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Manchester: A Micro-Historical Approach to British Abolitionism, 1787-1807

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An abstract of
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Abstract
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During the eighteenth century, England dominated the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The English simultaneously experienced an economic boom and international ascendancy into the British Empire. The northern city of Manchester also profited greatly as its textile industry exported predominantly to Africa and the West Indies. In 1787, however, the Anti-Slave Society was founded and twenty years later the 1807 Slave Trade Act abolished the British slave trade. Manchester was the hotbed of the abolitionist movement and sent several mass petitions to Parliament supporting bills to end the slave trade. The levels of abolitionist fervor and popular mobilization in Manchester, however, are ironic and surprising. Manchester's economic connections to the slave trade were so strong that, prior to 1787, abolitionists and anti-abolitionists alike expected the Mancunians to condemn any act limiting the slave trade. This Manchester paradox—popular mobilization despite economic self-interest—is not adequately explained by the historiography of British abolitionism. Micro-historical analysis of Manchester, however, shows that the Mancunians were well-aware of their interests in the slave trade but still supported abolition. The extant sources suggest that Mancunians knowingly mobilized for the good of their fellow humans on humanitarian, religious, and moral bases rather than continuing their lucrative ties to the slave trade. More micro-historical analysis of Manchester and its paradox through a broader array of sources has the potential to clear a path through the dense thicket of macro-historical debate by showing how the large institution of British abolitionism was understood in a small place like Manchester.

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INTRODUCTION

The British slave trade was as substantial as it was paradoxical. Estimates suggest that over the entire course of the Atlantic slave trade (1544-1866), ten to twelve million Africans were forcibly transported.[1] Great Britain was responsible for roughly three million of those, but with the vast majority—two and half million—coming during the eighteenth century peak of the transatlantic slave trade.[2] As involved as the British were in the slave trade, the institution of slavery itself was not tolerated in England.[3] This irony was confronted by the 1787 establishment of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Anti-Slave Society) in England. A shockingly short twenty years later, the triumph of total abolition was completed in 1807 by a vote passed in both houses of Parliament.[4] Massive abolitionist public opinion—typically demonstrated through parliamentary petitions—has often been credited for its role in the successful abolition of the slave trade.[5] The hotbed of popular abolitionism was, ironically, the region surrounding the northern industrial center and city of Manchester. The multiple instances of Manchester's popular mobilization are remarkable, especially, because they are so unexpected. The citizens of Greater Manchester profited greatly from the slave trade,

[1] Lovejoy, Paul E. "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis." *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 4 (1982): 473-501.
[2] Eltis, David and Richardson, David. *Atlas of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010. See also slavevoyages.org. 1514-1807, by Great Britain Flag and 1700-1800, by Great Britain Flag.
[3] Cleve, George van. "Somerset's Case' and Its Antecedents in Imperial Perspective." *Law and History Review* 24, no. 3 (March 1, 2006): 601–45. 621.
[4] Drescher, Seymour. *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. 4.
[5] Drescher, Seymour. "Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade." *Past & Present*, no. 143. (May 1994). 136-166.

particularly in the cotton and textile industries, and their campaign to abolish the slave trade ran counter to their economic interests.[6]

This paradox—popular abolitionist mobilization despite economic self-interest—in the city of Manchester is striking. The large issue of abolitionism in a relatively small place like Manchester affords the opportunity to consider the abolition of the British slave trade from a local perspective. In this thesis, I hope to contribute to the historiography of British abolitionism by accomplishing the following goals:

1. Suggesting a micro-historical approach to British abolitionism based on Manchester
2. Considering the Mancunians' reasons for abolitionist popular mobilization
3. Reaffirming the importance of Mancunian popular mobilization in the abolition of the British slave trade
4. Demonstrating that Mancunians benefitted from the slave trade
5. Calling for further research into and searches for the petitions and other slave trade-related sources of Manchester

The historiography of British colonial slavery and abolition is a huge, complex field. Substantial interest in this history first became apparent in the 1930's as an ideological response to the rise of the Third Reich.[7] Since then, the field has typically been divided into two distinct parts: the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 and the subsequent abolition of slavery in the British West Indies in 1833. This analysis will focus exclusively on the former, the abolition of the British slave trade (or simply the term "abolition"). Explanations of the slave trade's abolition have focused on a number

[6] Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944. 68.
[7] Davis, David B. Foreword to *Econocide*, by Seymour Drescher. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. Xii.

of particular factors: prominent abolitionist politicians (often called "the Saints" or Great Man school), religion, the economics of slavery (the decline theory), and popular mobilization/public opinion.

Until the mid-twentieth century, historians were dedicated, in the words of Eric Williams, to "the view that a band of humanitarians—The Saints, they had been nicknamed—had got together to abolish slavery, and had after many years succeeded in arousing the conscience of the British people against man's greatest inhumanity to man."[8] The "Saints" school developed in the 1920s and became very popular in the 1930s. Reginald Coupland's *Wilberforce: A Narrative*—the cornerstone text of this perspective—has entrenched the Yorkshire abolitionist and member of the House of Commons, William Wilberforce, as the face of "the Saints".[9] Others in the "Saints School" have doubted Wilberforce's credentials and elevated a larger group to primacy, the humanitarians (particularly religious groups like the Quakers and Rational Dissenters as well as some of the less recognized "Saints" like Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp). But more recently, historians have not only debated which individuals were most important in ending the British slave trade but also questioned what inspired the individual action itself.

About mid-century, historians shifted from the focus on "the Saints" and humanitarianism to a structural explanation of abolition, the economic decline of slavery. Rather than emphasis on the humanitarian factors, the decline theory of abolition (also known as the free labor theory) focuses on the role of economic forces in the abolition of

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[8] Williams, Eric. *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister*. London, Andre Deutsh, 1969. 49-50.
[9] Though William Mathieson (*British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838*) and William Lecky (*History of European Morals*) were precursors, Sir Reginald Coupland—author of *Wilberforce: A Narrative*—best embodies the group of historians who highlight the work of "the Saints" and the role of humanitarianism in British abolition.

the slave trade. Deriving from Adam Smith's arguments that "work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves," the decline theory posits that the slave trade was abolished because it was recognizably incapable of providing sustainable profit.[10] Lowell Ragatz's 1928 monograph, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, details the decline of the British West Indies and plowed the ground for the broader economic decline theory of abolition.

The decline theory was not entrenched, however, until Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944. In this landmark analysis, Williams explains the rise and fall of British slavery in regards to a single variable: long-term economic development.[11] He reveals "the role of Negro slavery and the slave trade in providing the capital which financed the Industrial Revolution in England and of mature industrial capitalism in destroying the slave system."[12] Williams traces slavery and the slave trade from the origins of Negro slavery to the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 (emancipation), and emphasizes that economic forces were the determinants in every aspect of both the development and decline of slavery. He asserts that the "decisive forces" in this era were "developing economic forces," and that even "the political and moral ideas of the age are to be examined in the very closest relation to the economic development."[13] However, Williams' overwhelming focus on economic forces suggests the "wholesale devaluation of the significance of noneconomic forces" in enacting the

[10] Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1904. I. 8. 40. See also Swaminathan, Srividhya. "Adam Smith's Moral Economy and the Debate to Abolish the Slave Trade." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 481–507.
[11] Drescher. *Econocide*. 5.
[12] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 1. See also Engerman, Stanley L. "The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: A Comment on the Williams Thesis." *The Business History Review* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 1972): 430–443.
[13] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 210-211.

abolition of the British slave trade and has compelled other historians to find a more complete, more satisfactory explanation.[14]

