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Brown, Chap. 5

CHAPTER 5

Africa, Africans, and the Idea of Abolition

The "traffic" in "rational beings" will continue until the "pecuniary interests of Europeans can be diverted into another channel." This was the advice the elderly Quaker doctor John Fothergill shared with his protégé John Coakley Lettsom shortly before his death in 1780, after a dozen years of intermittent and unsuccessful lobbying against the Atlantic slave system. The eminent English physician had been instrumental in 1767 in arranging for the first London reprints of Anthony Benezet's publications.[1] In 1768 Fothergill had read in manuscript the research Granville Sharp had begun to assemble against the practice of slaveholding on English soil. Fothergill had given Sharp financial and moral support four years later, in 1772, when the case of James Somerset lay before Lord Mansfield and the Court of King's Bench. In the subsequent months, he had hosted the American Quaker abolitionist John Woolman and had introduced Benezet's colleague William Dillwyn to Granville Sharp and other antislavery enthusiasts in England. Fothergill, moreover, had studied the emancipation schemes that circulated during the 1770s with great interest. He had expressed enthusiasm for the "Spanish Regulations," which Granville Sharp had shared with the sympathetic during the American war. Perhaps inspired by Maurice Morgann's *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies,* Fothergill in 1772 had written optimistically (though in private) of colonizing liberated slaves in the Americas, perhaps, he suggested, in the new British colonies of Tobago or Saint Vincent.[2]

1. John Coakley Lettsom, ed., *The Works of John Fothergill . . .* , 3 vols. (London, 1783–1784), III, xlvi–xlvii. The Benezet pamphlet was first published as *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions: Collected from Various Authors, and Submitted to the Serious Consideration of All, More Especially of Those in Power* (Philadelphia, 1766). For John Fothergill's role in shepherding the text through publication by the Society of Friends in England, see MS Minutes of the Meeting for Sufferings, XXXII (May 22, 1767), 68, Library of the Society of Friends (LSF), London; MS Minutes of the Committee on Friends Books (n.d., 1767), 39, LSF.

2. John Fothergill to Granville Sharp [1768?], [1772?], MS Granville Sharp, Received

John Fothergill, then, had enough experience by 1780 to recognize the challenges that aspiring antislavery activists faced. He knew that the works of Benezet had failed to generate an antislavery movement in Britain before the American Revolution, even among his brethren within the Society of Friends, among whom, he remarked sadly in 1779, there was "a sort of lethargy prevailing among too many." With David Hartley and other proponents of conciliation, Fothergill had labored unsuccessfully in 1775 to work out an amicable peace between Britain and the colonies. So he understood, as James Ramsay did by 1778, that the moment for benevolent intervention in the American colonies had passed, that the successful rebellion in North America would compel British opponents of slavery to abandon schemes for a comprehensive emancipation. "It is not a time," he confessed to Sharp in 1779, "to hope much good to liberty."[3] Most of all, Fothergill recognized the decisive influence of "pecuniary interests." He knew that a profitable trade would be abolished only if abolition could be characterized persuasively as improving and enhancing British trade rather than diminishing it. He understood that moral appeals needed to be balanced by attention to economic interests and the needs of state.

John Fothergill was a scientist as well as an abolitionist and, therefore, often in the company of cosmopolitan men dedicated to the promotion of useful knowledge. In collaboration with Joseph Banks and other naturalists in 1771, he had commissioned an entrepreneur, Henry Smeathman, to study the flora and fauna on the Grain Coast of Africa. During the four years that he spent in Sierra Leone, Smeathman became convinced that the soil and the climate could support commercial agriculture, that crops like sugar, indigo, and cotton traditionally cultivated in the Americas could

Letterbook, 1768–1772, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia; Fothergill to Sharp, Feb. 2, 1772, in Betsy C. Corner and Christopher C. Booth, eds., *Chains of Friendship: Selected Letters of Dr. John Fothergill of London* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 374–375; Sharp to Fothergill, Feb. 8, 1772, MS Granville Sharp Letterbook, fols. 46–48, York Minster Library (YML); Sharp to Anthony Benezet, Jan. 7, 1774, Granville Sharp MSS, D3549 13/1/B19, Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO); Fothergill to John Pemberton, Aug. 29, 1772, Pemberton Papers, XXXIV, fol. 165, HSP.

3. Fothergill to Pemberton, June 14, 1779, Portfolio MSS, XXXVIII, fol. 113, LSF; R. Hingston Fox, *Dr. John Fothergill and His Friends: Chapters in Eighteenth Century Life* (London, 1919); Fothergill to Sharp, Mar. 11, 1779, in Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp . . .* (London, 1820), 188.

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Pettigrew, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings o*
His Correspondence, 3 vols. (London, 1817), II, 135

instead be acquired from Africa, and that Africans might be taught, as he saw it, the value of a hard day's work. Smeathman also became intrigued with attaining power and influence on the coast, and he married three daughters of local rulers in quick succession. He left Sierra Leone in 1775 for Grenada in the British West Indies at the behest of sugar planters who hired him to exterminate ants; the self-styled "flycatcher" had become in Africa an expert on insects. There, too, he took to the study of plantation agronomy, certain, he told Fothergill, that with a suitable mixture of skills and labor he could produce staple crops along the Atlantic coast of Africa for export to Europe, if given the chance to return. These reports persuaded the aged Quaker physician by the late 1770s that slave trade abolition might be described as promoting, rather than reducing, Atlantic commerce. The way to end slavery in the colonies, Fothergill told Lettsom after the Smeathman expedition, was to transfer British sugar production from the Caribbean to Africa, "where it seems to have been indigenous, and thrives luxuriantly," and where "the natives" might "be employed as servants for hire, and not as slaves compelled to labour by the dread of torture."[4] Here was the alternative channel through which the pecuniary interests of Europe might be diverted. Here was a way to attain the produce of the Americas without a dependence on the Middle Passage.

The development of alternatives to the Atlantic slave trade in the late eighteenth century, in every instance, depended on the hope of encouraging a trade in African commodities rather than human bodies, although the character and content of the proposals would vary. Dreams of reordering

4. Smeathman's expedition is now detailed splendidly in Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge, 2005), 28–37. See also Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786–1791* (Liverpool, 1994), 6–12, and discussion in notes on 35–37; and Henry Smeathman, *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, Voyages and Travels in Africa and the West-Indies, from the Year 1771 to the Year 1779 Inclusive* [London, 1780]. For Lettsom's account of Fothergill's advice, see John Coakley Lettsom, *Memoirs of John Fothergill, M.D., etc.,* 4th ed. (London, 1786), 69–70. Lettsom published this idea anonymously in 1780s, in the weeks before Fothergill's death. *Gentleman's Magazine, and Historical Chronicle,* L (1780), 458. Lettsom confessed to be the author of this essay several years later. Lettsom to Dr. Cuming, Oct. 20, 1787, in Thomas Pettigrew, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of J. C. Lettsom, with a Selection from His Correspondence,* 3 vols. (London, 1817), II, 135.

the Africa trade, of stimulating staple crop production along the West African coast, waxed and waned during the eighteenth century but revived forcefully for a time in the early 1780s as certain British entrepreneurs looked for new opportunities and resources after the American war. The new British settlement in Sierra Leone established in 1786 as an asylum for black loyalists represented the most concrete result of this intensified interest in the West African coast. It also marked the meeting point for several crystallizing impulses and agendas fundamental to the making of organized abolitionism in the 1780s.

Surprisingly, the formulation of the Sierra Leone scheme rarely figures in accounts of early British antislavery. As has long been clear, the Sierra Leone experiment represented more than one outcome of a long-standing colonizationist fantasy. The project arose in part from the self-assertion of fugitive slaves escaping from the United States after the American War of Independence. Its early history brings to light the strategies and aims of free blacks within the British Empire in the crucial years before organized abolitionism emerged in Britain. The occasion for the scheme indicates also a subtle but significant shift in how some British officers and politicians regarded men and women of African descent residing in the British Empire. In the context of the American Revolution and its aftermath, affording protection to black loyalists seemed to advance the needs of state, even when that assistance sacrificed the concerns of propertied and commercial interests discomfited by the prospect of legal rights for liberated slaves. Last, the Sierra Leone experiment indicates, also, an emerging tendency among antislavery enthusiasts to seek in Africa solutions to the problem of slavery in the Americas, to reform enterprise in the western Atlantic by reordering operations in the eastern Atlantic. In each of these ways—as the distant offspring of an expansionist fantasy, as a refuge for free blacks escaping from slaveholding in the Americas, as an instance of an emerging interest in the ideal of trusteeship among decision makers within the British government, and as an indirect challenge to the slave system itself—the Sierra Leone settlement occupies a crucial though often overlooked place in the development of the antislavery movement in Britain.

