first step towards revolution.<sup>83</sup> Anti-abolitionists also argued that the abolitionists' humanity was misplaced: other groups needed their attention more than those slaves who were already looked after by their masters. Overall, anti-abolitionists argued that the ideology upon which abolitionism was based was dangerous to Britain and her colonists: it had the power to destroy a profitable trade, destabilise life in Britain and in the colonies, and threaten their very systems of government. The British people had to look only across the channel for proof of this assertion.

Anti-abolitionists attacked the abolitionists' narrow view of humanitarianism during the slave trade debates. On 4 February 1791, during a discussion of Wilberforce's request to address the slave trade, Tarleton remarked:

If gentlemen were anxious to exercise their philanthropy, there were a variety of other objects to display it upon. He should suppose the poor laws would afford them sufficient scope for their humanity; or the state of our infant settlement in [New] South Wales. He was as warm an admirer of humanity, and its benign influence, as any man, but he thought that gentlemen might better apply their beneficence<sup>84</sup>

He noted that there were many pressing humanitarian projects affecting Britons at home and abroad that were equally (if not more) deserving of their efforts and concern. He believed that the abolitionists' humanity was selective. On 3 July 1804, during a debate on abolition, the Lord Chancellor, the earl of Eldon, commented on the dangers of the House passing bills on the basis of their humanitarian objectives:

It might be a very snug thing for a Chancellor, seated on the woolsack, a right rev. prelate, seated there in virtue of a wealthy diocese, or a noble earl with a great estate, to sit and indulge their benevolence and humanity, in voting for a bill of this kind, for the relief of one description of persons; but all he would ask of right rev. and noble lords, was, to exercise their benevolence and humanity upon universal, not partial principles, and not to indulge their zeal for promoting the comforts of one set of men at the expence [*sic*] and total ruin to other classes, equally entitled to consideration and to justice.<sup>85</sup>

He urged his fellow peers to think about the consequences of the proposed bill for all those involved, instead of just the oppressed slaves on whom the abolitionists were focusing. Rather than attacking the bill as being based on abstract principles, Eldon emphasised that as it stood the bill would only benefit one group while injuring

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>84</sup> *PHE* XXVIII, col. 1208.

<sup>85</sup> *PD* II, col. 932.

others who were equally entitled to their care and consideration. His use of the term 'zeal' reiterated the anti-abolitionists' argument that popular pressure was not a sufficient reason to pass such a bill. He argued that the selfish thing to do would be to go along with the supposed humanity of the bill; they must not be pressured by outside influences or tempted to take the easy and popular route which led to abolition.

French patriotic rhetoric was often universalist, appealing to universal natural rights and liberty, in contrast to the historic focus of Britain's patriotic rhetoric that emphasised the need to protect traditional English values and British liberty.<sup>86</sup> Anti-abolitionists in Parliament frequently highlighted the danger of acting on abstract principles and allowing popular pressure to affect parliamentary decisions. MPs increasingly feared mass revolts in the colonies because the abstract concepts of liberty, equality, and fraternity had much more obvious significance for slaves in the West Indies than for free men at home.<sup>87</sup>

On 11 April 1793, during a debate on abolition in the House of Lords, the earl of Abingdon commented: 'your lordships are aware of that new philosophy on the principles of which these monsters in human shape, this savage nation, have declared war, not only against man, but against God himself'.<sup>88</sup> He then proceeded to ask the House, if it agreed that abolition was founded on these principles, whether it would not be more appropriate for members to postpone the matter to a time when 'mankind may be restored to their senses, and this enthusiastic madness no longer shall remain'.<sup>89</sup> Abingdon believed that passing a bill for abolition would mean acting on the same dangerous revolutionary principles that had caused mass upheaval and destruction in France. Shortly after, he reiterated the connection he had made between abolition and revolutionary ideology: 'For in the very definition of the terms themselves, as descriptive of the thing, what does the abolition of the slave trade mean more or less in effect, than liberty and equality? what more or less than the rights of man?'<sup>90</sup> and what is liberty and equality, but the foolish fundamental

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<sup>86</sup> Clive Emsley, 'Revolution, War and the Nation State: the British and French experiences 1789-1801', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 111.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Duffy, 'War, Revolution, and the Crisis of the British Empire', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 125.

<sup>88</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 653.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 654.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Paine's treatise of the same name was distributed in tens of thousands of copies and was blamed by conservative critics for starting a dangerous trend. The book was banned in Britain and Paine was charged with seditious libel for inciting revolution. See Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, 57-64.

principles of this new philosophy?’<sup>91</sup> Anti-abolitionists were able to use the enthusiastic embrace of these abstract principles to discredit the abolitionists’ arguments and the philosophical basis underlying their cause.

During the same debate Abingdon made a further connection between the application of the principles of liberty and equality and the internal upheaval that France now faced: ‘I have said, not only that this proposition is founded on this new philosophy in speculation, but that it has, on its very principles, been reduced to practice; and of this neither are the damning proofs deficient: for, look at the state of the colony of St. Domingo, and see what liberty and equality, see what the rights of man, have done there.’<sup>92</sup> St. Domingo became a common illustration of the destruction that followed the embracing of revolutionary principles.<sup>93</sup> Its descent from a profitable colony envied by all western powers to that of an island revolting against French control, claiming freedom for its slaves, and killing the relatively small white population, shocked Britain. Anti-abolitionists argued that the principles of liberty and equality had caused the men and women of St. Domingo to revolt on an unprecedented scale.<sup>94</sup> These radical principles would therefore have to be considered as equally dangerous to Britain’s West Indian possessions.

Anti-abolitionists also alluded to the overthrow of the French monarchy and other established institutions to demonstrate the dangerous nature of the abolitionists’ ideology. The *Parliamentary History of England* records that on 15 March 1796, during the second reading of Wilberforce’s motion for abolition, General Richard Smith asked for the ninth act of Queen Anne to be read aloud to compare the actions of Parliament in 1709-10 to that day’s deliberations. He argued that although the trade might have violated the principles of justice and humanity nearly one hundred years earlier, Parliament had still found the policy of the measure reasonable:

He admitted the preamble of the bill to be true, but then it was true one hundred years ago as well as at this time; and yet the parliament at that time gave preference to the policy of the measure, and by that means encouraged our trade, our commerce, and our shipping. We were grown wiser than our ancestors, and now we said that they were

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<sup>91</sup> *PHE* XXX, col. 654.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 655.

<sup>93</sup> For example, on 27 February 1807, Thomas Hughan depicted the destruction of St. Domingo as a result of intentionally disseminated revolutionary doctrines. See *PD* VIII, cols. 1041-2. Another example occurred on 16 March 1807, when George Hibbert argued that the French believed revolution in St. Domingo was related to abolition. See *PD* IX, col. 126.