While acknowledging the contributions of Williams' thesis, David Brion Davis provided a more inclusive and persuasive explanation of the abolition of the British slave trade. In 1966, Davis sought to join Williams' decline theory with the older emphasis on humanitarian principles. He acknowledged that "colonial slavery was of greater importance to the British economy in 1750 than 1789," which supported the decline theory of abolition.[15] However, Davis also recognized "the importance of ideas, moral perceptions, and public opinion" in abolition much more than Williams.[16] Roger Anstey also attacked Williams' thesis when he showed Britain's national self-deception as to the importance of the slave trade. Rather than ending a declining institution, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition* counters the Williams-Ragatz school by asserting that when Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, it did so at the worst possible time.[17] Anstey argued that in 1807 "the British West Indies' share of Britain's total oceanic trade was higher than it had been at any time in the eighteenth century.[18]

The foundations of the decline theory were most disturbed, however, by the work of Seymour Drescher. In his 1977 seminal analysis, *Econocide*, Drescher systematically analyzed the sources utilized by Williams and Ragatz and came up with different figures. Drescher found a stable and profitable slave trade, not a decline. In Davis' words, Drescher's *"Econocide* totally destroyed the belief that the British slave system had

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[14] Drescher. *Econocide*. 4.
[15] Davis, David B. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.
[16] Davis. Foreward, xiv. See also Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. 152-153. Davis modifies his standpoint and moves substantially away from the decline thesis in the revised 1988 edition.
[17] Anstey, Roger. *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810*. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1975. 38-57, 321-425.
[18] Davis. Foreward, xv.

declined in value before Parliament outlawed the slave trade."[19] In short, Drescher argues that not only does the decline theory not hold water, but that Britain was "econocidal" when it abolished its incredibly profitable and still expanding slave trade. After destroying the hegemony of the decline theory and the Williams-Ragatz school, Drescher suggests "that a more coherent explanation of British abolition may be achieved by looking for an alternative hypothesis."[20]

An alternative to the economic decline explanation for the abolition of the British slave trade is still evolving. Drescher argues that the growth England experienced during the course of the British slave trade shifted the balance of social power.[21] In *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery* and *The Mighty Experiment*, Drescher illuminates how social forces and popular mobilization were instrumental in abolishing the slave trade.[22] By examining newspapers, Drescher shows that the English were well-aware of both their financial boom and increasing international dominance. While abolitionists were mobilizing between 1787 and 1807, "newspapers were happily announcing record flows of goods through customs," the British control of "the lion's share of foreign trade of her old colonies," and, in general, "Britain's international ascendancy."[23] Drescher argues that England's domestic stability and international hegemony shifted the British social dynamic. Print culture meant the average Briton became better informed and more politically invested. Voting, and influence over policy, however, remained severed,

[19] Davis. Foreward, xv.
[20] Drescher. *Econocide*. 9.
[21] Ibid., 186.
[22] Drescher, Seymour. *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987. See also Drescher, Seymour. *The Mighty Experiment*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2004.
[23] Drescher, *Capitalism*. 141

restricted, and unrepresentative.[24] Still, developments in the economy and print culture made it possible for abolitionists to coordinate, and popular mobilization helped overcome the restrictive and unrepresentative political system.

Historians are now emphasizing the diversity and variety of factors involved in the British abolition. They lift up complexity and even indeterminacy. The decline theory, social forces and popular mobilization, "the Saints," and humanitarianism all find their way into the story and each offers significant insight into the abolition of the British slave trade. Micro-history, the history of large developments in small places, might provide a way out of this thicket of macro-historical debate. Greater Manchester—the industrial city spanning parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire counties—was the center of British abolitionist support. Using extant sources for Manchester, it may be possible to wrestle British abolitionism to the ground and to see the landscape from the perspective of the abolitionists themselves.

ORGANIZATION

Microhistory requires attention to both the national and local stages. This analysis will therefore consider what factors influenced both British and Mancunian identities in relation to abolition. The extant sources pertinent to Manchester abolitionism reflect the paradigms considered in the historiography—economic decline, humanitarianism, and popular mobilization. Thus, this analysis will consider the sources through the frameworks established in the historiography to gain insight into the reasons

[24] "Getting the Vote," The National Archives: The Struggle for Democracy, accessed April 3, 2014, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/struggle_democracy/getting_vote.htm.

for such ardent abolitionism and popular mobilization (despite economic self-interest) in Manchester.

DISCLAIMERS

While potentially fruitful, this micro-historical approach is not without limitations. One of the most notable—and perhaps the reason a Manchester micro-history on abolition has not been previously conducted—is the limitations of the sources. Many of the sources pertinent to Manchester abolitionism have unfortunately been lost. The most grievous example is the destruction of the parliamentary petitions sent to the House of Commons by the fire of 1834.[25] Furthermore, many of the existing records relating to slavery and abolition in Manchester are maddeningly ambiguous.[26] There is also potential inaccuracy within sources pertaining to the slave trade as British officials were not above shaping the evidence to fit their own views on or interests in abolition.[27]

For the purposes of this analysis the terms Manchester and Greater Manchester are used interchangeably to refer to the area where Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire counties meet in northern England. Additionally, the terms public opinion and popular mobilization suffer from some imprecision but will here be used to refer to advocacy, testimonials, arguments, letters, petition signing, and other similar acts. It is important to realize that England did not yet have universal male suffrage (only those with greater than 40 shillings in property could participate in county votes) and Manchester did not

[25] "Manchester & Lancashire FHS and Parliamentary Archives Complete Joint Project," Federation of Family History Societies, last modified April 19, 2007, accessed April 6, 2014. http://www.ffhs.org.uk/ezine/articles/mlfhs.php
[26] Drescher. *Econocide*. 9.
[27] Ibid.

even have a representative in the House of Commons. Therefore, these forms of popular expression were among the few available forms of social voice. Also, the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies in 1833 is often compared to the abolition of the slave trade, and there is even debate as to which was more important or difficult to accomplish. This thesis does not enter that conversation and exclusively focuses on abolitionism between the 1787 founding of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, though some pre-1787 factors including the Somerset decision will also be considered.

SLAVERY & THE RISE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The popular belief that the 1772 Somerset case abolished slavery in England is inaccurate, but the Somerset ruling did have substantial implications for the British slave trade. James Somerset was a slave purchased in Boston who visited England with his master and then sued, claiming that his presence on English soil freed him and that his master could not re-enslave and take him back. With support from the young, pro-abolition lawyer Granville Sharp, Somerset won his freedom. The Chief Justice Lord Mansfield ruled that "if the Negro Somerset was a man—and he should conclude him one till the court should adjudge otherwise—it was impossible he could be a slave in England."[28] Such a verdict upheld earlier rulings that claimed "as soon as a man sets foot on English ground he is free" and "that England was too pure and air for a slave to breathe in."[29] While the Somerset ruling did not abolish slavery in England's colonies or

[28] Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* London: Henry Colburn and Co., 1820. 83.
[29] Cleve. "Somerset's Case." 621 and 614.

confer lasting freedom if a former slave returned to the colonies, the Somerset ruling reaffirmed the free status of all persons on English soil (excluding convicts) and established that no free person could be made a slave in England. Moreover, by establishing that in England no free person could be forcibly enslaved, it created doubts about the legitimacy of the slave trade.

Though the British slave trade began in 1562, two hundred years before the Somerset case, it remained fairly small until the Virginia Company expanded England's colonies into the Caribbean in 1612.[30] Over the next two centuries, the trade exploded. The story of the slave trade is in many ways the story of British trade to the West Indies.[31] And, by 1799, trade in both slaves and West Indian goods had reached peak numbers such that England dwarfed Portugal, with its huge colony of Brazil, as the principal slave-trading nation during the eighteenth century.[32]

The British Empire grew as the slave trade grew. Increasingly, the Union Jack flew over much of the world. Within England, the cities of Liverpool and Manchester both experienced rapid growth. New research shows that Liverpool did not begin slaving voyages until 1695, but it soon became known for outfitting and dispatching the most slave voyages.[33] The port city of Liverpool was intimately tied to the nearby industrial center of Manchester. Williams concisely summarizes the relationship between England's two northern cities.