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In key respects, the roots of the Sierra Leone settlement lay deep in the history of British enterprise in Africa. It evolved from the hopes of a persistent few who in the eighteenth century wished to establish

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5. K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Comp*
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6. A. P. Newton, "British Enterprise in
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a more permanent British presence along the African coast, who wanted to found colonies of settlement that promoted commercial agriculture, not merely a trade in human bodies, who aimed to enhance the state's role in the management of African enterprise. The Restoration governments of the late seventeenth century had tried to restrict British commerce in the eastern Atlantic to chartered joint stock corporations. From 1660 to 1698, the Royal Adventurers to Africa and its successor, the Royal Africa Company, held an exclusive right to transport captive Africans to the British colonies. But freebooters, the "separate traders," proved far more effective in providing the American colonies with a sufficient supply of slaves and, after 1713, won from Parliament unfettered access to the coast.[5] Thereafter, limited metropolitan oversight was the rule in the African trades. By the early eighteenth century, the initiative in African waters had shifted to individual traders and investors willing to hazard fortunes on uncertain ventures. Parliament in 1730 assumed from the Royal Africa Company the costly obligation to maintain trading forts and thereby ensure British influence on the coast. The forts, however, played only a marginal role in the trade. Ships arriving from England regularly skirted these stations to deal directly with African sellers. From the Gold Coast to the Bight of Benin, the African trade often took on the character of an open, unpoliced bazaar. British ships routinely sold to African buyers goods produced by European rivals when in competition for the purchase of human cargoes. British factors in Africa sometimes boarded enslaved men and women on French and Dutch ships.[6] This last practice was common particularly along the banks of the

5. K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957), esp. 97–152; James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York, 1981), 141–169. For the challenge to the Royal Africa Company's monopoly, see Tim Keirn, "Monopoly, Economic Thought, and the Royal African Company," in John Brewer and Susan Staves, eds., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London, 1996), 427–466; Kenneth Morgan, ed., *The British Transatlantic Slave Trade*, II, *The Royal African Company* (London, 2003), x–xxiv; and James A. Rawley, "Richard Harris, Slave Trader Spokesman," in Rawley, *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade* (Columbia, Mo., 2003), 57–70.

6. A. P. Newton, "British Enterprise in Tropical Africa," in J. Holland Rose, A. P. Newton, and E. A. Benians, *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, 8 vols. (1929–1959; rpt. Cambridge, 1961), II, 633–635; Davies, *The Royal African Company*, 121–122, 259–262; Nigel Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade: Comprising the Log of the Daniel and Henry of 1700 and Accounts of the Slave Trade from the Minor Ports of England, 1698–*

Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Sherbro Rivers, where British firms established private trading posts, especially after the final demise of the Royal Africa Company in 1750. Historian David Hancock reports that from 1763 to 1783 Grant, Oswald, and Company provided from their Bance Island fort 4,847 men, women, and children to French ships dispatched from Honfleur.[7] On the African coast, self-interest prevailed routinely over corporate or national interests. Perhaps nowhere in the Atlantic was the mercantilist system more widely abandoned in practice.

The British merchants operating in Africa sought assistance from the state only when fulfilling their ambitions required the muscle of state authority. Gold, not slaves, first had brought the English (like other Europeans) to the African coast. Deep into the eighteenth century the prospect of substantial returns in gold would continue to enthrall British men who traveled to Africa, even as gold exports declined. Those who dreamed of locating an African El Dorado hoped above all to enrich themselves. Yet they understood that they would need state support to exploit and profit from their claims. Private interests were described as public interests when private interests needed state funding. In 1757, for example, an entrepreneur name Thynne proposed to instruct Fantee laborers in what he characterized as Brazilian techniques of gold mining if the crown first would secure land rights along the Gold Coast for British nationals. George Glas,

1725 (London, 1991), 78; Margaret Priestley, *West African Trade and Coast Society* (London, 1969), 75.

7. David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), 172–220. This practice had early eighteenth-century precedents. London slave trader Humphry Morice dealt extensively in Dutch wares and frequently sold slaves to Dutch and Portuguese agents along the coast. James A. Rawley, "Humphry Morice: Foremost London Slave Merchant of His Time," in Rawley, *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade,* 45–46, 48, 50. For Miles Barber and Co., which operated from the Sherbro River, see Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1450–1800* (Oxford, 1970), 251–253, and Melinda Elder, *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (Halifax, Eng., 1992), 59–60. In 1763, former company factor Richard Brew constructed a "castle" of his own in the shadows of the English fort at Annamaboe. Priestley, *West African Trade and Coast Society,* 55–113. For further evidence of such privately owned slave trading stations, see Conrad Gill, *Merchants and Mariners of the Eighteenth Century* (Westport, Conn., 1961), 74–91.

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8. Robin Law and P. E. H. Hair, "The Eng
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9. James L. A. Webb, Jr., "The Mid-Eigh
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a slave trader, sought from the king in 1764 an exclusive claim to a discovery he advertised as "the greatest that has been made in commerce" since 1492—a West African harbor positioned to divert gold caravans away from the Sahara and toward the Atlantic coast and British merchants. When lobbying for support, these speculators often resorted to the vocabulary of imperial power. They predicted increased revenue for the Treasury, enlarged markets for British manufactures, and growth of the merchant marine. And they warned darkly of the consequences if Britain should "be too late in her application to Negroe princes" for the rights to inland gold fields. The French, they predicted, would be the first to exploit the natural resources of the continent should the state fail to act quickly.[8] These warnings about the dangers presented by French power, in one instance, transformed British enterprise on the coast. The merchants Samuel Touchet and Thomas Cuming wanted access to the French-controlled trade in gum arabic, an item used in the refinement of silks and other textiles. So in 1758 they successfully urged on the elder William Pitt an expedition to capture the French trading base at Saint Louis, selling the plan to the first minister as a means of reducing the economic power of a bitter rival.[9]

For all the wealth the slave trade produced, some familiar with the coast thought the potential for commerce with Africa scarcely tapped. This view prevailed particularly among those unsuccessful in the competition to procure slaves for the American colonies. In sporadic fits of enthusiasm, the Royal Africa Company asked its agents to promote the export trades in

8. Robin Law and P. E. H. Hair, "The English in Western Africa to 1700," in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire,* I, *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), 251–256; "Proposal for Working the Gold Mines on the Gold Coast of Guinea," PRO CO 267/6; "Petition of George Glas to the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations (The Board of Trade)," PRO PC 1/7/96; [George Glas], *A Scheme for Opening a Trade between the European and the Inhabitants of the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1764).

9. James L. A. Webb, Jr., "The Mid-Eighteenth Century Gum Arabic Trade and the British Conquest of Saint-Louis du Senegal, 1758," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* XXV, no. 1 (1997), 37–58; Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge, 2002), 397–399; Maxine Berg, "In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present,* no. 182 (February 2004), 137–140.

cotton, indigo, pepper, medicines, and potash. The company at times took the further step of sending to the coast seeds, mills, and technicians to set up its own plantations. The Royal Africa Company attempted indigo along the Sherbo River in the 1690s and again, with brief success, at Cape Coast Castle early in the eighteenth century. These modest achievements owed much to the initiative of Sir Dalby Thomas, the energetic and ambitious chief factor at Cape Coast Castle from 1703 and probably the first British official to espouse agricultural "improvement" in West Africa. Before his death in 1711, he wrote officials in London about supplementing the several acres of indigo at Cape Coast with corn, cotton, and sugar worked by slave labor, in the hope that, in time, the region could support a British colony. These ideas continued to circulate long after Thomas left the scene. In 1715 the Royal Africa Company funded a short-lived project to seek gold mines near the coast. In 1718 they considered manufacturing rum. Exploration of the African interior figured in the fiction of Daniel Defoe, who published two defenses of the Royal Africa Company in the 1710s, and sent his fictional Captain Singleton on a transcontinental trek through southern Africa. James Brydges, the duke of Chandos and a prominent voice in company affairs, renewed plantation schemes a decade later, convinced that Africa could "become as beneficial to England as America is to Spain." Under his leadership, in the early 1720s, the Royal Africa Company sent to Cape Coast Castle gins to foster an export trade in cotton and teams of Cornish miners to draw ores from Akan gold fields.[10]

10. David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2000), 241–244; Robin Law, "King Agaja of Dahomey, the Slave Trade, and the Question of West African Plantations: The Embassy of Bulfinche Lambe and Adomo Tomo to England, 1726–1732," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XIX, no. 2 (1991), 155–158; Davies, *The Royal African Company,* 132–133, 220–221, 344–345; Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast,* 167–170; Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade,* 91–92; Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720: A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade* (Oxford, 1970), 45–46; Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes: The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Urbana, Ill., 1981), 36; Tim Keirn, "Daniel Defoe and the Royal African Company," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research,* LXI (1988), 243–247; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000), 107–109; Larry Stewart, *The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660–1750* (Cambridge, 1992), 320–324; Joseph E. Inikori,

These projects, both real and imagined the British to establish ascendancy anyw peans, British visitors suffered from high and political authority, moreover, rested u Until the capture of Senegal in 1758, the Africa. Factors, soldiers, traders, and arti scattered forts during the eighteenth cent little more than trading posts held at the the British paid tribute or annual rent commerce open to British ships. Africar the coastal towns, however, prevented th tlements, an opposition that the slave t inclined to overcome. The hundreds who outfitted ships for Africa found r enticing than uncertain long-term inves where they lacked secure claims to land against the American colonists in the m

The Chaining of a Continent: Export Deman South of the Sahara, 1450–1870 (Mona, Jama Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolut* presented in this paragraph and the pages deserves a more extended discussion than it c that comparable ambitions developed elsewh tury, with comparably limited results. The ir tions, colonies, and legitimate commerce in For the Dutch, see Inikori, *Africans and the I* For the French, see William B. Cohen, *Th Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington.