<sup>94</sup> C.L.R. James has argued that St. Domingo’s slaves interpreted the French Revolution as white slaves rising up to overthrow their masters. They understood the concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity. See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938. New Edition, London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 81.

wrong in the principle upon which they acted, although we felt the good effects of their proceedings; for who would presume to say, that it was not owing to the wise regulations he had just referred to, that our commerce was at present so extended?<sup>95</sup>

This argument reflected a widely-held belief that the current law came from ancient English custom and, as a result, Parliament should only clarify and confirm existing laws.<sup>96</sup> Matthew Montagu,<sup>97</sup> however, challenged Smith's logic: 'Montagu considered it as no argument in favour of this trade to say, that it was permitted or encouraged by our ancestors; for if they were wrong, it was no reason why we should persist in this error. The antiquity of a bad system was no justification of its continuance.'<sup>98</sup> Henry Dundas defended General Smith's comments on the long life of the British slave trade: 'Ought we, in justice to the memory of our ancestors, to testify so much eagerness to throw upon them the stigma, of having so long encouraged a trade of inhumanity and justice? ... certainly, the long duration of any system, was an argument why it should not be abruptly exploded.'<sup>99</sup> He objected to the abolitionists' opinion that, because the slave trade had existed for so long, it ought to be abolished. George Rose concurred:

Positive acts of parliament in favour of the slave trade, which decidedly pronounced, that without this trade our colonies could not exist, were to be found in our statute books. He was therefore against its being abolished abruptly, violently, or unseasonably, and without giving a fair trial to other modes by which the same object might be accomplished with equal effect, and infinitely less danger.<sup>100</sup>

He incorporated the language of abrupt change, danger and violence into his argument to warn the House against enacting rash measures. In the context of the French Revolution anti-abolitionists could credibly argue that the hasty overthrowing of traditional institutions could have dangerous and unpredictable consequences.<sup>101</sup> Edmund Burke<sup>102</sup> had warned of these dangers,<sup>103</sup> anti-abolitionists were able to use

<sup>95</sup> *PHE* XXXII, col. 868. Anthony Browne also challenged the wisdom of dismantling long-established institutions during a debate on abolition on 27 February 1807. See *PD* VIII, col. 1048.

<sup>96</sup> The French Revolution threatened this belief. See Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850*, 31.

<sup>97</sup> MP for Bossiney (1786-90), Tregony (1790-6), and St. Germans (1806-12).

<sup>98</sup> *PHE* XXXII, cols. 873-4.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 878.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 890.

<sup>101</sup> Conservative propagandists emphasised the difference between France's revolutionary order, based on abstract principles and speculation, and Britain's relatively stable political and social order that was the result of history, experience, and common sense. See H.T. Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815', in *Britain and the French Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 106.

<sup>102</sup> Burke (1729/30-1797), MP for Wendover (1765-74), Bristol (1774-80) and Malton (1780-94), was a politician and a proficient writer on philosophy, history and economics. He frequently spoke in

his warnings and the destruction that followed in France as further evidence of the dangers of abolition. The bill was subsequently lost.

The conservative reaction to the French Revolution greatly hampered not only abolition, but the entire reform movement.<sup>104</sup> Fears of Jacobinism in Britain led to the suspension of Habeas Corpus, the shutting down of radical presses, and an increase in popular loyalism.<sup>105</sup> Loyalists viewed British Jacobins as ‘traitors and potential insurrectionists’.<sup>106</sup> Reformers of all kinds were labelled Jacobins and humanitarians were viewed as enemies of the state.<sup>107</sup> Pitt and his followers rejected anything French or Jacobin-inspired in the late 1790s and the fear remained during the peace of 1802-3.<sup>108</sup> These fears were exploited by anti-abolitionists who portrayed themselves as expressing their loyalty to the British crown by seeking to oppose abolition.

On 28 February 1805, during a debate on Wilberforce’s motion for abolition, Tarleton remarked: ‘This measure, sir, is certainly founded on the opinions respecting the rights of man, which have produced such horror and devastation all over the world. It is a remnant of Jacobinism. I am sure that the hon. gent. who urges it [Wilberforce], is not in his heart a Jacobin, but still the effect of his conduct is the same as if he were one.’<sup>109</sup> While being careful not to label Wilberforce an outright Jacobin, he depicted abolitionism as a measure that was greatly influenced by Jacobinism and had the same power to inflict devastation on the British as Jacobin-inspired principles had achieved in France. The political demands of the poor were feared by Britain’s upper classes in the wake of the French Revolution<sup>110</sup>

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parliamentary debates and quietly opposed the slave trade while representing the port of Bristol. His unpublished ‘Sketch of a negro code’ helped form the basis for later slave trade legislation. See Paul Langford, ‘Burke, Edmund (1729/30-1797)’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2012) [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4019, accessed 1 October 2012].

<sup>103</sup> Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* demonstrated support for Britain’s government and her hierarchical social structure and a dislike of the rights of man. It stressed the need to secure property, respect social status and maintain a stable government: all of these had been overthrown by the French revolution and were threatened by abolition. See James T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke*, ed. Michael Hurst, Studies in Political History (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 75-6. In contrast, a key point of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* was that historical precedents should not hinder the rights of the living. See Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 237.

<sup>105</sup> British Jacobinism was seen as conspiratorial, illegal and clandestine by the late 1790s. See Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850*, 24.

<sup>106</sup> Clive Emsley, ‘The Social Impact of the French Wars’, in *Britain and the French Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 212.

<sup>107</sup> Mark Philp, ‘Introduction’, in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>108</sup> Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars*, 67-70 and 94.

<sup>109</sup> *PD III*, col. 655.

<sup>110</sup> David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 98.

and the slaves in the West Indies were perhaps the most feared because of their great numbers, strength, supposed savagery, and lack of education.

By tying abolition to such abstract principles as liberty and equality in a pejorative manner, anti-abolitionists were able to demonstrate that abolition would set a dangerous precedent. On 5 February 1807, during a debate on Lord Grenville's motion for abolition, the earl of Westmorland noted: 'if such a system were acted upon, no property could be reckoned safe which could fall within the power of the legislature; upon such a principle as this the tithes of the clergy, and the very freehold estates of the landholders might be sacrifices to field-preaching and popular declamation'.<sup>111</sup> He believed that abolition threatened the fundamental right to possess private property. Once abolition was passed, therefore, any other kind of private property might plausibly be threatened by public pressure. On 23 February 1807, when the Commons debated the bill for abolition, Hibbert questioned the consequences of basing their decisions on the principle of humanity: 'Gentlemen should consider, sir, how far they would follow this principle, and whither it would lead them: it would certainly go the length of suppressing the licensing of alehouses, and the continuance of lotteries.'<sup>112</sup> He doubted that the House was willing to suppress the selling of alcohol or the lotteries and as such they should not be passing any bill based on the same abstract principle. Anti-abolitionists such as Westmorland and Hibbert were able to argue that abolition, a measure based on abstract principles, would set a dangerous precedent which would threaten the rights of individuals and their businesses while encouraging the masses to continue pressurising Parliament.

Anti-abolitionists were able to tie abolition to the abstract principles that were firmly entrenched in French revolutionary ideology. The strong arguments for reform in the 1780s mostly disappeared in the 1790s and significant reforms came to be seen as unnecessary.<sup>113</sup> The revolution boosted popular conservatism and encouraged Britons to preserve their existing political and social order.<sup>114</sup> This growing sentiment allowed them to attack the propriety of the timing of the bills, their ideological basis, the character and true intentions of the abolitionists, and the likelihood of a positive outcome. After making these connections they then reminded their fellow MPs and peers to focus on the legal basis of the bills and the

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<sup>111</sup> *PD* VIII, col. 667.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 992.