> "The growth of Manchester was intimately associated with the growth of Liverpool, its outlet to the sea and the world market. The capital

[30] Jordan, Michael. *The Great Abolition Sham: The True Story of the End of the British Slave Trade*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2005. 26.
[31] Drescher. *Econocide*. 71.
[32] Ibid., 71.
[33] Westgaph, Laurence. "Liverpool's Involvement in the Slave Trade." *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 3 (January 1, 2008): 481–482.

> accumulated by Liverpool from the slave trade poured into the hinterland to fertilize the energies of Manchester; Manchester goods for Africa were taken to the coast in the Liverpool slave vessels."[34]

The fates of Liverpool and Manchester—and the British Empire itself—rested on the British slave trade.

Still, there are questions. Did the British Empire rise because of England's substantial role in the slave trade, or did the British role in the slave trade increase as a result of the empire's growth? Three positions are common: that Britain would not have achieved international dominance at all without slavery, that Britain would have become internationally dominant at the same rate without slavery, and the moderate perspective that Britain could have become the empire it was without slavery, but that slavery and the associated slave trade was the core of the British economy for much of the eighteenth century.[35] Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery* espouses the moderate stance by claiming that "exchanges with the slave plantations *helped* British capitalism to make a breakthrough to industrialism and global hegemony ahead of its rivals."[36] International dominance stemmed from a strong economy enhanced by the slave trade. The slave trade did not inspire industrialization; rather industrialization was the byproduct of England's booming economy, which included the slave trade.

The British slave trade economy and international ascendancy also promoted social change. England became "one of the most highly developed civil societies in the Atlantic world" where newspapers and media "nationalized an evolving dialogue

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[34] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 68.
[35] Eltis, David, and Engerman, Stanley L. "The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain." *The Journal of Economic History* 60, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 123–144.
[36] Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery: From Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*. New York, Verso Books: 1997. 572.

between citizens and legislators."[37] In northern England especially, literacy rates were high—with an estimated seventy-percent of males literate—and rising.[38] Previously provincial, marginalized, and untapped groups were becoming more educated and politically active thanks to this increased stability and communication.[39] But, only three percent of the total population could vote in England's restrictive political system.[40] In the absence of international upheaval, abolitionism served as a "fair-weather revolution" in which these groups were able to unite and express their views. The abolition of the slave trade was therefore one of the battlefields for determining how to convert public opinion and popular pressure into political action and legislation within the British Empire.[41] The rise of the British Empire empowered previously overlooked sociopolitical groups without directly increasing their voice in government. The abolition of the slave trade is an example of the negotiations between these popular groups and the government over the disjunction between popular opinion and legal policy.

The social developments caused by the economic and international ascendancy of the British Empire also prompted shifts in the British moral identity. England's domination of more and more of both the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Caribbean contrasted with the Somerset ruling that was highly publicized thanks to the rise of print culture, newspaper networks, and literacy. The group coordinating much of the abolitionist action was the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (also known as the Anti-Slave Society, the London Committee, and the Committee) which had

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[37] Drescher, Seymour. "History's Engines: British Mobilization in the Age of Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 737–756. 739.
[38] Stephens, W. B. "Literacy in England, Scotland, and Wales, 1500-1900." *History of Education Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (December 1, 1990): 545–71. 555.
[39] Drescher. "History's Engines." 739-740.
[40] The National Archives, "Getting the Vote."
[41] Drescher. "History's Engines." 739.

been founded in London in May of 1787.[42] The Anti-Slave Society focused on appealing to the minds and emotions of both legislators and the public.[43] The Somerset ruling's implicit contradiction with the British slave trade—the free people of England cannot be enslaved but free people can be enslaved by the free people of England—begun the assault. Newspapers brought the abolitionist message about the horrible mortality and brutality of the slave trade into every home while "the evils of over-crowding, lack of hygiene, disease" affected Manchester industrialists and their families in "offensive, dark, damp and incommodious habituations."[44] Drescher asserts that "Every Briton became aware of the inside of a slave ship through mass-produced prints."[45] This awareness of the "wrongs" of the slave trade was furthered by the freedman Olaudah Equiano's autobiography.[46] As an author and a speaker, Equiano provided a first-hand account of his experiences as a slave and the extreme hardships of the "Middle Passage." This moral focus was also reflected in the national campaign of petitions supporting abolitionist bills. Drescher reveals that abolitionist petitions "stressed moral grounds for reform" based on humanity, religion, and justice and that less than five percent of all national petitions suggested economic advantage to abolition.[47] Abolitionists' emphasis on moral reasons over any other justification for the abolition of the slave trade implies they recognized the slave trade's contradiction of what it meant to be a moral Briton.[48]

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[42] Oldfield, John R. *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: Mobilization of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807*. London: Frank Cass Publishing, 1998. Chapter 3.
[43] Drescher. "History's Engines." 742.
[44] Knight, Frida. *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker: Ten Years in the Life of a Manchester Radical.* London: Lawrence & Wishart, Ltd, 1957. 21.
[45] Drescher. "History's Engines." 742.
[46] Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*. Leeds: James Nichols, 1814.
[47] Drescher, Seymour. "Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade." *Parliamentary History (Edinburgh University Press)* 26 (Supplement 2007): 42–65. 48.
[48] Drescher. "History's Engines." 742.

THE RISE OF MANCHESTER

Like the British Empire, Manchester's meteoric rise was tied to the slave trade. But while England and the British Empire were *helped* by slavery and the slave trade, Manchester was *made* by them. England became internationally dominant in cotton production thanks to the strategic advantages of Greater Manchester.[49] Manchester had the three factors most commonly associated with manufacturing—water-power, fuel, and iron. It also had easy access to an established international port (Liverpool) and a developed system of canals. The profitability of Manchester's textile manufacture and its connection to the slave trade are highlighted in Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*.

> "Lancashire's foreign market meant chiefly the West Indian plantations and Africa. The export trade was £14,000 in 1739; in 1759 it had increased nearly eight times; in 1779 it was £303,000. Up to 1770 one-third of this export went to the slave coast, one-half to the American and West Indian colonies. It was this tremendous dependence on the triangular trade that made Manchester."[50]

Williams shows that the Manchester export trade was more than twenty-one times greater in 1779 than it had been in 1739.

The numbers Williams reaches, however, do not seem particularly large by modern standards. Though it is difficult to be accurate in calculating the historic value of the pound relative to today, it is possible to use the Retail Price Index (RPI, a commonly utilized measure of inflation for the British pound) to achieve an estimate. Using RPI, the most conservative estimate for the modern value of the Manchester's 1779 exports

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[49] Baines, Edward. *The History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*. London: Fisher and Jackson, 1835. 85.
[50] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 68.

would be £35.5 million.[51] A much higher estimate based on economic power—or the share of the Gross Domestic Product—is £2.83 billion.[52] Interestingly, Williams' analysis is corroborated by Drescher, who observes that "antiabolitionists had expected overwhelming rejection of any proposed legislation that would interfere with the slave trade" from the citizens of Manchester.[53] This highlights the paradox of Manchester abolitionism: the Mancunians were expected to oppose abolition and defend their economic interests, but they did not. The expectation that Manchester would oppose abolitionist action also suggests that it was common knowledge that Manchester benefitted immensely from its economic ties to the slave trade. Though Williams and Drescher are at odds about the forces behind the abolition of the British slave trade, they both agree that Manchester was intimately connected to and profited from the slave trade.