11. For general statements on European v century, see J. D. Fage, "African Societies *Present,* no. 125 (November 1989), 97–115, a Country': The Realities of Power in Afro-Eu Coast,'" *Itinerario,* XVIII (1994), 50–64. Th work on the coast are evoked in Hancock, *C* "'Companies Are Always Ungrateful': Jam African Trade," *African Economic History,* Drudgery of the Slave Trade, 1750–1790," i

ıedicines, and potash. The company at times took ıg to the coast seeds, mills, and technicians to set he Royal Africa Company attempted indigo along 690s and again, with brief success, at Cape Coast :enth century. These modest achievements owed Sir Dalby Thomas, the energetic and ambitious st Castle from 1703 and probably the first British ıltural "improvement" in West Africa. Before his ficials in London about supplementing the several :oast with corn, cotton, and sugar worked by slave n time, the region could support a British colony.) circulate long after Thomas left the scene. In 1715 ny funded a short-lived project to seek gold mines ey considered manufacturing rum. Exploration of ed in the fiction of Daniel Defoe, who published yal Africa Company in the 1710s, and sent his ton on a transcontinental trek through southern the duke of Chandos and a prominent voice in l plantation schemes a decade later, convinced that s beneficial to England as America is to Spain." the early 1720s, the Royal Africa Company sent to to foster an export trade in cotton and teams of ores from Akan gold fields.[10]

: of African Slavery in the Americas (Cambridge, 2000), Agaja of Dahomey, the Slave Trade, and the Question of he Embassy of Bulfinche Lambe and Adomo Tomo to *mperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XIX, no. 2 (1991), 155- *an Company*, 132–133, 220–221, 344–345; Rodney, *A His- Coast*, 167–170; Tattersfield, *The Forgotten Trade*, 91–92; *and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720: A Study of the in Trade* (Oxford, 1970), 45–46; Colin Palmer, *Human ade to Spanish America, 1700–1739* (Urbana, Ill., 1981), 36; id the Royal African Company," *Bulletin of the Institute of* 88), 243–247; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: ghteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000), 107- *of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philos- 1660–1750* (Cambridge, 1992), 320–324; Joseph E. Inikori,

These projects, both real and imagined, were doomed by the inability of the British to establish ascendancy anywhere in Africa. Like other Europeans, British visitors suffered from high mortality on the coast. Military and political authority, moreover, rested unambiguously with African elites. Until the capture of Senegal in 1758, the British could claim no territory in Africa. Factors, soldiers, traders, and artisans in the hundreds occupied the scattered forts during the eighteenth century. But these establishments were little more than trading posts held at the pleasure of local rulers to whom the British paid tribute or annual rent. The British garrisons kept the commerce open to British ships. African political and commercial elites in the coastal towns, however, prevented the formation of sizable British settlements, an opposition that the slave traders were neither equipped nor inclined to overcome. The hundreds of independent British merchants who outfitted ships for Africa found returns in the slave trade far more enticing than uncertain long-term investments in commercial agriculture, where they lacked secure claims to land and insufficient wealth to compete against the American colonists in the market for slave labor.[11]

The Chaining of a Continent: Export Demand for Captives and the History of Africa South of the Sahara, 1450–1870 (Mona, Jamaica, 1992), 47–50. Chandos cited on 48; Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England*, 385–388. The account presented in this paragraph and the pages that follow touch on a vast subject that deserves a more extended discussion than it can receive here. Readers should be aware that comparable ambitions developed elsewhere in Europe during the eighteenth century, with comparably limited results. The international history of schemes for plantations, colonies, and legitimate commerce in Africa before the 1780s remains unwritten. For the Dutch, see Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England*, 385–388. For the French, see William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980), 155–166.

11. For general statements on European vulnerability in Africa during the eighteenth century, see J. D. Fage, "African Societies and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Past and Present*, no. 125 (November 1989), 97–115, and Robin Law, "'Here Is No Resisting the Country': The Realities of Power in Afro-European Relations on the West African 'Slave Coast,'" *Itinerario*, XVIII (1994), 50–64. The isolated conditions endured by Britons at work on the coast are evoked in Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 195–198, David Henige, "'Companies Are Always Ungrateful': James Phipps of Cape Coast, a Victim of the African Trade," *African Economic History*, IX (1980), 27–47, and Ty M. Reese, "The Drudgery of the Slave Trade, 1750–1790," in Peter A. Coclanis, ed., *The Atlantic Econ-*

The Royal Africa Company, in theory, was better suited to attempt projects that would not yield quick returns. But its weak political standing in England, outsized debt, and unreliable agents hindered even its modest attempts to expand the trade in staple crops. Its successor, the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, suffered as well from limited funds. Even more, though, it never established more than nominal control over its employees on the coast. The organizations responsible for overseeing the Africa trade struggled to maintain the forts, provision the garrisons, and instill a semblance of discipline. They stood no chance of setting up plantations in Africa on their own.[12] The Board of Trade added to these difficulties after 1750 by discouraging private efforts to plant British colonists anywhere along the coast. In 1752 the board forbade officials at the Gold Coast from reviving cotton and indigo plantations on the grounds of Cape Coast Castle, in part because cultivation in Africa could harm the profitability of colonial settlements in the Americas by offering them competition. The board did express an interest in Thynne's plan to capture Fantee gold mines for British nationals. But it decided that any attempt to exercise command in Africa would entangle merchants in local politics and undermine the Atlantic slave trade.[13] Caution prevailed. The state neither supervised the African trade nor blessed efforts to expand its compass.

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omy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel (Columbia, S.C., 2005), 277–280. Mortality rates among Royal Africa Company employees are treated in K. G. Davies, "The Living and the Dead: White Mortality in Africa, 1684–1732," in Eugene Genovese and Stanley Engerman, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), 83–98. The difficulty of competing with the American plantations is considered in Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England,* 388–389, 393.

12. On the weaknesses of Royal African Company oversight, see Law, "King Agaja of Dahomey, the Slave Trade, and the Question of West African Plantations," *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth Hist.*, XIX, no. 2 (1991), 157–158, and Davies, *The Royal African Company,* 344–349. For the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, see Eveline Christiana Martin, *The British West African Settlements, 1750–1821: A Study in Local Administration* (London, 1927), 43–56.

13. Consider excerpts from the board's report on Thynne's application to discover and work gold mines near the coast: "England has not in Africa, like Portugal in the Brasils, Property in the Soil, or Sovereignty over its Inhabitants. On the contrary, the British interest, both in Possessions and Commerce, depends chiefly, if not entirely, on

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14. Little of Postlethwayt's correspond
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This restricted if judicious definition of national interest infuriated those enamored with grandiose fantasies of establishing British imperial power in Africa, notably Malachy Postlethwayt, a commentator too frequently neglected in histories of British antislavery thought. Students of the eighteenth-century empire know Postlethwayt as the chief propagandist for the Royal Africa Company and, as such, as a leading apologist for the Atlantic slave trade in the 1740s. Few, though, have noticed his more general commitment to extending the reach of the British state deep into the African hinterland or the consequences of that commitment to his evolving view of the Atlantic slave trade, a shift evident in his later publications.[14] Postlethwayt believed that great wealth awaited the nation that

the good Will and friendship of the Natives, who do not allow Us even those Possessions limited as they are to the bare Spots on which Our Forts and Factories are situated without the Payment of an annual Quitrent, by way of acknowledgement of their Right. The whole of the British Commerce also, as well in Slaves, as in Elephants Teeth and Gold Dust, passes thro' the hands of the Natives, who have ever expressed great Jealousy at every attempt made by Europeans to discover the Nature and Produce of their Country and particularly their Gold. . . . When these circumstances are considered, it must be submitted whether it be adviseable to give Encouragement to such an Undertaking. . . . Whether there is any reasonable hope of Succeeding in it; and whether on the contrary, there is not great Reason to fear, that the very attempt might, by embroiling us with the Natives, and thereby affording the most favourable Opportunity to the designs of our Enemies who have Settlements on the Coast, be productive of such Consequences, as may endanger the British Possessions, and the valuable Branches of Commerce which we now carry on in that Country." "Lords of Trade Report to William Pitt on Mr. Thynne's Proposal to Work Gold Mines on the Coast of Africa," Jan. 23, 1758, PRO CO 267/6. See also Martin, *The British West African Settlements,* 24–25. For India, see P. J. Marshall, "The British in Asia: Trade to Dominion, 1700–1765," in Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire,* II, *The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), 498. The concern to protect West Indian cultivators of tropical crops is discussed briefly in Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England,* 389–392, and Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast,* 46. North American and West Indian lobbyists almost certainly campaigned to prevent the development of plantation agriculture in West Africa. Regrettably, that history remains unwritten.