<sup>113</sup> David Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 168.

<sup>114</sup> Dickinson, 'Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalty, 1789-1815', 103-4.

potential disasters that could result from passing them. As William Windham<sup>115</sup> observed on 16 March 1807, during the final debate in the Commons on the abolition bill: ‘on such a question, the house ought not to go upon abstract principles of right, but upon the consequences of the measure, and of the possible ruin of the British empire resulting from it’.<sup>116</sup> The anti-abolitionists found ample support for their arguments in the dangerous consequences of the French revolution and were able to advance these comparisons very successfully in order to attack abolitionist ideology and prevent abolition from being secured in the 1790s.<sup>117</sup>

## 6. Anti-Abolitionist Rhetoric After 1807

Anti-abolitionist rhetoric changed after the passing of the abolition bill in 1807. The West Indian lobby’s credibility came under regular attack by the winning side, forcing the planters and colonial representatives to defend their positions and insist on their humanity. Abolitionists attacked the credibility of the anti-abolitionists’ arguments when the mass insurrections and bloodshed they had predicted failed to occur.<sup>118</sup> Proslavery language disappeared from the parliamentary debates outside of early discussions of Britain’s rivals benefiting from continuing the trade and the advantages of plantation life for the slaves.<sup>119</sup> The anti-abolitionists halted their attacks on abolitionist MPs and their ideology. Instead, the West Indian interest spent much time defending its members, their business, and their property inside and outside Parliament.<sup>120</sup>

Their frustration with the constant attacks from abolitionists and the public’s disapproval and growing influence on parliamentary proceedings is evident in their

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<sup>115</sup> Windham was MP for Norwich (1784-1802), St. Mawes (1802-6), New Romney (1806-7), and Higham Ferrers (1807-10). He served as Secretary at War (1794-1801) and Secretary of State for War and Colonies (1806-7). Windham’s wife was the daughter of Arthur Forrest, plantation owner and Commander-in-Chief of Jamaica from 1769 until his death in 1770. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 5, 608-36.

<sup>116</sup> *PD IX*, col. 136.

<sup>117</sup> By stressing the upheaval and destruction witnessed in France as a likely outcome of reform or revolution at home or in the colonies, popular conservatism was able to restrict radicalism and calls for reform. See Dickinson, ‘Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815’, 124. Jeff D. Bass has argued that the growing distrust of reform, the onset of war, indifference regarding abolition, a better organised West Indian faction in Parliament, and new reactionary peers in Pitt’s government all worked to prevent abolition from being passed before 1807. See Bass, ‘An Efficient Humanitarianism: The British Slave Trade Debates, 1791-1792’, 162.

<sup>118</sup> For example, James Stephen attacked Joseph Marryat the elder and the West Indian interest in the House of Commons on 15 June 1810 because cities had not been destroyed in the aftermath of abolition. See *PD XVII* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1810), cols. 679-81.

<sup>119</sup> The foreign trade in slaves did increase following 1807, as did the profits of Britain’s rival trading nations in Europe. See Howard Temperley, ‘Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology’, *Past & Present*, 75 (1977), 104.

<sup>120</sup> These concentrated efforts resulted in them receiving an unprecedented amount of compensation in the 1830s.

chosen language. The use of the term ‘absurd’ reflects this growing frustration and their desire to reassert Parliament’s authority over popular opinion. For example, on 24 May 1832, during a discussion of petitions asking for relief for the West Indians, Charles Weatherell remarked, ‘With all due deference to the abolitionist party—to the piety or saintship of one class, the eloquence of another and the eagerness of a third—it was his opinion that the idea of the immediate emancipation of the slave-population of the West-India colonies was an absurdity’.<sup>121</sup> On 25 June 1833, Lord Ellenborough echoed Weatherell’s word choice during a debate over compensation for West Indian planters: ‘But the measure was thrust upon his Majesty’s Government by the people of England. Were his Majesty’s Government afraid of the House of Commons? If so it was an absurd fear’.<sup>122</sup> At the same time as these discussions were held, West Indian colonists were agreeing to numerous resolutions for ameliorating conditions in the West Indies in an effort to postpone the more drastic decision to emancipate all slaves. These strategies required a defensive and conciliatory tone to be adopted throughout the slavery debates. Thus their direct attacks on the abolition movement practically ceased in Parliament after the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>123</sup>

There were certainly exceptions to the defensive tone adopted throughout these decades. Prior to abolition, the anti-abolitionists had intentionally focused on the futility of Britain alone abolishing the slave trade.<sup>124</sup> After 1807 planters demonstrated to both Houses of Parliament that their predictions that the slave trade of foreign competitors would continue had unfortunately come true. As the anti-slavery lobby produced petitions of greater length and in unprecedented numbers from across the country, anti-abolitionists challenged their legitimacy and the methods used to gather the tens of thousands of signatures of men and women who had never witnessed colonial slavery nor realised slave labour’s contribution to Britain’s economy and manufacturing.<sup>125</sup> As the above quotation from Lord Ellenborough demonstrates, anti-abolitionists were able to question the government’s decision making and strength by highlighting its willingness to bow before public

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<sup>121</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XIII, cols. 68-9.

<sup>122</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 1215.

<sup>123</sup> In contrast, as Chapter Two has shown, their rhetoric remained heated and argumentative in print.

<sup>124</sup> Drescher, ‘People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade’, 575.

<sup>125</sup> Srividhya Swaminathan has argued that anti-abolitionists deliberately focused on the economic benefits of slavery and the slave trade in the slavery debates in order to justify slavery. See Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, 128. In his analysis of slavery debates in Parliament that took place prior to the abolition of the slave trade, Seymour Drescher found that anti-abolitionists were twice as likely to employ economic arguments as their opponents. See Drescher, ‘People and Parliament: The Rhetoric of the British Slave Trade’, 573.

opinion and defer to the mood of the Commons rather than follow legal precedent or logic.

One of the greatest difficulties anti-abolitionists faced in Parliament was how to prove the success of amelioration in the colonies. Few abolitionists witnessed the effects of nineteenth-century colonial slavery for themselves. Planters exploited this weakness by highlighting their own personal knowledge and challenging the legitimacy of the abolitionists' claims and the evidence used to support these.<sup>126</sup> The West Indian interest, in turn, was regularly charged with bias and self-interest and its testimony was classed as tainted and untrustworthy in Parliament. When several colonial assemblies refused to submit to various elements of the 1823 resolutions for amelioration and the controversial 1831 Orders in Council, colonists and anti-abolitionists in Parliament found themselves facing severe criticism and an increase in the number of calls for immediate emancipation. Abolitionists were able to argue convincingly that the interests of humanity and justice would compel the British government to assert its authority if the colonists were unwilling to take practical measures to facilitate a rapid emancipation on their own initiative. The anti-abolitionists, therefore, had no choice but to focus their efforts on defending the colonists' property as the institution of slavery was officially destroyed.