Manchester was not one of the initial targets of the abolitionist movement. Thomas Clarkson—the "Saint," reverend, and Anti-Slave Society member who more recent historiography has credited as more influential in abolition than Wilberforce—was dispatched by the Anti-Slave Society in 1787 to generate abolitionist support in Liverpool and Bristol, the cities the least likely to pressure their members of Parliament (MP).[54] Manchester, on the other hand, did not even have an MP until 1832. Manchester was, in Drescher's words, "the epitome of a booming hard-nosed manufacturing town."[55] Its population in 1783 was 39,000 "mainly given over to the manufacture of cloth."[56] But its

[51] Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2014. http://www.measuringworth.com/
[52] Ibid.
[53] Drescher. "History's Engines." 740.
[54] Drescher "Public Opinion." 47.
[55] Ibid., 48.
[56] Forbes, Allan. *Towns of New England and Old England, Ireland and Scotland: Connecting Links between Cities and Towns of New England and Those of the Same Name in England, Ireland and Scotland.* London: State Street Trust Co., 1921. 122.

inhabitants had perhaps the largest stake in the slave trade of any inland British city and seventy percent of its lifeblood, cotton, came from the Caribbean slave colonies.[57] Britain imported nearly four million pounds of cotton in 1764 and more than six and a half million pounds in 1780, with the West Indies supplying roughly one-half and two-thirds respectively.[58] The city was dominated by the wealthy merchants with ties to Liverpool and London, but the majority of people were industrial workers and their families.[59] Estimates suggest that the goods Greater Manchester exported to Africa employed "180,000 men, women, and children" throughout England, but especially in Manchester.[60] Because of Manchester's lack of parliamentary influence and small local elite, provincial status, and large number of industry workers, Manchester was initially overlooked by Clarkson and Anti-Slave Society. But, when those factors coincided with the social changes and the moral incongruity of the slave trade, they ignited Manchester as the hotbed of British abolitionism.

When Clarkson traveled through Manchester on his way back to London, he was surprised to find that Manchester had already formed its own branch of the Anti-Slave Society and was preparing a parliamentary petition.[61] Two-thirds of Manchester's adult males—ten thousand petitioners—signed the initial petition supporting the end of the British slave trade.[62] Drescher shows that the rhetoric of this petition "focused first and foremost on the need for political action against an offence to humanity, justice, and national honour."[63] This 1788 petition became the template for parliamentary petitions

[57] Drescher. "Public Opinion." 48.
[58] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 72.
[59] Ibid., 70-71.
[60] Ibid., 70.
[61] Drescher. "Public Opinion." 48.
[62] Drescher. "History's Engines." 740.
[63] Drescher. "Public Opinion." 48

and popular mobilization throughout England as other cities and towns followed Manchester's example as part of the Anti-Slave Society's national campaign.[64] Manchester sent another petition in 1792 with almost 20,000 signatures.[65] While both of these early petitions were lost to fire, two of Manchester's 1806 petitions remain and are particularly interesting. One Manchester petition from 1806 included 430 names of predominantly wealthy merchants and business owners (many of whom signed their business' name rather than their personal name) and was in support of the slave trade.[66] Sent to the House of Lords, it was planned to coincide with its debate on a bill for the abolition of the slave trade. The aim was to influence the Lords and have them strike down the bill, as the Lords had done on all previous bills for the abolition of the slave trade. Clarkson responded to this pro-slavery petition by calling for a counter-petition. Within hours, a pro-abolition petition with five times the number of the pro-slavery petition was dispatched to the House of Lords with the promise that a single day's more time would have resulted in double the number of abolitionists' signatures.[67] In March of 1807, the slave trade was ended by a landslide vote in Parliament.

THE ECONOMIC DEBATE IN MANCHESTER

Having established the Manchester paradox—abolitionism despite clear economic self-interest—let me investigate Manchester's abolitionism and probe the reasons for it from the perspectives of the abolitionists themselves through micro-historical analysis.

[64] Ibid.
[65] Federation of Family History Societies, "Manchester & Lancashire FHS and Parliamentary Archives Complete Joint Project."
[66] Drescher. "Public Opinion." 61.
[67] Ibid.

As Williams established, Manchester thrived economically thanks to its textile industry.[68] It is important to realize that Manchester functioned as both producer and consumer. The textile industry consumed cotton produced in the West Indies, the American colonies (and later nation), and India.[69] The goods that Manchester produced then found their way to the African coast and the British colonies. In 1788—the year after the first Manchester anti-slave trade petition—many thousands of Mancunians were employed in furnishing the more than £300,000 in Manchester manufactures that went to the West Indies.[70] The export growth in exports from £14,000 to £303,000 in a short forty years "made" Manchester into a booming industrial center.[71] Anti-abolitionists "could and did accuse its [Manchester's] abolitionist workers of also acting contrary to their own interests" and of "indifference to the interests of their fellow capitalists."[72] Why, then, were so many Mancunians who profited both directly and indirectly from the economics of the slave trade so ardently opposed to it?

A March 7th, 1788 letter from Granville Sharp to Thomas Walker—the chairman of the Anti-Slave Society in Manchester—suggests one possible answer. Prior to the 1787 founding of the Anti-Slave Society, abolitionism was relatively uncoordinated. The only well-established abolitionist group to speak of was the Quakers (or Society of Friends).[73] The Anti-Slave Society was born out of the Quaker abolitionist movement and made the nationally renowned abolitionist lawyer Sharp its chairman, with the intention

[68] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 68
[69] Ibid., 69.
[70] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery.* 70.
[71] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery.* 68.
[72] Drescher. Capitalism and Anti-Slavery. 72.
[73] Rees, Alan M. "English Friends and the Abolition of the British Slave Trade." *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association* 44, no. 2 (1955): 74–87. 74.

of coordinating abolitionist support.[74] Sharp's counterpart in Manchester—the chairman of the Manchester Anti-Slave Society that Clarkson had been pleasantly surprised to discover—Thomas Walker, was also nationally known. Walker was a Manchester cotton merchant, political reformer, and proven defender of industrial interests.[75] He had twice previously marshalled enough industry opposition to force Prime Minister William Pitt to back down from proposed limitations on free trade.[76] In many ways, Walker is the personification of the Manchester paradox.

The letter from Sharp to Walker not only demonstrates the coordination that was the goal of the Anti-Slave Society, but also the interest the two chairmen had in the economics of the slave trade. In this letter, Sharp clearly differentiates the goods sent to Africa in slaving ships and goods sent to Africa in "Wood-ships" to be traded for "the Produce of Africa only."[77]

> "We also extend our Views on our intended Motion for Papers, to a distinction between Goods exported in Ships sent for Slaves and those in Ships sent for the Produce of Africa only, and which are called Wood-ships, these take large Quantities of Goods, and the amount of their Cargoes must be deducted from the total Capital in order to form a just Estimate of the Commercial Importance of the Slave Trade. We have ordered Copies of the whole and when obtained, purpose forwarding you a duplicate."[78]

Clearly, abolitionists questioned the economic importance of the slave trade, and lifted up the importance of non-slave trade. Since it is quite clear that Sharp is responding to a previous letter from Walker, it seems likely that the Manchester chairman had raised this topic. The differentiation between slave ship goods and "wood-ship" goods would

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[74] Ibid., 80.
[75] Knight. *The Strange Case* 11-18.
[76] Drescher. *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*. 69.
[77] Letter from Granville Sharp to Thomas Walker. March 7, 1788. GB 133 CRO2/22. Robert Crozier Papers, John C. Rylands Library, University of Manchester. Archives Department.
[78] Ibid.

obviously have been particularly pertinent to Manchester considering that one-third of Manchester-produced goods went to the African slave-coast and another fifty-percent to the American and West Indian colonies.[79] Such information—if it demonstrated distinctions between Manchester's exports involved in the slave trade and Manchester's exports traded for other African goods—would have been very valuable. A report showing significant portions of Manchester manufactures going to Africa for goods (other than slaves), would deemphasize the importance of the slave trade to Manchester's profits. Walker would likely have been able to recruit more abolitionist support with such information by showing it possible to end the slave trade without damaging Manchester's economy. This correspondence therefore lends credence to the Williams school and the decline theory by revealing that these icons of abolition believed the profitability of the slave trade had been overestimated for both England and Manchester by including "wood-ship" commerce in slave trade statistics.