14. Little of Postlethwayt's correspondence appears to survive, but much can be gleaned about his life from his several publications. See also Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion, and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cam-

secured for itself a commerce in the natural products of Africa. For this reason, it was not enough to allow the independent merchants to predominate in the Africa trade. If these individual traders succeeded well in securing profits for themselves, they had not and would not do enough to advance the nation's strategic interests in Africa as a whole. The state, he argued, needed to promote what later generations would come to know as "legitimate commerce," in particular by deepening official investment in the Royal Africa Company. Its declining fortunes he regarded as symptomatic of a more general failure among politicians to grasp the national importance of the Africa trade or its possibilities.

Postlethwayt had a personal interest in keeping the Royal Africa Company afloat. He served on its Court of Assistants for more than a dozen years before it was disbanded in 1750. In three increasingly alarmist pamphlets published in the 1740s, he warned that abandoning the company would mean throwing the slave trade into the arms of European competitors. As it was, he stated, the exclusive privileges enjoyed by the Compagnie des Indes enabled France to supply its colonies with slaves at a cheaper price, permitting the cultivation of sugar at a lower cost, allowing French sugar to undersell British sugar in European markets, and in turn strengthening the French merchant marine. Whereas France kept the purchase price of slaves low by restricting the number of French ships on the African coast, British merchants drove up their own costs through reckless bidding wars on each cargo. Only the Royal Africa Company, Postlethwayt insisted,

bridge, 1994), 163–169; William Darity, Jr., "British Industry and the West Indies Plantations," in Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Societies, Economies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham, N.C., 1992), 270–273; Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850* (Madison, Wis., 1964), 70; and E. A. J. Johnson, *Predecessors of Adam Smith: The Growth of British Economic Thought* (New York, 1937), 185–205. Only a handful of studies have been alert to the way Postlethwayt's published views shifted over time. See James Robert Constantine, "The African Slave Trade: A Study of Eighteenth Century Propaganda and Public Controversy" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1953), 45–51; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* 2d ed., rev. (Oxford, 1988), 160–161; Angelo Costanzo, ed., *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (Peterborough, Ont., 2001), 25–26, 300–303; and Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 21–24.

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15. [Malachy Postlethwayt], *The Africa British Plantation Trade in America* . . . (Lo *Importance of Effectually Supporting the Ro* don, 1745), and Postlethwayt, *The National Considered: Being an Enquiry, How Far Britain, Effectually to Support and Maintai ing to the Royal African Company of Englan* 1746). The first of these tracts the Englis Charles Hayes, director of the Royal Africa the author in his *In Honour to the Adminstr tion Considered: with Copies of the Memoria Malachy Postlethwayt . . . to Which Are Adde rials* (London, 1758), 270–273.

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could discourage such free-for-alls by negotiating for all British traders a set price from African suppliers. Furthermore, only sufficient funding for the company's forts in Africa could keep the French from encroaching on British trade in the Gambia River and prevent the Dutch from seizing control of traffic along the Gold Coast. Postlethwayt accepted that independent merchants would predominate in the carrying trade across the Atlantic. He proposed for the Royal Africa Company a sphere of activity better suited to its coastal establishment. In addition to warehousing captives for British merchants, the forts could serve as stations from which to carry "*British* Produce and Manufactures into the very heart of Africa, where they have not yet reached." Only a joint-stock company could perform this task. And the prospects, he added parenthetically, were limitless. "It certainly is our own Fault," he declared, "if we do not render the *African Trade* as valuable to Great Britain as the *Mines* of *Peru, Mexico,* and the *Brazils* are to the *Spaniards* and *Portuguese*."[15]

Few before the American Revolution went further than Postlethwayt in imagining West Africa as a future seat of British power. The idea of a British empire in Africa figured prominently in his several publications on trade and commercial policy even after the Royal Africa Company lost its charter. Increasingly, he looked with hope to the East India Company, which already had routine access to the textiles most valued by African consumers. Even more, Postlethwayt explained, the East India Company possessed the capital required to build forts and factories in the interior and, thereby, forge alliances with "negro princes." In time, he predicted trade with Africa

15. [Malachy Postlethwayt], *The African Trade, the Great Pillar and Support of British Plantation Trade in America* . . . (London, 1745), 45. See also Postlethwayt, *The Importance of Effectually Supporting the Royal African Company of England* . . . (London, 1745), and Postlethwayt, *The National and Private Advantages of the African Trade Considered: Being an Enquiry, How Far It Concerns the Trading Interest of Great Britain, Effectually to Support and Maintain the Forts and Settlements in Africa; Belonging to the Royal African Company of England . . . with a New and Correct Map* (London, 1746). The first of these tracts the English Short Title Catalog wrongly attributes to Charles Hayes, director of the Royal Africa Company. Postlethwayt identifies himself as the author in his *In Honour to the Adminstration; the Importance of the African Expedition Considered: with Copies of the Memorials . . . the Whole as Planned and Designed by Malachy Postlethwayt . . . to Which Are Added, Observations, Illustrating the Said Memorials* (London, 1758), 270–273.

would surpass commerce with Asia and the Americas. Postlethwayt described Africans as "savages." But he also thought their extensive trading networks evidence of great wealth and stable polities. Commerce, Postlethwayt insisted, would civilize Africans as it had American Indians and, in turn, instill a dependence on British goods. Sending out British colonists to the coast in substantial numbers would inspire the peoples of Africa to embrace European tastes and manners. They would "become so civilized as to clothe, and live more and more according to the European mode." The desire for imported manufacturers, in turn, would move Africans to offer up precious commodities and clear the way, on the continent, for the cultivation of crops valued in European markets. Postlethwayt waxed rhapsodic contemplating the possibilities. "None except the Portuguese," he remarked, "have made any use of all the land, the fruitful soil lies waste, a very established country, pleasant vallies, banks of rivers, spacious plains capable of cultivation to unspeakable benefit, in all probability will remain fallow and unnoticed."[16] Postlethwayt considered the West African hinterland a vast, unimproved common. His plans for commercial agriculture represented a grand scheme of enclosure.

As his enthusiasm for a British empire in Africa intensified, Postlethwayt's support for the slave trade seems to have diminished. The erstwhile propagandist for the Royal Africa Company turned against the slave trade in later publications, including his *Britain's Commercial Interest Explained* (1757) and the several editions of his *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*. These works not only expounded on the commercial returns that the colonization of Africa could yield. They also suggested that a British empire in Africa could liberate the continent from the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade. Christian Europe stood to gain more from "a friendly, humane, and civilized commerce" with Africa than a "trifling portion of trade upon their sea-coasts." But civilized commerce had become impossible because of the disorder in West African societies caused by the colonial demand for slaves. While this situation persisted, Europeans could never "travel with safety into the heart of Africa" or "cement" "commercial friendships." If the

16. Postlethwayt, *In Honour to the Administration*, 59, 85, 93. Similar passages appear in the 1757 and 1766 editions of Postlethwayt's *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (London) and *Britain's Commercial Interest, Explained and Improved in a Series of Dissertations*, 2 vols. (London, 1757).

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17. Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictiona*
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ɔndon, 1757).

slave trade ended, however, "a fair and honourable commerce" could take its place and "civilize" the "natives." At that point, white laborers could be recruited from Europe to work the Caribbean sugar colonies as servants in the place of enslaved Africans. This attempt to justify British colonies in Africa led Postlethwayt to reconsider some of his earlier statements. His later works insisted on the human equality of African peoples, who he thought possessed the same "rational faculties" and were "as capable of mechanical and manufactural arts and trades" as Europeans. Postlethwayt described the Atlantic slave trade as ruinous for Africa. His publications may have been among the first to argue that it led to the continent's "underdevelopment." "The whole country was captive," he observed in his *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce,* "and produced its treasures, merely for the use and benefit of the rest of the world, and not at all for its own." In 1757, three decades before the formation of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, indeed, four years before the Quakers renounced participation in the slave trade, Postlethwayt was hoping that his publications would "rouse some noble and benevolent christian spirit to think of changing the whole system of the Africa trade."[17]

17. Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce . . .* , 2 vols., 3d ed. (London, 1766), I, vii, 25, 727. Postlethwayt the publicist was recognized at the time and since as a "literary pirate" who liberally appropriated the ideas of others, especially in his *Universal Dictionary*. See Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2001), 21; Elspet Fraser, "Some Sources of Postlethwayt's Dictionary," *Economic History,* III (1938), 25–32; and Fritz Redlich, "The Earliest English Attempt at Theoretical Training for Business: A Bibliographical Note," *History of Political Economy,* II (1970), 199–204. For these reasons, it may seem possible that the antislavery views published in the *Universal Dictionary* were silently extracted from the work of others, and not Postlethwayt's own. The work of this important author desperately needs more extensive study. There are, nonetheless, at least three reasons to believe that antislavery opinions published in his work were in fact his own views. First, they also appear in his works written to confront specific junctures in British imperial affairs, notably *Britain's Commercial Interest, Explained and Improved.* The antislavery statements in the *Universal Dictionary* were not, then, mere transcriptions to which the author attributed minimal importance. He also included them in his other publications. Second, the introduction to the third edition of the *Universal Dictonary* specifically identifies the passages on the Africa trade as the special contribution of the author. "Would it not be far more beneficial for all the trading European states, rather to