### *1. Attacks on Individual Abolitionists*

After the abolition of the slave trade anti-abolitionists rarely attacked individual abolitionists. They did respond to individuals over their use of unfair accusations or inflammatory language, but, in doing so, commented only on their actions and language rather than their character or motives. The only abolitionist to face strong and continuous opposition during the slavery debates in Parliament throughout the post-1807 period was William Wilberforce. His central role in securing the abolition of the slave trade and pushing for international abolition made him the object of direct attacks on any element of abolition that did not unfold as planned. Even so, these attacks were neither malicious nor slanderous, but instead focused on mistakes made and lessons to be learned. For example, during a discussion of Wilberforce's motion asking the Prince Regent for details on the slave population in Jamaica, on 19 June 1816, John Foster Barham challenged the propriety of Wilberforce's earlier bill, which had been intended to end the illegal trade in slaves under foreign flags in the West Indies:

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<sup>126</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, 142.

The bill in question was brought in on the ground that there actually existed a contraband trade in slaves. Such was the plain understanding of the preamble, and such the point on which the arguments rested, by which it was supported; and yet now, when it turns out, that no such trade has existed, the author of the bill wheels round, and pretends, that this never was the foundation on which the bill was rested!<sup>127</sup>

Anti-abolitionists had fervently argued that the bill in question was neither based on solid evidence nor on grounds of necessity because no such illegal trade existed in the British West Indies. They believed that no proof of such activity had been found. This allowed Barham to attack Wilberforce's change of position and to question his knowledge and credibility.

Barham's arguments remained focused on Wilberforce and his mistakes during this debate:

But where will my hon. friend (Mr. W.) hide himself, when at some still and solitary hour, these poor slaughtered blacks seem to approach him and to say, "this time twelve-month we were innocent and contented, and but for you we should have been innocent and contented still!" If ever I have envied any man's fame; if ever I have envied any man's feelings, it had been the fame and the feeling to which my hon. friend was entitled, on his accomplishment of his great work, the abolition . . . now that, urged on by desperate counsels, he has produced calamities of which no man can foresee the conclusion, he will I fear need all the consolation, which the good he has heretofore done can afford him.<sup>128</sup>

Here Barham expressed great admiration for Wilberforce's recent accomplishments (outwardly if not genuinely), but emphasised the unforeseen consequences that his work had produced for the slaves. Rather than providing them with security and happiness, Barham believed that the slaves were now in greater despair because of the efforts and 'achievements' of the abolitionists. He admitted that Wilberforce's memories of his great work might console him, so long as he viewed the colonies from afar, but it was the unfortunate colonists and the slaves who had been forced to live with the consequences of his actions.

## *II. Demonstrating Abolition's Damaging Consequences*

Perhaps the strongest evidence anti-abolitionists could employ to attack the abolitionists in this period was the disappointing consequences of British abolition. Despite years of negotiations and financial incentives, European nations were slow to

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<sup>127</sup> *PHE* XXXIV, col. 1193.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1194.

join Britain in enacting and enforcing an international abolition of the slave trade. Some countries even experienced an increase in both trade and profits as a result of Britain's withdrawal from the slave trade.<sup>129</sup> Both Houses of Parliament produced addresses to the monarch requesting him to do more to encourage other nations to abolish the trade. During these discussions anti-abolitionists were able to reiterate their earlier objections to abolition on the grounds that Africa and Africans would not materially benefit from abolition if other nations did not take part. As Barham remarked on 12 March 1816, he 'had always been of the opinion, that unless the trade was abolished by other governments it would soon revive in our own colonies. It was only by treaty with other powers that the trade could be effectually abolished'.<sup>130</sup> During another discussion of a similar address to be sent on 2 May 1814, Joseph Marryat the elder commented on the unchanged number of transported slaves: 'From the Report of the African Society it appeared, that up to the year 1810, the average number of slaves obtained from Africa annually amounted to 80,000; one half of which were carried away by the Spaniards, and the other half by the Portuguese. The traffic which was formerly carried on in English ships was thus kept up in Spanish and Portuguese vessels.'<sup>131</sup> Anti-abolitionists had predicted that the number of Africans being exported to the West Indies would not noticeably change if Britain were the only European nation to adopt abolition. Neither Marryat nor Barham commented on Britain's lost profits, but their statements implied that its European rivals were also gaining great financial benefits that Britain had chosen to forego. They were therefore vindicated in their earlier objections and could claim to have a better understanding of the potential outcomes of any further proposed legislation for the colonies.

The other contentious outcome of abolition was Britain's continued reliance on slave labour for the production of required and desired foodstuffs. In the 1820s and 1830s anti-abolitionists focused on the hypocritical elements of the anti-slavery argument and the British public which desired cheap sugar, while objecting to the manner in which it was obtained. On 5 March 1828, during a discussion of William Joseph Denison's<sup>132</sup> request for additional duties on imported sugar, Ralph Bernal argued that such a measure would encourage further slave imports:

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<sup>129</sup> Temperley, 'Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology', 104.

<sup>130</sup> *PD XVI*, col. 14\*\*\*\*\*b.

<sup>131</sup> *PHE XXVII*, col. 645.

<sup>132</sup> MP for Camelford (1796-1802), Kingston-Upon-Hull (1806-7), Surrey (1818-32), and Surrey West (1832-49).

he [Denison] seemed to forget that, by imposing a duty on the sugar exported from our colonies, a bounty would be given on the increase of the slave-trade, by the encouragement which would thereby be given to the importation of sugar from Martinique, the Havannah, the Brazils, &c. where, the slave trade was still carried on to a horrible extent; more especially under the French flag.<sup>133</sup>

He believed that such a measure would only perpetuate slave labour and the atrocities of the foreign slave trade. In fact, to meet domestic demands, Britain continued to import affordable slave-grown sugar from Cuba and Brazil beyond 1833, while the price of West Indian sugar increased and production declined in some of Britain's own colonies.<sup>134</sup>

William Robert Keith Douglas questioned the logic, sincerity, and knowledge of the thousands of Britons who, having signed petitions calling for an end to slavery, still demanded regular supplies of cheap sugar. On 21 February 1831, during a discussion of Lord Althorp's motion to assist the West Indians, Douglas argued that, without financial assistance, West Indian sugar would become too expensive:

The country was hardly consistent in its wishes to abolish slavery in our colonies while it was anxious to benefit by the low price of slave-grown sugar. . . . those people who had been so anxious to abolish slavery, would find that they must draw all their supplies from countries that still carried on the Slave-trade, and over which they had not the slightest control. By not assisting the English planter, then, they would perpetuate that crime which the public voice had loudly condemned, and which the country had been at great expense to put down.<sup>135</sup>

Richard Godson challenged the Commons to consider a similar outcome during a discussion of emancipation on 31 May 1833: 'If, after losing the West Indies, we depended for our supply of sugar upon the produce of other countries, would the object so anxiously desired be accomplished? Where were we to obtain sugar, the produce of free labour? From Brazil? No. From Cuba? No. From the French colonies? No. Slavery existed in them all.'<sup>136</sup> On 20 June 1833 the duke of Wellington went further in arguing that, if the proposed emancipation resulted in the complete stoppage of production in the colonies, there would develop in its place an illegal underground slave trade and British markets would find themselves relying on

<sup>133</sup> *PD* New Series XVIII, col. 976.

<sup>134</sup> Temperley, 'Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology', 103-10.