Sharp's letter also introduces another important name in abolition: Reverend Robert Boucher Nickolls, the Dean of Middleham.[80] Nickolls was a clergyman in the small parish of Middleham in the northern part of Yorkshire County, but he was originally a native of the West Indies. He wrote a letter to the Anti-Slave Society advocating the cessation of the slave trade on a variety of grounds. Whether as a form of coordination or introduction, Sharp informs Walker that "Our Friend and able Coadjutor the Dean of Middleham is now here for the purpose of being examined before the Privy Council" (the monarchy's formal advising body composed of senior politicians from the

[79] Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery*. 68.
[80] It is very likely (especially considering the clear relationship between the London and Manchester branches of the Anti-slave society revealed in Sharp's letter) that though published in London this letter would also have been circulated in Manchester.

House of Lords and Commons).[81] It is possible that Walker was already acquainted with Nickolls.[82] If he was not, Walker was soon familiar with his work, for Nickolls' letter to the Anti-Slave Society was published.[83] The Anti-Slave Society made frequent use of the thickening network of newspapers that not only nationalized the dialogue between the people and Parliament but also connected interested actors around the island.[84] Abolitionists circulated their materials throughout England through this network, and Nickolls' letter would have appeared in several places including Manchester (where this copy was found in the Spencer collection of the John C. Rylands Library's Methodist Archives and Research Center).[85]

In his letter, Nickolls argued that the slave trade was actually detrimental to Great Britain because of the unnecessary costs associated with it.

> "To the planter the prohibition of the slave trade would be immediately beneficial, and the benefit would be progressive with time, as it would immediately raise the value of his negroes, whose numbers also would be increased by a melioration of the system of slavery :
>
> To the British merchant it would be equally beneficial, in a similar manner; for none of the produce of the islands being expended in the purchase of slaves, more would be left for the payment of debts to Britain:
>
> To the British nation it would be beneficial because the planter, cultivating the sugar-cane at less expense, could afford his produce at a lower rate; because, also, seamen and soldiers would not be sent to perish in the unhealthy climates of Africa :"[86]

Whereas Walker and Sharp intended to undermine the perceived profitability of the slave trade by emphasizing its exaggeration, Nickolls focused on the unconsidered costs

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[81] Letter from Granville Sharp to Thomas Walker.
[82] At the time, Manchester was geographically located where Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cheshire counties met. It has since become its own county: Greater Manchester.
[83] Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade From the Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, Dean of Middleham. London: James Phillips, 1788. Spencer 25030. John C. Rylands Library, University of Manchester. Archives Department.
[84] Drescher. "History's Engines." 739.
[85] Ibid., 740.
[86] Letter to the Society…Middleham . 28.

connected to the slave trade. These costs, he suggested, were not accounted for in calculating slavery's profitability. He argued that by removing the slave trade and its associated costs but continuing the practice of slavery and trade with the West Indies, both the West Indies and Great Britain would benefit.[87] Nickolls' economic analysis again shows that in the beginning of the movement, the abolitionists believed and argued that the slave trade was an economic liability.

From 1788, these two letters appear early in the history of the Anti-Slave Society. As the twenty-year road to abolition progressed, however, the abolitionists' use of economic arguments faded into resounding silence. Drescher provides a convincing explanation for this phenomenon. He notes that in the beginning of the unified abolition movement (1788), "abolitionist writers did not hesitate to invoke Adam Smith's principle of the superiority of free labor."[88] Three years later, however, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade commanded its agents to "completely avoid policy arguments, including any economic discussion."[89] This shift in argumentation was also noticed in Parliament. The abolitionists changed their tactics because it became clear that slavery was economically profitable, not declining. Towards the end of the abolition debate, it was consistently the pro-slavery position that emphasized economic and security reasons for continuing the slave trade while abolitionists overwhelmingly emphasized humanitarian reasons.[90] The abolitionists' abandonment of economic arguments shows that their initial perception of economic decline in the slave trade was

[87] Nickolls is clearly not only in favor of abolition, but of emancipation as well. Most abolitionists shared his views. The choice, however, to first attack the slave trade before attempting to effect emancipation was a very conscious one. The Anti-Slave Society knew that it could not attack slavery directly without first abolishing the slave trade.
[88] Drescher. *The Mighty Experiment*. 34.
[89] Drescher. *The Mighty Experiment*. 35.
[90] Drescher. "Public Opinion." 49.

unfounded. Instead, the economics of the slave trade became a strong argument of pro-slavery positions. Abolitionists evolved from the ill-considered free labor economics to predominantly humanitarian-based rationale.

HUMANITARIANISM

Within the extant Manchester sources, humanitarianism is abundant. Humanitarian perspectives can be divided into religious and moral fields. The humanitarian, religious, and moral arguments bleed into each other somewhat, but it is possible to differentiate them by considering their respective centers of gravity. The religious arguments claimed that the slave trade was a violation of scripture and thus against God's will. Moral criticisms of the slave trade focus on its brutality (both in Africa and on the slave ships) and its violations of morality.

It is quite clear that religion played a central role in sentiments of many abolitionists. Unsurprisingly, as a reverend, the Dean of Middleham built his arguments on religious grounds.[91] Nickolls demands that "if the slave trade be consistent with the moral law or with the gospel, pursue it—if not, give it up, or call not yourselves moralists or Christians."[92] It is not the issue of slavery that Nickolls claims is problematic, but the trade itself and the way in which it is conducted.[93] Firstly, Middleham asserts, the seemingly limitless supply of new slaves through the slave trade prevented the spread of Christianity. He claims that the end of "that infernal traffic in human blood" would allow

[91] Letter to the Society…Middleham. 11.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Nickolls recognized that to achieve the abolition of slavery would first require the abolition of the slave trade. Therefore, he nuances his argument to gain more support for solely abolition, though he clearly recognizes that the next step after abolition will be emancipation.

slaves to "be more easily converted to Christianity."[94] With the ability to replace slaves through the slave trade, owners could work slaves until they died. By abolishing the slave trade, owners would be forced to treat their slaves in a more humane fashion, and the slaves might then have better exposure to the religion of their owners so that they might convert to Christianity. Secondly, the debtors' colony of Georgia, the indentured servant system used to populate the American colonies, and the penal colony established in Australia in 1788 all reflect how coerced labor was consistent with the British ethos, but Nickolls claims that the African slave trade violated scripture by providing coerced labor through sacrilegious means: man-stealing.[95] Here, Nickolls cites 1 Timothy 1:8-10 of the King James Bible, which points out that "men-stealers" are unrighteous and groups them with the worst violators of God's law. Nickolls argues that "the Christian cannot countenance it; his Bible shews him, that 'men-stealers' are classed with 'murderers of fathers and mothers, and perjured persons."[96] Middleham's argument attacks the slave trade for its violation of scripture and Christian principles, suggesting that it was the blasphemy of how the slave trade functioned that abolitionists opposed so vehemently. Africans did not fall into bondage for a crime or transgression, but merely to fuel the slave trade.[97] This was a common abolitionist tactic along moral lines, but Nickolls' reference to the Bible makes it a potent religious argument as well. Nickolls even has the prescience to anticipate the counter-argument that it was not the British who were the men-stealers as Africans were enslaved by other Africans. Rather, he notes, the atrocities

[94] Letter to the Society…Middleham. 27.
[95] Lewis, Wendy, Balderstone, Simon, and Bowan, John. *Events That Shaped Australia*. Chatswood: New Holland Publishers, 2006. 25.
[96] Letter to the Society…Middleham. 25.
[97] Letters on the Slave Trade by Thomas Cooper. Manchester: Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle, 1787. 13. Spencer 25030/4. John C. Rylands Library, University of Manchester. Archives Department.

committed—war for the express purpose of accumulating slaves, kidnapping, and an African king enslaving his own people—for the sole purpose of trading with the British were a violation of religious principles for which the British were culpable because "it is the receiver of stolen goods that makes the thief."[98]

The slave trade's violation of religious principles was also brought up in a letter by Thomas Cooper—another political reformer living in Manchester—that was published in Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle in 1787 specifically "upon a subject of importance, to the Inhabitants of Manchester."[99]