Malachy Postlethwayt contemplated antislavery measures in the 1750s and 1760s, it must be emphasized, as a means of enlarging the British Empire more than of promoting a revolution in attitudes toward slavery. There were limits, therefore, to how far he would push his antislavery views. Postlethwayt never strayed far from his first concern with expanding the reach of British trade. Outside his bulky tomes on British commerce, there is no evidence that he lobbied privately or publicly for slave trade abolition. For him, the cause of humanity never mattered more than extending the sphere of British power. Indeed, he tended to conflate the two, assuming that colonization of the coast would be an unambiguous good for the peoples of West Africa, about whom he actually knew little. What seemed to bother Postlethwayt most about the slave trade, in fact, were the ways it prevented the development of what he thought would be more lucrative branches of commerce.[18] Early abolitionists writing in the 1780s—notably Thomas Clarkson and Olaudah Equiano—would draw on his writings extensively (and selectively) to bolster their case against the slave trade. Until his death, though, in 1766, Postlethwayt's principal concern would remain with finding new ways to capture Africa's natural wealth.

Those ambitions to diversify British enterprise on the coast would become increasingly common in the decade after the Seven Years' War with

endeavour to cultivate a friendly, humane, and civilized commerce, with those people, into the very center of their extensive country, than to content themselves only with skimming a trifling portion of trade upon their sea-coasts? Has not the author of this performance, to no purpose yet, many years since suggested ways and means, whereby this might be done to the immense benefit of the British empire?" (vii). Finally, those passages in the *Universal Dictionary* that were most critical of the Atlantic slave trade were featured in sections set off as "remarks," sections in the dictionary where Postlethwayt shifted from narrative and description to opinion and prescription, a tendency especially pronounced on topics concerned with the national interest. Redlich, "An Eighteenth Century Business Encyclopedia as a Carrier of Ideas," *Harvard Library Bulletin,* XIX (1971), 80, 83, 87, 97–98. Postlethwayt's reasons for condemning the slave trade were complex, as the analysis in these pages should suggest, but the critique itself appears sincerely meant. Postlethwayt, moreover, was not alone in imagining African colonization as a route to slave trade abolition at the close of the Seven Years' War. See the anonymously published *Plan for Improving the Trade at Senegal* (London, 1763), as cited in Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery,* 208n2.

18. Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce,* I, 685.

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19. Martin, *The British West African Sett*
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the seizure of French trading posts along the Senegal River. The new province of Senegambia, formally established in 1765, presented the possibility of extending British commerce beyond what Postlethwayt had mocked as a mere coasting trade. Parliament seemed to anticipate this possibility by granting the new colony a governor, council, courts, and constitution in the same years that it was authorizing new governments in the captured territories in Canada, the Caribbean, and the Floridas. British appointees recognized the opportunities for profit, too, as they conspired to transform Senegambia into personal fiefdoms in the same years that their peers pursued similar prospects for speculation in those parts of the Americas opened up by British conquest. Senegambia seemed to allow for the founding of a permanent beachhead on the African coast. Within a year of arrival, Governor Charles O'Hara had devised plans to establish white colonists several hundred miles up the Senegal River, near what he thought to be extensive gold mines and "prodigious quantities of Rice, Wax, Cotton, Indigo, and Tobacco." His successor, Matthias McNamara, would try to arrange for a colony of convicts along the Senegal in 1776. Among commentators in Britain, too, the new colony of Senegambia, like the new territories in North America and the Caribbean, generated grand (even grandiose) expectations. Thomas Whateley thought that it opened the way for an "Improvement in Power, in Commerce, and in Settlement, to a Degree, perhaps, of Colonization." Arthur Young espoused the introduction of "European customs and refinements" to create a demand for British manufactures in what most regarded as an immensely populous region. John Campbell fastened on the commodities that might be acquired and proposed encouraging "the Natives" to settle near the forts and cultivate export crops. O'Hara predicted that, in time, Senegambia would become "one of the richest Colonies, belonging to his Majesty," that British colonists would "extend over every part of this Continent that was worth while to settle."[19]

19. Martin, *The British West African Settlements*, 80–102; J. M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia* (1940; rpt. London, 1966), 234–275; H. A. Wyndham, *The Atlantic and Slavery* (London, 1935), 51–58; Frederick Madden and David Fieldhouse, eds., *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth: The Foundations of a Colonial System of Government*, III, *Imperial Reconstruction, 1763–1840: The Evolution of Alternative Systems of Colonial Government* (Westport, Conn., 1985), 491–505; Charles O'Hara to earl of Dartmouth and Board of Trade, 1765, July 26,

A British empire in Africa, however, was more easily imagined than accomplished in the eighteenth century. The eighteen years of British "rule" in Senegambia turned out to be an unqualified failure for the British and a disaster for the Wolof peoples of Senegal. Without colonists, Senegambia was a colony only in name. The elaborate constitution proved wholly inappropriate for a province that never boasted more than a few dozen British residents. Charles O'Hara, governor from 1765 to 1776, moreover, had little interest in and no skill for civil administration. He managed to increase the volume of the slave trade by instigating wars upriver. But because he terrorized the Francophone African creoles residing along the Senegal, Britain never reaped the full benefits of the gum trade. Dissension, backbiting, and corruption plagued the first British "province" in Africa. With the exception of the traders who imported gum from Senegal, few in England mourned the loss when the French captured Saint Louis in 1779 during the American Revolution.[20] The settlement did succeed, however,

1766, PRO CO 267/1; [Arthur Young], *Political Essays concerning the Present State of the British Empire; Particularly respecting: I. Natural Advantages and Disadvantages, II. Constitution, III. Agriculture, IV. Manufactures, V. The Colonies, and VI. Commerce* (London, 1772), 527–528; John Campbell, *A Political Survey of Britain: Being a Series of Reflections on the Situation, Lands, Inhabitants, Revenues, Colonies, and Commerce of This Island; Intended to Shew That We Have Not Yet Approached Near the Summit of Improvement, but That It Will Afford Employment to Many Generations before They Push to Their Utmost Extent the Natural Advantages of Great Britain; in Two Volumes* (London, 1774), II, 633; Thomas Whateley, *Considerations on the Trade and Finances of This Kingdom, and on the Measure of Administration, with Respect to Those Great National Objects since the Conclusion of the Peace,* 3d ed. (London, 1766), II, 129–130.

20. The earlier history by Martin, Gray, and Wyndham carefully avoid mention of O'Hara's depredations. His military career is outlined in William D. Griffin, "General Charles O'Hara," *Irish Sword,* X, no. 40 (1972), 179–187. For his subsequent role fighting in North America and the Caribbean during the American Revolution, see George C. Rogers, Jr., ed., "Letters of Charles O'Hara to the Duke of Grafton," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine,* LXV, no. 3 (July 1964), 158–180, and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 232. Brief but more balanced assessments of O'Hara's administration appear in James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700–1860* (Cambridge, 1993), 114, 153, and Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1998), 67–68, 87.

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21. John Cannon, "The Loss of Ame
American Revolution (London, 1998), 2
main, Sept. 12, 1777, in Madden and Fi
Reconstruction, 504; William Cobbett ar

in producing a constituency in Britain for the colonization of Africa. Despite the obvious hazards, despite the undistinguished results of the first experiment, those who had resided in Senegambia for any length of time returned to Britain convinced that on the African coast, if given another chance, they could build a fortune for themselves, and perhaps for the nation, too.