<sup>135</sup> *PD* New Series II (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1831), cols. 787-8.

<sup>136</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 221.

this slave-produced sugar to meet the country's demands.<sup>137</sup> Anti-abolitionists were able to argue that Britain's continuing desire for sugar and other plantation produce would prevent abolitionists from achieving their goals of ending the country's dependence on slave labour. They argued that, on the contrary, the colonies would probably cease production or resume the hated trade in slaves or leave the British empire. Each of these potential outcomes meant that Britons would be forced to hand over their money to foreign powers, which would in turn be encouraged to use slave labour and import more slaves to meet Britain's demands as well as their own. Overall, they stressed that the abolitionists would inevitably fail to achieve their objectives and instead cause more Africans to be enslaved. Some of these predictions indeed came true.<sup>138</sup>

### *III. Attacks on the Abolitionists' Methods*

Anti-abolitionists attacked many of the Anti-Slavery Society's methods that appeared to have an impact on Parliament as well as the abolitionist MPs and peers' strategies in Parliament. They objected to the ways in which anti-slavery petitions originated and the means by which signatures were gathered. They whole-heartedly disagreed with the practice of requiring pledges from parliamentary candidates and forcing those standing for election to make public their views on (and any personal connections to) slavery. Abolitionists were also accused of creating spectacles and sharing dramatic, but false or outdated, stories in order to gain public support from their uneducated and ill-informed audiences and readers. The anti-abolitionists denounced these practices in Parliament throughout the years leading up to emancipation as a means of discrediting the anti-slavery activists and countering the hundreds of petitions that some abolitionist MPs maintained clearly reflected the British public's overwhelming support for anti-slavery views.

Anti-abolitionists and the West Indian lobby fought to convince Parliament that the numerous anti-slavery petitions arriving in Parliament were not truly representative of the views of the British people and so they should not be allowed to influence parliamentary action. Unable or unwilling to procure thousands of signatures in support of counter petitions, anti-abolitionists were forced to discredit

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., cols. 1189-90.

<sup>138</sup> David Eltis has maintained that the British and American abolitions in 1807 had only a temporary effect on the volume of slaves being transported from Africa. Other groups took over supplying French and Spanish colonies with slaves. See David Eltis, 'Was Abolition of the U.S. and British Slave Trade Significant in the Broader Atlantic Context?', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 66 (2009), 222.

the appearance and legitimacy of anti-slavery petitions. On 15 May 1823, during a discussion of Thomas Fowell Buxton's bill for amelioration, Alexander Baring commented:

I trust his majesty's ministers will not be unduly influenced by the petitions on that table, which have, in fact, been got up by a few persons in the metropolis. I know no question upon which petitions have been procured with more trick and management than on the present; or where they have come so notoriously from persons having no means whatever of exercising a judgement upon the question.<sup>139</sup>

He accused the petitions of being the work of a few men in London and of containing signatures that were not only gained through trickery, but which also belonged to men who were not in any position to comment on the subject (and, perhaps more important, did not possess the vote). Parliament had been rejecting petitions on the basis of informal or inappropriate language since the early 1790s;<sup>140</sup> anti-abolitionists could also use these precedents to challenge the origins and validity of the anti-slavery petitions without having to argue against the petitioners' sentiments.

On 15 March 1824 George Watson Taylor discussed the improper methods used to gather signatures during the presentation of several anti-slavery petitions:

itinerant adventurers had come down with petitions ready prepared. ... They addressed themselves to the passions of the people on the subject of negro slavery, rather than to reason. The poor artisan, mechanic, and peasant, were asked, whether they objected to seeing persons in perpetual slavery; and on answering, of course, in the affirmative, they were requested to sign the petitions presented to them. He could not think this a fair way of collecting the opinions of the public on this important subject.<sup>141</sup>

He objected to pre-crafted petitions being presented to Parliament as though they originated from the communities in which their signatures were gathered. He also believed that the way in which people were approached was intentionally deceptive rather than being for the purposes of spreading and gaining information. Both Baring and Watson Taylor believed that these practices should lead their fellow MPs to ignore these petitions and instead focus on facts and evidence produced within the houses of Parliament.

Anti-abolitionists also objected to the methods anti-slavery societies used to gain financial backing for their activities. On 16 March 1824, during a discussion of

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<sup>139</sup> *PD* New Series IX, col. 348.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, 31.

<sup>141</sup> *PD* New Series X, col. 1012.

the resolutions for amelioration, Baring reflected on London's Anti-Slavery Society's fundraising practices:

This society had raised large subscriptions, and was in the practice of sending its emissaries about to disturb every market town in the kingdom ... he had seen, on market days, men come into the town [Taunton], who related stories and exhibited pictures. The country people were asked, whether they would not vote against slavery? Some of the pamphlets of the society were placed in their hands, and they were told many dreadful stories of women who were tied down to the ground and shockingly beaten. These stories, however, were, he would say, gross exaggerations.<sup>142</sup>

He argued that abolitionists were systematically targeting innocent people on busy market days in towns across Britain and employing shock tactics to gain sympathy for their cause and money for their activities. Baring then elaborated on the exaggerated stories abolitionists shared with the crowds to acquire money from the innocent market-goers by referring to them as 'stock stories'. He argued that these same shocking stories were used time and again because no new, relevant stories had emerged from the West Indies in support of the anti-slavery cause.<sup>143</sup> He believed that abolitionists across the country were regularly and intentionally misleading a sympathetic, gullible, and uninformed British public for financial gain.

On 15 April 1831, during a debate on Fowell Buxton's motion for emancipation, Baring recalled a spectacle in Yorkshire during the election period: 'there were persons led about in chains, with blackened faces, in order to rouse the feelings of the people'.<sup>144</sup> He claimed that such visual propaganda was meant to gain sympathy for the anti-slavery cause rather than give the electors any genuine information on the subject and were thus unnecessary and 'ridiculous'. Sir Richard Vyvyan objected to another controversial practice of Britain's anti-slavery societies: requiring men standing for election to publicly pledge their support for emancipation or face public scorn and humiliation. On 30 May 1833, as the Commons discussed emancipation, he challenged his fellow MPs' ability to speak freely and vote freely on the subject of slavery and emancipation: 'He was aware that he was addressing an assembly, many Members of which had deeply pledged themselves, though the system of pledges was ruinous to the best interests of the country. Was not a pledge a bribe, far more injurious to the Empire at large, than bribery by money?'<sup>145</sup> Baring

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<sup>142</sup> *PD* New Series X, col. 1159.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1161.

<sup>144</sup> *PD* 3rd Series III, col. 1464.

<sup>145</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 131.

and Sir Richard objected to these practices because they were directed at the unenfranchised wider public who had been continually subjected to what they regarded as false and one-sided information produced by the abolitionists. They argued that, by making pledges, MPs were then prevented from having open, honest debates and voting on the subject of slavery as their own conscience and reason dictated. His decision to use the word ‘bribe’ further emphasised his belief that this was an underhanded practice.