> "As honest and religious men, as Christians, followers of that Master whose life was *Benevolence*, whose name is *Love*, how can we do otherwise than discountenance a practice, which involves almost every vice that fills the black catalogue of human iniquity."[100]

This indictment questions the faith of those who would call themselves Christian yet not condemn the slave trade. In anticipation of the developing 1787 Manchester petition, Cooper asks "what if the Clergy of Manchester were to recommend to their respective Congregations, in an express Discourse, to contribute their Mite toward the subscription for the Parliamentary application?"[101] He calls for all the religious bodies of Manchester to sign the 1787 petition. Cooper also specifies three religious communities within Manchester—the Quakers, Presbyterians (Rational Dissenters), and Methodists—and thus suggests the three most notable groups of faith-based abolitionists.[102] Though he concludes with the query "why these addresses to the inhabitants of Manchester in their religious characters only?" before invoking the principle of common honesty amongst all

[98] Letter to the Society…Middleham. 23.
[99] Letters on the Slave Trade by Thomas Cooper. 3.
[100] Ibid., 4.
[101] Ibid., 27.
[102] Ibid. In doing this, however, Cooper also raises the question: Why these three in particular? Within the context of Manchester, there is therefore more research to be done on these particular religious groups and why Cooper singled them out.

men, Cooper's distinction of these three groups is striking and worth further consideration.[103]

One of the narratives included within Cooper's propagandist letter details British abolitionism prior to 1787, including significant praise of "that most respectable of religious denominations, the Quakers."[104] He highlights the abolitionist devotion of John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, and notes how the Manchester Quakers condemned the traffic of the slave trade at their conference in 1754 because "to live in ease and plenty by the toil of those whom fraud and violence had put into their power was neither consistent with Christianity, nor common Justice."[105] The Quakers, Cooper asserts, would answer the call for the Parliamentary petition "with a zeal, a perseverance, an attention, a liberality to which no praise can be equal."[106] If anything, Cooper's letter fails to adequately express the actions of the Quakers (or the Society of Friends) in opposition to the slave trade and slavery as an institution.[107] David Brion Davis recognized the Quakers as so critical to abolition that he placed them at the center of his analysis.[108] The Quakers were incredibly active in the abolition of Atlantic slavery—not just British or the slave trade—from the beginning of the eighteenth century and are well-deserving of the significant status they hold in the historiography of abolition. Cooper's letter therefore corroborates the historiography of Quakers and abolition when he suggests that the Manchester Quakers would have easily, ardently, and perhaps universally have contributed to the parliamentary petitions.

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[103] Ibid., 28.
[104] Letters on the Slave Trade by Thomas Cooper. 6.
[105] Ibid. It is worth noting that this condemnation is of the slave trade and not coerced labor.
[106] Ibid., 27.
[107] Rees. "English Friends." 87.
[108] Davis. *The Problem of Slavery*. 291

The Rational Dissenters that Cooper refers to in his letter—namely the Presbyterians—are another example of the abolitionists compelled by religious beliefs. In his discussion of the Presbyterians, Cooper employs an international comparison (a common abolitionist tactic) between the Presbyterians in Manchester and America. At a meeting of the Presbyterian body in America, the vote over freeing slaves was defeated by one vote.[109] Why then, Cooper asks, "should not the inhabitants of Manchester, the Teachers in particular of this persuasion, second the exertions of the respectable Minority abroad, and complete, as far as the present application can extend, what was left undone by their American brethren?"[110] This question is qualified as Cooper expresses his desire not to "distinguish, among the numerous opulent Dissenters in Manchester who rank under the denomination of *Presbyterian*, those of the Arian from those of the Calvinistic persuasion" as "this [the abolition of the slave trade] is not the cause of Arianism or of Calvinism—it is the cause of Humanity, of Christianity."[111]

This challenge to the religious fervor and superiority of the Mancunians is tactfully executed.[112] What is more interesting, however, and a fruitful result of this micro-historical approach is the implications Cooper's arguments provide for Rational Dissenters and their role in abolition. Within the literature of the abolition of the British slave trade, it has been suggested that the Rational Dissenters have not been afforded the place they deserve.[113] The suggestion of Cooper's letter is that, at the very least for Manchester, the role of Rational Dissenters was important.

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[109] Letters on the Slave Trade by Thomas Cooper. 7.
[110] Ibid., 27.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Though conciliatory in a religious sense, this question would have come in the wake of the American Revolution and potentially played on any inferiority complex of the English.
[113] Page, Anthony. "Rational Dissent, Enlightenment, and Abolition of the British Slave Trade." *The Historical Journal*, 54, 2011. 741-772.

Cooper also lifts up the Methodists. He applies "particularly to the Methodists: to those who must have read, or have heard at least, of the very excellent Tract of that very excellent man the Rev. John Wesley."[114] One of the founders of the Methodist movement, Wesley wrote one of the cornerstone works of abolitionist literature in 1774, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*.[115] It seems likely that Cooper himself was a Methodist based on his incredibly impassioned appeal.

> "My friends, for this end you are again called upon: I call upon the Preachers among you to second the endeavors of their great Master. This is the cause of Benevolence and Religion: it is therefore the case of Methodism. Do yourselves honor, and haste to come forth the foremost in this business. The omission will disgrace you."[116]

As it is likely the Parliamentary application/petitions were signed at church meetings, Cooper would have physically seen which Methodists who refused to sign the petition at services. This employment religious appeal (if not pressure) again suggests the humanitarian priorities of the abolitionists set on ending the British slave trade.

The religious arguments from Manchester, however, are vastly outweighed by the abolitionists' moral reasons for abolishing the slave trade. For the purposes of this analysis these arguments of morality will predominantly pertain to the brutal and inhumane conditions associated with the slave trade and the damage being done to Africa**.** When these conditions are held in conjunction with the Somerset decision and the experiences of Olaudah Equinao, there seems to be a clear moral contradiction. This concept of a disjunction between moral statement and moral practice appears in the context of Manchester.

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[114] Letters on the Slave Trade by Thomas Cooper. 27.
[115] Ibid., 7.
[116] Ibid.

One of the core moral issues of the slave trade, especially for Nickolls, is its needless inhumane treatment of the slaves. Originally a native of the West Indies, Nickolls argues that "the natural increase of the negroes already in the islands would be fully adequate to the cultivation of them, and that such natural increase would be secured by humane treatment."[117] The greed of the wealthy planters and the perpetual availability of fresh slaves, however, promoted inhumane conditions for the slaves. But abolishing the slave trade "would necessarily oblige the planter to such care of his negroes, as would at once essentially serve the cause of humanity, without giving him any occasion for the pleas that his rights are infringed, or his property invaded."[118] Under this argument, abolition serves humanity and improves slave conditions, while still preserving the planters' property.

Nickolls was not the only abolitionist interested in sustainable slave populations. In his letter to Thomas Walker, Granville Sharp also raised the subject of slave populations in the West Indies.

> "There is a Gentleman near your Town acquainted with yourself who has a considerable Number of Slaves which has been kept up for several Years without supplies from Africa. If you can procure the particulars of this or any similar Circumstance, it will be of very great use as such Cases make great Impressions."[119]

The "supplies from Africa" to which Sharp refers are not commercial goods, but actually fresh slaves. This statement reaffirms the connections between Manchester and slavery/the slave trade while also representing a rationale for Manchester abolitionism. If the slave populations on Caribbean plantations were already capable of naturally sustaining themselves, Manchester and its industry workers could maintain profits by

[117] Letter to the Society…Middleham. 13.
[118] Ibid., 23.
[119] Letter from Granville Sharp to Thomas Walker.

selling to those plantations without having to promote the inhumane slave trade or further line the pockets of the planters.