The British defeat in the American war gave the Senegambia veterans additional arguments for a second attempt at colonization. The familiar lures remained: the mysteries of the unexplored interior, the likely market in Africa for British goods, the potential for commodity production in a tropical climate. What made the proposals of the 1780s different, what accounts for their quantity and variety, were the still uncertain consequences of American independence. The loss of the thirteen North American colonies threatened to rob the empire of American consumers, a vast supply of staple crops, and the principal source of foodstuffs for Caribbean plantations. In the end, of course, American independence proved less detrimental to the imperial economy than was feared. After the American war, British Atlantic trade would enter a period of explosive growth; at its close, though, no one could know what the future held. It seemed possible that Britain would need to look elsewhere for markets, for commodities, for provisions to supply the West Indian colonies. If the American rebellion succeeded, Senegambia governor John Clarke predicted in 1777, "the remaining Provinces of the Empire may rise in their Claims to public attention." The Gambia River district, the opposition gadfly Temple Luttrell declared in 1777, might provide "every valuable production we receive from America." "With proper care," he argued, "the advancement of the general trade to Africa" might "save the *debris* of this once mighty empire, when America shall be no longer ours." "The improvement of your marine nurseries, and an extension of your commerce to Africa," he told the House of Commons, "may yet maintain the British realm in splendor and prosperity, when her colonies on the other side of the Atlantic are totally separated from her empire."[21]

21. John Cannon, "The Loss of America," in H. T. Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the American Revolution* (London, 1998), 244–246; Gov. John Clarke to Lord George Germain, Sept. 12, 1777, in Madden and Fieldhouse, eds., *Select Documents*, III, *Imperial Reconstruction*, 504; William Cobbett and T. C. Hansard, *The Parliamentary History of*

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Empire in Africa, several entrepreneurs agreed, could compensate for losses in America. Between 1783 and 1788, more than a dozen schemes materialized to transform or expand British enterprise on the African coast. Returned Senegambia administrators came forward with plans to colonize the Gambia River district, to which Britain retained exclusive trading rights at the peace. The British government struggled during and after the American war to find a place to dump felons sentenced to transportation. Charles O'Hara led a delegation to Whitehall that proposed a convict colony several hundred miles up the Gambia River. A rival, Edward Morse, bombarded the government in the same years with schemes to populate the region with British settlers and diversify the export trade. He stressed not only the likely take in staple crops. A colony on the Gambia, he argued, might also provision the Caribbean islands with "lumber, corn, and other Necessaries which heretofore they received from America." In a similar report, Daniel Houghton, a returned Senegambia soldier and future explorer of the Gambia, urged that Africa could supply crops no longer available within British territories. He recommended particularly the great quantity and high quality of Gambia cotton as a substitute for the plantations lost with the return of Tobago to France at the peace of 1783.[22]

England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, from Which Last-Mentioned Epoch It Is Continued Downwards in the Work Entitled "Hansard's Parliamentary Debates" . . . , 36 vols. (London, 1806–1820), XIX, 307, 308, 314, 315. The relation between the loss of America and fantasies of possession in Africa is described well in Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, 2–3, 5, 20–22.

22. "Minutes of the Committee of the House of Commons Respecting a Plan for the Transporting of Felons to the Island of Le Maine in the River Gambia," PRO HO 7/1; Alan Frost, *Convicts and Empire: A Naval Question, 1776–1811* (Oxford, 1980), 8–9, 28–37; Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages: Illusions of Australia's Convict Beginnings* (Melbourne, 1994), 101–109; Patrick Webb, "Guests of the Crown: Convicts and Liberated Slaves on McCarthy Island, the Gambia," *Geographical Journal*, CLX (1994), 136–142; Edward Morse to Lord Sydney, Mar. 6, 1783, PRO CO 267/7; Morse, "A Comparative Statement of the Advantages and Disadvantages to Be Expected from the Territory of the River Gambia in the Hands of the African Company or Erected in a Colony," PRO CO 267/8; Daniel Francis Houghton to Thomas Townshend, Feb. 24, 1783, PRO CO 267/20; Robin Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa: European Exploration in North and West Africa to 1815* (New York, 1965), 219–224. The reader should keep in mind that the West African coast was just one of several regions considered for British colonization after the

British adventurers nominated almost
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23. Frost, *Convicts and Empire*, 37–49; F
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*Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation
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24. The Papers of William Pitt, first earl

25. Henry Trafford to Lord Grantham,
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Universal Revolution of Commerce," Feb. 1

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British adventurers nominated almost every region in West Africa for exploration or colonization by the British during the 1780s. The government considered sending felons to Sierra Leone, São Tomé, and Cape das Voltas before settling in 1786 on the South Pacific and Botany Bay.[23] An army lieutenant in 1785 urged William Pitt to reorganize the Gold Coast establishment by vesting authority for the forts in the crown, instituting agriculture in the place of the transatlantic slave trade, dispatching convicts to Cape Coast Castle to serve as colonists, and acquiring African labor for the settlements by redeeming slaves destined for the Middle Passage.[24] All of these schemes were ambitious. Some bordered on the sublime. With the loss of North America, advised an adventurer named Henry Trafford, Britain had to look to the eastern Atlantic to secure its economic future. In 1783, he pestered the Shelburne ministry with what he called a "Plan of an Universal Revolution of Commerce," premised on a "re-transplantation of East and West Indian, North and South American Trades, into Africa." He looked forward to the day, he wrote, when Africa would be "traded, travelled and traversed, with the same efficacy and security as Europe." These were the same months in which Henry Smeathman, the originator of the Sierra Leone scheme, sought patrons for his plans to "civilize Africa," imagining himself, in each instance, as the founder of a new nation, a "Romulus, or Mahomed," perhaps, or, as he wrote to John Coakley Lettsom, "almost a Penn."[25]

American war. This was a moment when entrepreneurs also pushed expeditions against Panama, Peru, and Chile, expeditions conceived as voyages of conquests that might yield a British empire in South America. See Alan Frost, "Shaking Off the Spanish Yoke: British Schemes to Revolutionise America, 1739–1807," in Margarette Lincoln, ed., *Science and Exploration in the Pacific: European Voyages to the Southern Oceans in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Eng., 1998), 27–32.

23. Frost, *Convicts and Empire,* 37–49; Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages,* 17–18. A House of Commons committee appointed to consider the convict question noted that Cape Das Voltas could serve as a home for British loyalists. A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and Other Parts of the British Empire* (London, 1966), 47.

24. The Papers of William Pitt, first earl of Chatham, PRO 30/8/363.

25. Henry Trafford to Lord Grantham, Mar. 5, 1783. Grantham Papers, L29/340/341, Bedfordshire Record Office; Trafford to earl of Shelburne, Mar. 5, 1783, Shelburne Papers, CLII, fol. 75. William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.; "Plan of an Universal Revolution of Commerce," Feb. 14, 1783, ibid., fols. 152, 177 ff.; Henry Smeath-

In some quarters, the assessment of economic interest was more sober. The prospect of new sources for raw cotton intrigued several merchants. London trader Richard Oswald in 1783 directed factors at his Bance Island fort to "buy all the Cotton Wool you can get . . . in this trade with the Natives, and endeavour to learn whether it may not be possible to persuade those people to increase the culture of that article, as a commodity of exchange and commerce." To support his ambitions for Sierra Leone, Henry Smeathman quietly lined up two London investors willing to back the project in exchange for potential returns in raw cotton.[26] Manchester manufacturers seem not to have troubled themselves with the proposals to colonize the African coast. But some did display a particular interest in obtaining high-quality cotton from the continent. In 1786, the Privy Council Committee for Trade and Plantations began a series of initiatives designed to increase the volume of raw cotton produced within the empire in order to liberate the nation from a continued dependence on foreign suppliers and meet the exploding demand in Britain and Europe for Lancashire textiles.[27] Ultimately, Mancunians would draw the bulk of their cotton supplies from India, the British Caribbean, and the southern United States. In 1787, though, when the subject was still in question, seventeen Manchester firms were pushing for the Gambia and Cape Coast Castle as "the most likely place to try the Experiment" in cotton planting since, "upon the

man to Lettsom, July 16, 1784, in Pettigrew, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of J. C. Lettsom,* III, 275–276. George Chalmers, an official at the Board of Trade, dismissed Trafford as "a madman or an Ideot." Chalmers cited in Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery,* 15.

26. Richard Oswald to Captain Griffiths, July 4, 1783, in Sheila Lambert, ed., *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century,* LXVIII, *Minutes of the Evidence on the Slave Trade, 1788 and 1789* (Wilmington, Del., 1975), 283; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists,* 94. Oswald took some interest, briefly, in Smeathman's proposals following the American war. Smeathman to Lettsom, July 16, 1784, in Pettigrew, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of J. C. Lettsom,* 272.

27. Caribbean governors were directed to encourage cotton planting in the British West Indies. At the recommendation of Joseph Banks, Polish scientist Anton Hove was dispatched to India to study cotton cultivation on the subcontinent. Vincent Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793,* II, *New Continents and Changing Values* (London, 1964), 280–293; David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science, and Empire, 1780–1801* (London, 1985), 144–167.

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28. William Frodsham to the Lords Com
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John Lowe, Jr., *Liberty or Death; A Tract,*
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Slave-Trade (Manchester, Eng., 1789), citatic

29. Wilfrid Oldham, *Britain's Convicts t*
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Wilmington, Del., 1975), 283; Braidwood, *Black Poor*
wald took some interest, briefly, in Smeathman's
ar. Smeathman to Lettsom, July 16, 1784, in Petti-
ritings of J. C. Lettsom, 272.
rected to encourage cotton planting in the British
ı of Joseph Banks. Polish scientist Anton Hove was
ıltivation on the subcontinent. Vincent Harlow, *The*
ire, 1763–1793, II, *New Continents and Changing*
David Mackay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration,*
ıdon, 1985), 144–167.