Finally, as in the era of Wilberforce’s almost annual motions for the abolition of the slave trade prior to 1807, anti-abolitionists complained of the abolitionists’ habit of continually bringing up motions to address and re-address the state of slavery in the colonies. They continued to argue that such discussions could have disastrous effects on the minds of the slaves and the stability of the colonies. On 17 April 1832, after presenting a West Indian petition to the House of Lords, slaveholder Henry Lascelles, the earl of Harewood,<sup>146</sup> reflected on this worrying practice:

Considering the situation in which the West-India interests at present stood, he would seriously ask, whether this was a proper time to irritate the slaves, and excite discontent and agitation among them by frequent motions in Parliament, having reference to their condition? Yet such motions were frequently made, and if the practice should be continued, the consequences, in all probability, would be fatal.<sup>147</sup>

Like many MPs and peers before him, Harewood argued that the abolitionists’ efforts to make Parliament constantly discuss the situation of slavery in the West Indies could have dangerous or even fatal consequences. He believed that they were the work of abolitionists who willingly ignored the potential dangers of their practices in order to continue agitating for emancipation and further their personal goals. Like the anti-abolitionists’ refusal to discuss emancipation without clear plans for compensation, however, this argument could also be interpreted as a desperate attempt to delay the proceedings that were threatening to emancipate hundreds of thousands of slaves.

#### *IV. Defending the Colonists and Themselves*

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<sup>146</sup> MP for Yorkshire (1796-1806 and 1812-8), Westbury (1807-12), and Northallerton (1818-20). The Lascelles family fortune had originated from slave-trading in Barbados. Lascelles became the heir to his father’s slaves upon the death of his brother in 1814. See Thorne, ed., *The House of Commons, 1790-1820*, vol. 4, 377-80.

<sup>147</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XII, col. 599.

Much anti-abolitionist rhetoric in Parliament after 1807 possesses a distinctly defensive tone not seen prior to the abolition of the slave trade. Members of the West Indian interest emphatically defended themselves and one another when accused by abolitionists of self-interest or misconduct. These MPs were sometimes able to defend the colonists and the colonial assemblies by favourably comparing their actions to those taken in Britain. They strengthened their objections to immediate emancipation by arguing that abolitionists were being unrealistic in their depictions of a post-emancipation society in the colonies.<sup>148</sup> Finally, some MPs rejected the abolitionists' accusations of partisanship and interest by arguing that they were all against perpetual, inhumane slavery in the West Indies. These rhetorical strategies helped defend the colonists and their actions, prolong the emancipation debates, and extend the use of slave labour in Britain's colonies into the 1830s.

Some anti-abolitionist MPs strove to counter and deflect abolitionist charges of inhumanity by stressing the ways in which humanity was inherent in the institution of slavery in Britain's West Indian colonies.<sup>149</sup> They demonstrated the humanity of the colonists by comparing their actions and laws to those taken and enforced in Britain. On 15 April 1831, during a debate on Fowell Buxton's motion for emancipation, Horace Twiss<sup>150</sup> argued: 'England was hardly entitled to take a very high tone of moral indignation on this subject, when it was remembered that it was only a very few years ago, in 1822, that even in this country of humanity, civilization, and freedom, the whipping of females was finally abolished'.<sup>151</sup> He had begun his defence by stating that he completely agreed that the whipping of female slaves was regrettable. Twiss then demonstrated the British government's own reluctance to act earlier on the issue of corporal punishment for women in an attempt to demonstrate that colonial law was not as far from Britain's laws as the abolitionists were making out. He therefore defended the colonists' actions and legislation by highlighting the similarities between Britons and the colonists and showing that his fellow MPs were being selective in their recollection of past legislation that might appear unfavourable or inhumane in the present circumstances, and yet was enforced and condoned at one time in Britain.

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<sup>148</sup> Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815*, 145.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>150</sup> Twiss, MP for Wootton Bassett (1820-30), Newport, Isle of Wight (1830-1), and Bridport (1835-7), was the Under-Secretary of State for War and Colonies from 1828 to 1830.

<sup>151</sup> *PD* 3rd Series III, col. 1453.

Anti-abolitionist MPs frequently challenged the abolitionists' optimistic forecasts of the outcomes of emancipation for the slaves, the colonists, and Britain's West Indian colonies. They were able to argue that the abolitionists were being unrealistic and misleading about the likely consequences of their proposed measures. On 15 May 1823, during a discussion of the bill for amelioration, Baring provided his own speculations as to the results: 'If we were to arrive at a free black population, the inevitable consequence would be, that the whole of the islands would be lost to this country; there would be an end to our colonial system'.<sup>152</sup> He believed that it was unfair to condemn the colonists for not actively pushing for emancipation when the prevailing belief was that it would inevitably lead to the destruction of property and human life. This argument had also been repeatedly brought forward prior to 1807 by numerous anti-abolitionist MPs. Baring then proceeded to challenge the abolitionists' claims that freed slaves would labour for wages.<sup>153</sup> He rejected the abolitionists' arguments of a slave population ready for the rights and privileges of freedom by questioning why such a massive, strong, and supposedly enlightened group of individuals would choose to continue labouring under British rule after emancipation.

The duke of Wellington employed a similar strategy in his discussion of the need for compensation for the planters. On 20 June 1833, as the Lords discussed the bill for emancipation, Wellington stated:

He wished to know why they were to give or to lend 15,000,000*l.* to the colonists, if the freed negroes were likely to work? He could easily understand the principle of compensation for the difference in the amount of labour done by the slave and the free negro; but then, what became of their boasted improvement of the negro, and of his willingness to work, when he was placed in a great degree at his own disposal? If these improvements were as they were described, why give compensation?—if no such improvement was yet to be found, then all these measures were premature.<sup>154</sup>

Like Baring, he challenged the abolitionists' claims that the slaves were fully ready for freedom. Wellington argued that compensation would be unnecessary if the freed slaves were truly willing to continue working as before, thus maintaining production levels in the colonies, yet here they were debating how many millions to send to the colonists as compensation for lost labour, property, and production. He was therefore contending that the abolitionists did not honestly believe that current

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<sup>152</sup> *PD* New Series IX, col. 347.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* See also page 181, above.

<sup>154</sup> *PD* 3rd Series XVIII, col. 1187.

production rates, property values, and perhaps the security of the colonies and their inhabitants, would be maintained following emancipation;<sup>155</sup> if they did, and could persuade the House to agree, they would all see that compensation was unnecessary. He was therefore able to argue that the act of debating compensation proved the flaws in the bill and in the entire basis for immediate emancipation.