In particular, abolitionists stressed the immorality and brutality associated with the slave trade. In the letter published and circulated throughout Manchester, Thomas Cooper provides several diverse examples of the inhumanity of the slave trade. The cramped conditions of a slave-trading vessel were already well-known to Mancunians.[120] Cooper notes that besides the confines of the vessel, slaves were exposed to foul air, poor and insufficient provisions and female slaves also had to suffer "the unrestrained commerce of the sailors."[121] Conditions on the vessels were so bad that slaves had starved themselves to death or jumped overboard when brought on-deck for air.[122] Cooper's detailed description of the horrible conditions on a slave-vessel would have appealed to the Mancunians' human morals, and also potentially resonated with their own experiences of the conditions in the textile industry.

Besides the horribly inhumane conditions of the slave ship, the methods in which slaves were procured (as Nickolls noted) were hardly moral. Cooper's letter not only reveals the atrocities of the slave trade, but also alludes to the damage being done to Africa. To trade slaves to the British, an African king would plunder "some of his neighbors' towns, selling the people for the goods he wants" or take "one of his own towns, making bold to sell his own subjects."[123] Wars were "begun for the express purpose of *procuring slaves*," but Cooper asserts that "whoever reflects on the prodigious slaughter that is constantly made in every African skirmish, will find that where 10 are

[120] Drescher. "History's Engines." 742.
[121] Letters on the Slave Trade by Thomas Cooper. 13.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid 9.

taken, he has every reason to presume that 100 perish."[124] Cooper loosely calculates that 180 million Africans died because of the slave trade—through the procuring of slaves, the Middle Passage, and the process of getting acclimated to the West Indies.[125] He exposes the slave trade as not just a violation of religious ideals or scripture, but also a violation of basic morals and humanity. Whether as a Christian or just a moral person, it would be hard to perpetuate the horrible conditions slaves faced on the Middle passage, the brutal methods for procuring slaves, and the damage done to the African continent and population. The potential for naturally sustainable slave populations in the West Indies made it even more difficult to continue these abuses of one's fellow man. As Cooper's letter was published and circulated throughout Manchester before the 1787 petition, it helps explain why Mancunians responded to abolition with such passion and disregard for their own self-interest in the slave trade.

POPULAR MOBILIZATION

The popular mobilization in Manchester became the template for abolitionism in 1787, but it was the 1806 petitions that were arguably the decisive catalyst in the abolition of the British slave trade. While publicized letters are also forms of popular expression, the Manchester petitions are the best examples of the widespread mobilization against the slave trade. Though the 1787 and 1792 petitions were destroyed, by analyzing the 1806 petitions it is possible to gain more insight into the abolitionist motivations of the Mancunians and their role in the abolition of the British slave trade.

[124] Ibid 11.
[125] Ibid., 25.

The 1806 petitions from Manchester reveal how overwhelmingly abolitionist most Mancunians were: a factor that was impactful in the final debate on the abolition of the slave trade. The Manchester Anti-Slave Society coordinated an 1806 petition that was, like the previous parliamentary petitions from Manchester, addressed to the House of Commons. The 1787 and 1792 petitions had supported bills for abolishing the slave trade that were debated and approved in the House of Commons but were then struck down in the House of Lords.[126] In 1806, however, the political climate was different. Manchester had led the way in a twenty-year campaign against slavery, but behind the abolitionist movement was the struggle for sociopolitical reform in which the Mancunians were also significant stakeholders. The previously provincial and overlooked actors Drescher describes had been empowered, developed networks, and mobilized to constitute a powerful popular force calling for abolition. Robin Blackburn concludes that in the 1807 debate of a bill to abolish the slave trade, "Britain's oligarchy had a world to win if they could pull through [abolition in 1807]—and a kingdom to lose if they did not."[127]

When the 1806 anti-slave trade bill supported by the Manchester petition was being debated in the House of Lords, Manchester cotton merchant Robert Peel coordinated a pro-slavery petition from over 400 Mancunians. [128] The fact that this petition was created and circulated emphasizes that Mancunians were aware of their ties to the slave trade. It also suggests that there was an awareness of the social shifts and significant concern that this time the House of Lords would approve the bill to abolish the

[126] Drescher. *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*. 68-75.
[127] Blackburn, Robin. *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1848*. New York: Verso Books, 1988. 526.
[128] Federation of Family History Societies, "Manchester & Lancashire FHS and Parliamentary Archives Complete Joint Project." See also Drescher. *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*. 68-75.

slave trade. The pro-slave trade petition was intended to prevent the House of Lords from approving the abolition of the slave trade by striking a blow to abolition from the hotbed of abolitionism. It is unclear how this pro-slavery petition was circulated amongst the over 400 individuals who signed it, but it was likely in secret.

There was notable backlash to this Robert Peel's petition. Flyers and broadsides were printed and posted around Manchester, detailing and condemning the shady and secretive actions of those who had circulated the pro-slave trade petition.[129] The criticisms Manchester's abolitionists made of the stealthy, pro-slave petition were, like their criticism of the slave trade, based predominantly on moral principles. Peel's petition is described on the broadside as "conceived in Darkness, and hatched in Privacy; it has lain in wait for its Dupes, like a Strumpet in Lanes and Corners."[130] In its critique of the petition in favor of the slave trade, the broadside provides some insight as to how Manchester petitions were normally circulated.

> "The Petition from the Town of *Manchester* was carried thro' the Stages of a Committee and General Meeting of the Subscribers, previous to its passing, with unanimous Approbation, in a regular, numerous, and respectable Meeting of the Inhabitants of *Manchester*. Copies of the Petition were left, for public Inspection, in different Parts of the Town ; and the Signatures were publicly received."[131]

Petitions, it seems, had to be approved by a committee and a meeting, displayed publicly, and also signed publicly. Churches would have served as the most logical and convenient place to gain large numbers of public signatures. The petition supporting the slave trade, however, had not passed through these steps but still carried Manchester's name which inspired the Mancunians' outrage.

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[129] Broadside: African Slave Trade. GB127.Broadsides/F1787.3, Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

The broadside was not the only retaliation from pro-abolition sources. Clarkson requested an abolitionist petition be sent to the House of Lords to counter the impact of the pro-slave trade petition.[132] In a matter of hours, an abolitionist petition exceeding the number of names of the pro-slave trade many times over was dispatched to the House of Lords with the promise that double that number of names could have been achieved with a day's more time.[133] Such a response not only attests to the passion of the abolitionists, but also to their rationale: Manchester abolitionism was based on humanitarian, religious, and moral conceptualizations of what was "right," regardless of economic interest or gain.

In March of 1807, Parliament passed a bill to abolish the British slave trade. It has been suggested that the Manchester 1806 petitions were instrumental in this.[134] The pro-slave trade petition was pivotal in that it stimulated a Mancunian response revealing abolition as the clear will of an overwhelming majority of people. That majority was reflected by the House of Commons' vote on the bill for the abolition of the slave trade: it passed with 283 in favor and only sixteen opposed.[135] When the bill was under consideration in the House of Lords, one of its chief opponents and former Prime Minister, Lord Sidmouth (Sydney), expressed his pain at differing from the great body of people in Britain.[136] These petitions embody the Manchester paradox. Robert Peel's pro-slave trade petition shows that Mancunians were aware of their strong economic ties to the slave trade. The other petitions, however, show that the vast majority of Mancunians not only opposed the slave trade but were willing to mobilize against it.

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[132] Drescher. "Public Opinion." 61.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 63
[135] Ibid., 62.
[136] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

During the eighteenth century, England dominated the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The English simultaneously experienced an economic boom and international ascendancy into the British Empire. The northern city of Manchester also profited greatly as its textile industry exported predominantly to Africa and the West Indies. In 1787, however, the Anti-Slave Society was founded and twenty years later the 1807 Slave Trade Act abolished the British slave trade. Manchester was the hotbed of the abolitionist movement and sent several mass petitions to Parliament supporting bills to end the slave trade.