African continent," "it grows . . . spontaneously." And in 1789, almost two years after the city's residents assembled thousands of signatures for its petition to Parliament on behalf of abolition, the Manchester writer John Lowe, Jr., argued publicly for, in the words of critic Deirdre Coleman, "the practicability as well as profitability of substituting for the slave trade a trade in African products." Lowe insisted that Africa could "make us amends, ten thousand fold," for the loss of the American colonies.[28]

Several scholars have discussed these proposals—notably Philip Curtin and Vincent Harlow—but their importance, wrongly, has been measured only in terms of their limited impact on policy and practice instead of their consequences for black loyalists and abolitionists. With the important exception of the Sierra Leone scheme, these plans were nonstarters. Holding European rivals at bay, keeping trade open to British merchants, minimizing costs—these remained the primary concerns in the African trade, and for many decades after. Otherwise, the state delegated oversight to the slave traders, who seem not to have cared about colonies or the prospects for commercial agriculture. This hands-off policy resembled the stance government had taken toward the East India Company. But, because of its sizable revenues and, after 1757, large territorial possessions, politicians had started to take a direct interest in Indian affairs by the 1780s. The African trade, by contrast, failed to win the sustained attention of a particular office or official. The British presence on the coast tended to rank low in the hierarchy of bureaucratic priorities. Lord George Germain ordered two regiments to Cape Coast Castle to defend British headquarters and to destroy the Dutch trading station at Commenda during the American war. But to avoid a drain on manpower, he sent a regiment of convicts that proved more successful at antagonizing African allies than achieving their modest military objectives.[29] Always, ministers of state treated Africa like a

28. William Frodsham to the Lords Committee of the Privy Council of Trade, Nov. 30, 1787, PRO BT 6/140; Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, 16; John Lowe, Jr., *Liberty or Death; A Tract, by Which Is Vindicated the Obvious Practicability of Trading to the Coasts of Guinea, for Its Natural Products, in Lieu of the Slave-Trade* (Manchester, Eng., 1789), citation on 17.

29. Wilfrid Oldham, *Britain's Convicts to the Colonies*, ed. W. Hugh Oldham (Sydney, 1990), 72–80. Records of the British attack on the Dutch fort at Commenda in 1781 may be traced in PRO CO 267/7.

backwater. There was little in the way of policy or strategy, rarely evidence of vision or initiative. Politicians often were embarrassingly uninformed about the coast. Parliament established a committee in 1785 to consider a government plan to abandon felons on an isolated island more than three hundred miles up the Gambia River. That committee soon learned, to its astonishment, that the Pitt ministry lacked even the simplest information about the intended destination.[30] Several entrepreneurs outside the halls of power formulated plans for a British empire in Africa at the end of the American war. Where decisions were made, though, delivering slaves to the American colonies would remain the primary concern.

[11] The West African coast held out a rather different promise to free blacks looking to escape North American slavery and racism, hoping to find an asylum for liberty. There, somewhere on the African coast it seemed, they might acquire land, security, and autonomy, a refuge from discrimination, dependence, and want. Their interest in the region differed from the ambitions and aspirations of men like Henry Smeathman, Malachy Postlethwayt, or Charles O'Hara. They did not care about reorganizing British trade. They expressed little interest in the promotion of Atlantic commerce. Nor did they lobby for slave trade abolition, a comprehensive emancipation, or other far-reaching plans of reform. They hoped, instead, to improve on the situation in which they found themselves. Their concerns were more immediate, their aims more pragmatic, the projects more personal. As early as 1773, four black freedom-seekers in Massachusetts declared a desire "to transport ourselves to some part of the Coast of *Africa*" to found "a settlement." After the war, free blacks in Rhode Island and Massachusetts explored opportunities to emigrate as a way of promoting a sense of nationhood. The free black preacher John Marrant told his Nova Scotia congregation in the late 1780s that on the coast of Africa they could establish a Christian utopia and an independent black state. Henry Smeathman in 1786 would, at last, find a constituency for his Sierra Leone scheme among the black loyalists in London hoping to start life anew on

30. See the testimony of Evan Nepean in "Minutes of the Committee of the House of Commons respecting a Plan for Transporting Felons to the Island of Le Maine in the River Gambia," fols. 4–12; Oldham, *Britain's Convicts to the Colonies,* ed. Oldham, 95–104.

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31. The petition of Peter Bestes, Sambo
Apr. 20, 1773, in Gary B. Nash, *Race and Re*
Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality.*
1863 (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 4–28; W. Bryan I
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thropists, 98–102; John Saillant, "Antiguar
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Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785–18(
(1999). Web site: http://www.mille.org/pul

the African coast. These Africans who would colonize Africa were not merely objects of charity, although their resettlement would require private and public patronage. By deciding to settle in Africa, they fought to determine their fate. The black loyalists in London resisted in 1786 those who would send them to Nova Scotia or the Bahamas instead. Those in Nova Scotia, several years later, demanded the opportunity to migrate to resettle in Sierra Leone, to escape from the white settlers who denied them land and equality. To them, the colonization of the African coast meant something altogether different from what it had meant to an adventurer like Henry Smeathman or what it would mean to abolitionists like Granville Sharp. The coast presented an opportunity for independence, freedom, and self-sufficiency.[31]

In the development of antislavery initiatives in late eighteenth-century Britain, black self-assertion had been and could be decisive. Fugitive slaves had effectively ended slaveholding in Britain one decade after the Seven Years' War by making slaveholding untenable. When they fled from involuntary servitude in a "land of liberty," they made slavery the subject of scrutiny. They obliged slaveholders to assert their authority through a show of force. That determination to win freedom had led as well to the abolition of slavery in Scotland in 1778. Inspired by the success of James Somerset, the enslaved Joseph Knight initiated the pivotal contest in the Scottish courts by escaping from the home of absentee planter John Wedderburn. Thereafter, the vigilance of free blacks would make it difficult for slaveowners to deport enslaved men and women from British soil. In one important instance, black initiative had transformed the Atlantic slave trade into a public scandal. In the spring of 1783 the sailor and former slave Olaudah

31. The petition of Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie, Apr. 20, 1773, in Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison, Wis., 1990), 174; Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787–1863* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 4–28; W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, "Atlantic Revolutions: Slavery and Freedom in Newport, Rhode Island, and Halifax, Nova Scotia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 302–311, 366–367; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, 98–102; John Saillant, "Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity: Anne and Elizabeth Hart in the Eighteenth-Century Black Atlantic," *Church History*, LXIX (1999), 103, 106–107; Saillant, "'Wipe Away All Tears from Their Eyes': John Marrant's Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785–1808," *Journal of Millennial Studies*, I, no. 2 (1999). Web site: http://www.mille.org/publications/winter98/saillant.PDF.

Equiano drew Granville Sharp's attention to the infamous case of the slave ship *Zong*, from which Captain Luke Collingwood in 1781 tossed 132 enchained Africans into the Atlantic in order to claim insurance for lost cargo. Sharp responded to Equiano's report by trying (and failing) to have the ship captain and his crew prosecuted for murder and by impressing on those in power "*the necessity* (incumbent upon the whole nation) to put an immediate stop to the *Slave Trade*."[32] The incident caused a minor furor in the press and would be remembered by later antislavery campaigners as crucial to exposing the horrors of the slave trade. Black self-assertion after the American war, in sum, continued attempts to secure rights and liberties in the years before, although the aims and strategies would change in crucial ways.

Researchers still know far too little about the approximately ten thousand men and women of African descent who lived in the British Isles in the era of the American Revolution. Key questions remain unanswered and, to a degree, unanswerable. Like the great majority of laboring peoples in the early modern era, most black men and women living in Britain could neither read nor write. With several notable exceptions, they did not publish. Letter books do not survive. As a result, scholars have few opportunities to know in detail what blacks were thinking and saying in these crucial years. Access to what Africans were doing is also elusive. The strategies social historians

32. For black freedom struggles in England during the eighteenth century, see especially Douglas A. Lorimer, "Black Slaves and English Liberty: A Re-Examination of Racial Slavery in England," *Immigrants and Minorities,* III (1984), 121–150, as well as the works cited in chapter 1 of this book. The most thorough account of both *Knight v. Wedderburn* and of the case of the slave ship *Zong* appear in F. O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (London, 1974), 177–183, 184–199. For Granville Sharp's response to Equiano, see Hoare, *Memoirs,* 236, 241–244; Diary H (Mar. 19, 20, 21, May 19–22, 1783), 1, 4, Granville Sharp MSS, D3549 13/4/2; Sharp to William Lloyd Baker, May 22, 1783, ibid. The papers Granville Sharp assembled on the *Zong* incident are preserved as "Volume of Bound Manuscripts: Documents Relating to the Case of the Ship Zong, 1783. Entirely in Granville Sharp's Hand," National Maritime Museum, sec. 6: Rec/19. From this collection, see especially Sharp to duke of Portland, July 18, 1783. Sharp's early exchange of information with Equiano is referenced in Vincent Carretta, "Phillis Wheatley, the Mansfield Decision of 1772, and the Choice of Identity," in Klaus H. Schmidt and Fritz Fleischmann, eds., *Early America Re-Explored: New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture* (New York, 2000), 210.