Finally, MPs who voiced their opinions against immediate emancipation defended their positions by reflecting on the nature of the debate and the similarities of the two sides. They argued that they all wanted the same things: a better life for the West Indian slaves and colonists who were safe and protected by the British government. On 6 March 1828, during a discussion of the origins and nature of the 1823 resolutions for amelioration, Sir Robert John Wilmot-Horton argued: ‘The West-Indian must be insane, who would not rather employ free labour than slaves, if the former would answer his purpose; but then, he said, very fairly, “You are bound to shew me that there is a chance of free labour succeeding.”’<sup>156</sup> He was convinced that the West Indians relied on slave labour not from choice, but out of necessity. They would prefer to employ free labour just like anyone in that House, but were stuck in the unhappy and precarious situation that had been handed down to them. This blurred the lines between abolitionists and anti-abolitionists and made it more difficult for abolitionists to attack the West Indian position. Wilmot-Horton also believed, however, that the onus was on the abolitionists to prove that free labour could meet the needs of the British public, maintain production in the colonies, and be safely implemented. Shortly after, in a response to Henry Brougham’s earlier speech, Sir Robert specifically questioned the meaning and usefulness of the term ‘abolitionist’:

He had also been accused by the same learned gentleman [Brougham], of being an opponent to the abolitionists. But when that learned gentleman told him, that he was an opponent to the abolitionists, he must beg leave to ask, who were meant by the term abolitionists? They were all pledged in one way – all agreed to the resolutions of 1823 – all were bound to carry them into execution; and he challenged any honourable member to say that he had ever done any thing which did not tend to the accomplishment of these resolutions.<sup>157</sup>

He argued that every MP in the House was on the same side and that he was no exception. The term abolitionist had been used to denote a specific group of activists

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<sup>155</sup> In reality, sugar production did decline after the end of apprenticeship in 1838. See Temperley, ‘Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology’, 103.

<sup>156</sup> *PD* New Series XVIII, cols. 1029-30.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1030.

and their followers; now Sir Robert suggested that in fact everyone was an abolitionist in that they had all agreed on the resolutions for amelioration and therefore all wished for the improvement of the institution of colonial slavery. Sir Robert found Brougham's use of the term 'abolitionist' to be unnecessary, divisive, and exclusive.

Prior to 1807, anti-abolitionists stood on firm ground from which they were able to attack numerous aspects of abolition. They accused abolitionist MPs of being dishonest and of intentionally misleading the public and their fellow politicians. They accused them of using underhand strategies to gain and demonstrate support for abolition and to push through reforms in Parliament. They dissected abolitionist arguments to show they relied upon speculation, dangerous revolutionary ideology, out-of-date information on the colonies and the trade, and persuasive sentimental language. Their confrontational, proslavery language helped defend the West Indian position on maintaining the institution of slavery and Britain's participation in the slave trade during periods of growing and waning support for abolition in the 1780s and 1790s. During war with France, however, abolitionists were able to convince Parliament that the logical route to preventing their enemies from prospering from Britain's participation in the trade and gaining the moral upper hand was to abolish the slave trade in 1807.

Things changed, understandably, after 1807. The language and rhetoric employed by anti-abolitionists in Parliament in the years following the abolition of the slave trade was defensive in nature and more often given in response to an abolitionist speech or petition than as a positive, spontaneous assertion of the anti-abolitionist position. This reflects a very different strategy and mentality about the permanence of colonial slavery compared to that in existence before the abolition of the slave trade. The abolition in 1807 abruptly ended the way in which slaves had been obtained; planters and sympathetic MPs alike were now well aware of how quickly slavery could be ended by a simple act of Parliament. Their strategic shift in rhetoric, from attacking the popular abolitionists and challenging the possibility of emancipation to willingly adopting ameliorative reforms and defending their rights to property, reflects the changed nature of the slavery debates and the damaged proslavery position in Parliament after the abolition of the slave trade.

## Conclusion

‘if I had been told ... of any measure that, although it was indisputably enjoined by every principle of justice and humanity, yet that in the course of almost 20 years discussion, it had not been able to make its effective progress through the British parliament (recommended, at the same time, by the cry of the people out of doors, and by an union of the greatest talents within), until it received the protecting hand of his majesty’s principle minister in either house, I should say, “it is impossible; there must be some mistake in the application of these great principles to the measure...”’

George Hibbert, 23 February 1807<sup>1</sup>

‘The reflections to which the whole treatment of our colonists during the past ten years, by successive parliaments and governments, must give rise in every impartial bosom, are of a painful kind; the ignorance, the rashness, the blind audacity of too many influential persons – the mean shuffling and intrigue of others – and the hot, heavy, dogged stupidity of the perhaps not ill-meaning agitators, to whose pertinacity the present ministry has at last succumbed – are features in our recent history, on which future times will pause with mingled wonder, contempt, and pity.’

John Gibson Lockhart, *The Quarterly Review*, January 1834<sup>2</sup>

‘I have not allowed myself to forget that the abolition of the Slave-trade by Great Britain, was agitated a hundred years before it was a final success; that the measure had its open fire-eating opponents; its stealthy ‘don’t care’ opponents; its dollar and cent opponents; its inferior race opponents; its negro equality opponents; and its religion and good order opponents; that all these opponents got offices, and their adversaries got none. But I have also remembered that though they blazed, like tallow candles for a century, at last they flickered in the socket, died out, stank in the dark for a brief season, and were remembered no more, even by the smell. ... School-boys know that [William] Wilbe[r]force and Granville Sharpe, helped that cause forward; but who can now name a single man who labored to retard it?’

Abraham Lincoln, c. July 1858<sup>3</sup>

The proslavery element in Britain has been forgotten by time and in many histories of abolition. It is true that members of the West Indian interest were sometimes racist, sometimes driven by greed rather than humanity, and sometimes willing to slander and attack genuine abolitionists who wanted to rid Britain of the shame of black slavery in her colonies. It is also the case that they lost the argument. None the less, they are just as worthy of historical research as their triumphant opponents,

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<sup>1</sup> *PD VIII*, col. 980.

<sup>2</sup> [John Gibson Lockhart], ‘Art. IV – 1. Journal of a West India Proprietor’, *The Quarterly Review*, 50.100 (January 1834), 374.

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. in Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 550-1.

and their motivations, arguments, and rhetoric are no less nuanced than that of the abolitionists. To characterise them as doomed, in decline, desperate and frenzied,<sup>4</sup> or simply defensive is to be unfairly dismissive of their arguments, their efforts, and their impact and to misunderstand the true nature of British proslavery expression in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After all, the slavery debates were genuine debates. Both sides were able to argue convincingly and to experience both victory and defeat.

Proslavery arguments in printed form were phrased and presented in a variety of ways that were often dependent upon the genre of the piece. Pamphlets contained strongly worded arguments and rhetoric that intentionally challenged abolitionist propaganda and asked their readers to consider both sides of the debate. They were aimed at the wider reading public which had been made aware of the slavery debate through carefully conducted abolitionist campaigns. These pieces are more defensive in nature than the views recorded in the other printed genres. Reviews contained personal editorial commentary on published works as well as opinions and information from the reviews' authors. These were meant to convince an informed, educated audience of the validity of the West Indian position on the topic of the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies. Instructive works, including scientific studies, travel writing, and plantation manuals, contained evidence that could be used to advance and support the proslavery position by supposedly presenting an unbiased view of Africans, slavery, and plantation life in the colonies to their readers. These contained more discussions of race and the natural suitability of Africans to slave labour in the tropics than the other genres examined in this paper. Artwork, creative writing, and theatre also presented a proslavery view of the British West Indies and the slavery debate. Art could prove to be pro-empire or anti-abolitionist, as could theatrical performances that were written to contribute to and comment on the slavery debate. These pieces provided visual evidence of happy, contented slaves and humane working conditions on West Indian plantations, sights that most people would not have seen for themselves. Satirical prints were able to satirise the abolitionists and their arguments. These different genres provided a variety of formats for the proslavery position to be disseminated to a broad spectrum of the literate British public and the arguments and information on West Indian slavery accordingly varied.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Iain Whyte described the West Indians in Glasgow in the 1820s as swinging 'from complacency to panic and then from frenzied activity to acceptance of the inevitable'. See Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838*, 166.