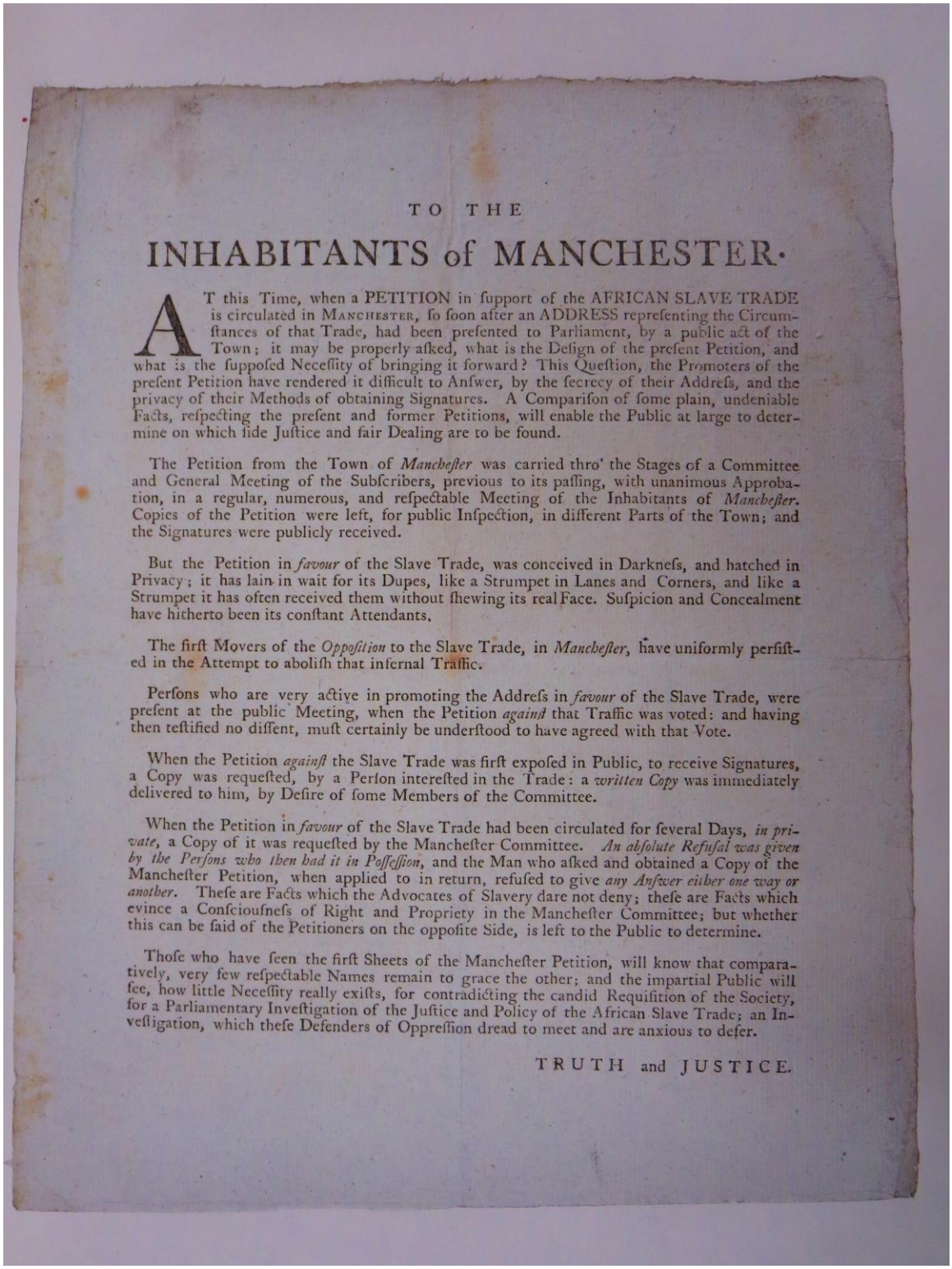
The levels of abolitionist fervor and popular mobilization in Manchester, however, are ironic and surprising. Manchester's economic connections to the slave trade were so strong that, prior to 1787, abolitionists and anti-abolitionists alike expected the Mancunians to condemn any act limiting the slave trade.[137] This Manchester paradox—popular mobilization despite economic self-interest—is not adequately explained by the historiography of British abolitionism. Micro-historical analysis of Manchester, however, shows that the Mancunians were well-aware of their interests in the slave trade but still supported abolition. The extant sources suggest that Mancunians knowingly mobilized for the good of their fellow humans on humanitarian, religious, and moral bases rather than continuing their lucrative ties to the slave trade. More micro-historical analysis of Manchester and its paradox through a broader array of sources has the potential to clear a path through the dense thicket of macro-historical debate by

[137] Drescher. *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*. 70-71.

showing how the large institution of British abolitionism was understood in a small place like Manchester.

APPENDIX

Abolitionist Broadside, Manchester



TO THE

INHABITANTS of MANCHESTER.

AT this Time, when a PETITION in ſupport of the AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE is circulated in MANCHESTER, ſo ſoon after an ADDRESS repreſenting the Circumſtances of that Trade, had been preſented to Parliament, by a public act of the Town; it may be properly aſked, what is the Deſign of the preſent Petition, and what is the ſuppoſed Neceſſity of bringing it forward? This Queſtion, the Promoters of the preſent Petition have rendered it difficult to Anſwer, by the ſecrecy of their Addreſs, and the privacy of their Methods of obtaining Signatures. A Compariſon of ſome plain, undeniable Facts, reſpecting the preſent and former Petitions, will enable the Public at large to determine on which ſide Juſtice and fair Dealing are to be found.

The Petition from the Town of *Mancheſter* was carried thro' the Stages of a Committee and General Meeting of the Subſcribers, previous to its paſſing, with unanimous Approbation, in a regular, numerous, and reſpectable Meeting of the Inhabitants of *Mancheſter*. Copies of the Petition were left, for public Inſpection, in different Parts of the Town; and the Signatures were publicly received.

But the Petition in *favour* of the Slave Trade, was conceived in Darkneſs, and hatched in Privacy; it has lain in wait for its Dupes, like a Strumpet in Lanes and Corners, and like a Strumpet it has often received them without ſhewing its real Face. Suſpicion and Concealment have hitherto been its conſtant Attendants.

The firſt Movers of the *Oppoſition* to the Slave Trade, in *Mancheſter*, have uniformly perſiſted in the Attempt to aboliſh that infernal Traffic.

Perſons who are very active in promoting the Addreſs in *favour* of the Slave Trade, were preſent at the public Meeting, when the Petition *againſt* that Traffic was voted: and having then teſtified no diſſent, muſt certainly be underſtood to have agreed with that Vote.

When the Petition *againſt* the Slave Trade was firſt expoſed in Public, to receive Signatures, a Copy was requeſted, by a Perſon intereſted in the Trade: a *written Copy* was immediately delivered to him, by Deſire of ſome Members of the Committee.

When the Petition in *favour* of the Slave Trade had been circulated for ſeveral Days, *in private*, a Copy of it was requeſted by the Mancheſter Committee. *An abſolute Refuſal was given by the Perſons who then had it in Poſſeſſion*, and the Man who aſked and obtained a Copy of the Mancheſter Petition, when applied to in return, refuſed to give *any Anſwer either one way or another*. Theſe are Facts which the Advocates of Slavery dare not deny; theſe are Facts which evince a Conſciouſneſs of Right and Propriety in the Mancheſter Committee; but whether this can be ſaid of the Petitioners on the oppoſite Side, is left to the Public to determine.

Thoſe who have ſeen the firſt Sheets of the Mancheſter Petition, will know that comparatively, very few reſpectable Names remain to grace the other; and the impartial Public will ſee, how little Neceſſity really exiſts, for contradicting the candid Requiſition of the Society, for a Parliamentary Inveſtigation of the Juſtice and Policy of the African Slave Trade; an Inveſtigation, which theſe Defenders of Oppreſſion dread to meet and are anxious to defer.

TRUTH and JUSTICE.

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