Proslavery arguments presented in Parliament during the slavery and slave trade debates were also wide-ranging. All types of argument in support of maintaining the institutions of the slave trade and slavery identified in this study were voiced in Parliament between 1783 and 1833 to defend the West Indian position and attack the varied support for abolition. They used racial arguments, economic and strategic arguments, humanitarian arguments, and legal arguments to try to persuade Parliament of the slave trade and slavery's legitimacy and benefits for Britain. Educated politicians presented these arguments to an audience of men with similar backgrounds who had the power to legislate on the issues of slavery and the slave trade. Proslavery arguments were crafted and presented as part of a debate over specific issues regarding slavery and the slave trade. This affected their type, topics, and the language used to present them. These timely arguments reflected what was going on in the larger political and military spheres as well as popular opinion on the slave trade and slavery and events in the West Indian colonies. Proslavery arguments in print could also reflect current events, but these, in contrast to the debates in Parliament, were always somewhat delayed due to printing and distribution constraints. The arguments presented in Parliament against the abolition of the slave trade and slavery are the most important ones for this study because it was at Westminster that the fate of Britain's participation in the transatlantic slave trade and in West Indian slavery was decided.

The study of proslavery rhetoric reveals that in Britain there were members of the West Indian interest who actively and intentionally attacked abolitionists and their arguments and defended themselves, their fellow colonists, and members of the interest during the slavery debates. While not an entirely accurate record of the debates, Cobbett's and Hansard's editions of the slavery and slave trade debates are the best sources for historical research and discussion of the rhetoric deployed in Parliament by both sides of the argument over an extended period of time. Proslavery arguments in contemporary printed materials provide additional examples of proslavery and anti-abolitionist rhetoric to support this branch of the analysis. While MPs geared their arguments to the relatively small audience of their peers, both sides of the debate were well aware that their words and opinions on slavery and the slave trade would reach a wider public out-of-doors through newspaper reports and printed copies of speeches. This could have had a great impact on their rhetoric and forced the proslavery side of the debate to remain calm and controlled during intense debates on the future of their own colonial properties and earnings. It

also allowed them to attack the abolitionists MPs' passionate language and charges of inhumanity as dangerous to their fellow Britons in the colonies and those with colonial interests because they could be inciting rebellion and upsetting the slaves. The analysis of proslavery rhetoric in Parliament therefore shows that the West Indian interest and its supporters were active participants in the slavery and slave trade debates in which they put forth their own opinions and actively challenged abolitionist sentiment during the era of abolition.

This detailed analysis of proslavery arguments and rhetoric, when combined with a close examination of the West Indian interest in Britain during the era of abolition, can contribute to the wider discussion and understanding of British abolition by highlighting the existence of a real debate over abolition and emancipation. This debate took decades to resolve as neither side could claim a unanimous victory in Parliament for many years. It is misleading to cast every member of the West Indian interest as doomed and inhumane just because they eventually lost the debate, just as it would be misleading to dismiss the sustained efforts of the abolitionists because they experienced numerous setbacks, saw many motions dismissed and fail in Parliament, and took over fifty years to succeed in achieving their ultimate goal. By looking at both sides of the debate in Parliament the nature of the abolition debate and the timing of abolition and emancipation can be better understood. Proslavery publications provide greater insight into the reception of abolitionist propaganda, printed material, and speeches (both in and out of Parliament). By examining proslavery works one can see what the abolitionists were up against when it came to swaying popular opinion. While the focus of this study remains fixed on the proslavery position and the people who held and publicised this view, the study as a whole can contribute to the much wider scholarship on British abolition by providing another perspective on this important and popular topic.

The content and nature of the proslavery arguments were affected by external events and the context of the debates. Prior to the abolition of the slave trade, proslavery arguments presented in Parliament supported and encouraged the continuance of the slave trade as being a benefit for the traders, slaveholders, and the slaves. They emphasised centuries of legislation that had condoned, encouraged, and regulated the trade in slaves from Africa to Britain's West Indian colonies. They also focused on racial differences and biblical defences to justify the enslavement of Africans in the colonies. After 1807, these arguments waned. There was no longer

any reason to explain and justify the enslavement of Africans or the use of African labour over European labour because the planters had lost their ability legally to obtain new African slaves. Legal arguments shifted to the classification of slaves as property and the necessity of the state to protect the private property of its citizens. Moral and biblical defences all but disappeared from the parliamentary debates. Instead, the West Indian interest focused on the civilising benefits of exposing the slaves to British West Indian manners and culture through the institution of slavery. Perhaps the most notable difference in the arguments and rhetoric after 1807 is the disappearance of proud, positive assertions of slave ownership from the slavery debates to support the continuance of the institution of slavery. West Indians in Parliament now reserved these to defend themselves and their fellow colonists against charges of inhumanity. Once facing a concerted and organised abolitionist lobby after 1823, proslavery and anti-abolitionist MPs typically framed their statements with the caveat, 'I am no friend to slavery, but...' before moving onto an explanation of why immediate emancipation would harm the slaves and the colonists. Anti-abolitionist arguments after 1823, therefore, might be best characterised as defensive and as delaying tactics. Was this because the West Indian interest and their supporters believed emancipation was inevitable? If they did, they were unwilling to admit it in Parliament.

There are a number of avenues down which further research into this area could advance. A truly balanced study of British abolition, with equal analysis and time given to both sides of the debate in and out of Parliament, could prove invaluable to our understanding of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. This would require an extensive period of research in order to cover the entire period of British abolition and the two opposing sides of the debate. The focus of such a study might therefore be best restricted to the nature and content of the debate and the debaters either in or out of Parliament. The West Indian interest and their supporters and publicists devised a range of convincing arguments that not only had a massive impact on the nature and timing of abolition and emancipation in Britain, but also impacted on the nature of the slavery debate in America. Tise touched upon this in his first few chapters of *Proslavery*;<sup>5</sup> a new examination of the influence of British arguments on the American debate could take into account recent scholarship on the

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<sup>5</sup> See Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*, Chs. 2, 4, and 5.

transatlantic networks of British and American pro- and anti-slavery supporters.<sup>6</sup> The similarities of early proslavery arguments and the ways in which the British proslavery arguments identified here were used, interpreted, and modified to fit the American context and later time period could provide some interesting insights into the American slavery debate of the mid-nineteenth century. A longer and wider-reaching exploration of proslavery printed materials, with analysis not only of the authorship and genre, but of the arguments, rhetoric, and wider context (both of the contemporary debate in Parliament and wider international events), would allow for a greater understanding of the debates out-of-doors over the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. It would be possible to focus solely on the wealth of printed materials in order to understand better the nature of the slavery debate and the proslavery position in print. By recognising and treating the proslavery side of the British abolition debate as legitimate and worthy of study, our knowledge of the story of British abolition can only benefit as it expands to include information on what was a dynamic and hugely significant debate in and out of Parliament.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Lambert, 'The "Glasgow King of Billingsgate": James MacQueen and an Atlantic Proslavery Network', 405-19.

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