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Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English S
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have used to reconstruct the experience of the English poor provide little help in this instance. No institution before 1783 took a prolonged interest in the several thousands living in or near London. The state, the church, and local governments did not treat the small community of Africans in Britain as a distinctive group. The British government neither enacted legislation that bore specifically on the black population nor established administrative units charged with special oversight. No occupations, moreover, were assigned exclusively to black workers. Blacks represented, instead, a small proportion of the much larger class of sailors, servants, and domestics. For all of these reasons, Britain's black population is difficult to study in the aggregate. Indeed, historians may never have more than very rough estimates of the number of blacks in London, where the African population was comparatively large and concentrated, and perhaps most measurable. The fragments that scholars have culled from disparate sources—from the diaries and correspondence of slaveholders, from portraits, parish registers, court records, wills, and runaway advertisements—allow only for anecdotal (if often elegant) histories that, unavoidably, focus heavily on the more exceptional figures.[33]

33. In addition to those cited above, the key works are: K[enneth] Little, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society*, rev. ed. (London, 1972); James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555–1945* (London, 1973); Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain, 1555–1833* (London, 1977); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984); James Walvin, *England, Slaves, and Freedom, 1776–1838* (Jackson, Miss., 1986), 26–68; Keith A. Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth-Century Afro-English Writing* (London, 1988); Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1995); Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, c. 1780–1830* (Portland, Ore., 1996); and James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745–1797* (London, 1998). Compare with Sue Peabody, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime* (Oxford, 1996). Myers's painstaking research on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London has established a minimum population figure of ten thousand with perhaps five thousand in London. Her systematic attempt to make the best of unsystematic sources hints that a more precise estimate, in the absence of new evidence, may be unattainable. Ian Duffield, rightly, has drawn attention to the underused naval records as likely sources for learning about those blacks who resided in England for a time during the late eighteenth century. Sailors and port workers almost certainly constituted

The exceptional figures matter quite a bit, though, to the history of British antislavery. The writings of Boston captive Phillis Wheatley and London grocer Ignatius Sancho, in particular, figured in the evolving antislavery debate in Britain during the 1770s and 1780s, particularly as it concerned the intellectual capacities of Africans and their descendants. White opponents of slavery described the accomplishments of these two black authors as a rebuke to racist assumptions, as evidence of African competence, talent, and promise. From Boston, the Reverend Thomas Woolridge wrote breathlessly to the earl of Dartmouth about Wheatley and her talents. To him, she was a marvel. "I was astonish'd and could hardly believe my own Eyes" when she sat to write, he effused. The contemporary debate on the significance and meaning of race shaped the reaction to Sancho's letters, too. His would embarrass those "half-informed philosophers" and "superficial investigators of human nature," declared the *Monthly Review* in 1784, who insist that "*Negers* as they are vulgarly called, are inferior to any white nation in mental abilities." Reactions of this kind fulfilled the hopes of his editor, Frances Crewe, who in 1782 had gathered Sancho's letters for publication with the express purpose of encouraging antislavery sentiment. Sancho's writings, she stated in the preface to his *Letters,* should prove "that an untutored African may possess abilities equal to an European." During the 1780s several British opponents of slavery—including Charles Crawford, Thomas Clarkson, George Gregory, William Dickson, and Joseph Woods—would seize on both Wheatley and Sancho as proof that Africans were capable of moral and cultural improvement. In this way, as symbols of black accomplishment, these early black writers assisted British arguments against slavery at a crucial moment in their development.[34]

the largest occupational class for black men in this period. Ian Duffield, "'I Asked How the Vessel Could Go': The Contradictory Experiences of African and African Diaspora Mariners and Port Workers in Britain, c. 1750–1850," in Anne J. Kershen, ed., *Language, Labour, and Migration* (Aldershot, Eng., 2000), 121–154.

34. Thomas Woolridge cited in James Rawley, "The World of Phillis Wheatley," *New England Quarterly,* L (1977), 670; the *Monthly Review* and Frances Crewe are cited in Vincent Carretta, ed., *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (New York, 1998), xvii, 4. Introductions to these works that place them in their cultural milieu are provided by Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment,* 43–72, and Carretta, *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington, Ky., 1996), 1–16. My discussion in this paragraph a large and growing literature on Phillis Wheatley a particularly from the following. Sancho: Paul Edw *of Ignatius Sancho* (Edinburgh, 1994); Reyahn Ki *Man of Letters* (London, 1997); and Markman El mental Libertinism and the Politics of Form," in Vi *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black* 217. Wheatley: Mukhtar Ali Isani, "The Britis *Various Subjects,*" *Journal of Negro History,* LX son, *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* (New American Racism and Phillis Wheatley's 'Sable Heart,'" in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, *Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1988), 338–444; ing: Phillis Wheatley in Freedom," in Carretta ar 198; Kirstin Wilcox, "The Body into Print: *Literature,* LXXI (1999), 1–29; [Helen Thoma *Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge, 2000), 2

35. Wheatley, "To the Right Honourable W Principal Secretary of State for North-America, Carretta, ed., *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sanch*

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Wheatley and Sancho, though, were not mere symbols. They contributed to the antislavery discourse of the period. Both denounced the slave system explicitly. Wheatley wrote of being "snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat." Sancho condemned those who would vouch for Wheatley's talent but not her right to liberty. As early as 1766, he inveighed against the "cruel and capricious tyrants" prevailing in the sugar colonies.[35] Recent assessments, moreover, have unveiled the political opinions sometimes masked behind Wheatley's neoclassical verse and Sancho's playful Shandyean prose. In different ways, the works of both challenged the social and moral order that made slaveholding possible. Moreover, Wheatley and Sancho undoubtedly expressed a degree of contempt for slavery in private that surpassed in vehemence what ended up in print. The Sancho that readers had in the 1780s (as now) is the Sancho that Frances Crewe chose to produce. He emerges from his letters to Laurence Sterne as an unthreatening and unchallenging figure.[36] Researchers may never know if Crewe withheld from publication other letters that would have cast Sancho

Ky., 1996), 1–16. My discussion in this paragraph and the two that follow draws from the large and growing literature on Phillis Wheatley and Ignatius Sancho. I have benefited particularly from the following. Sancho: Paul Edwards and Polly Rewt, eds., *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (Edinburgh, 1994); Reyahn King, ed., *Ignatius Sancho: An African Man of Letters* (London, 1997); and Markman Ellis, "Ignatius Sancho's Letters: Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form," in Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic* (Lexington, Ky., 2001), 199–217. Wheatley: Mukhtar Ali Isani, "The British Reception of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects*," *Journal of Negro History,* LXVI (1981), 144–149; William H. Robinson, *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* (New York, 1984); David Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism and Phillis Wheatley's 'Sable Veil,' 'Length'ned Chain,' and 'Knitted Heart,'" in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1988), 338–444; Frank Shuffleton, "On Her Own Footing: Phillis Wheatley in Freedom," in Carretta and Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage,* 175–198; Kirstin Wilcox, "The Body into Print: Marketing Phillis Wheatley," *American Literature,* LXXI (1999), 1–29; [Helen Thomas], *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge, 2000), 201–225.

35. Wheatley, "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North-America, etc.," in Carretta, *Unchained Voices,* 66; Carretta, ed., *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho,* 74.

36. Carretta, ed., *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho,* 7.

in a different light. Self-censorship among black writers probably misshapes the archival record, too. For many years, it had seemed to scholars that the mixed-race New England theologian Lemuel Haynes took no interest in the institution of slavery until much later in life, until many years after American independence. When historian Ruth Bogin in 1983 produced an unpublished antislavery manuscript that Haynes wrote in 1776, the discovery forced a reassessment of Haynes's history and early black antislavery thought. As the historian John Saillant has now shown in exquisite detail, Haynes took the occasion of the Declaration of Independence to circulate among his friends a challenge to the narrow definition of liberty that prevailed within the patriot cause. "The oppression inherent in slavery," he wrote, was "a much greater oppression" than what the colonists experienced and "which they, themselves, impose on another." Almost certainly there were other black men and women in this period who drafted antislavery manuscripts that they could not or would not publish.[37]

These silences, in their own way, are crucial pieces of evidence. They help clarify what made black protests in Britain during the 1780s different from black antislavery initiatives in the decades before. Before the American Revolution, both external and self-imposed constraints limited what black activists could achieve. The forms they chose and the styles they adopted in these texts would prove far less influential as antislavery polemic than the works that Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano would compose in the 1780s. The earlier publications succeeded more as interventions in ongoing debates about the capacities of the African race than as attempts to influence the political future for colonial slavery. Because Wheatley wrote about slavery obliquely and, in most instances, without reference to concrete injustices, her British readers, in 1773, could fixate on the hypocrisy of American slaveholders, as they were inclined to do, rather than scrutinize the slave trade that first brought her to Boston. The British treated her as a wonder rather than a thinker. Because Sancho assumed the persona of the jocular exile, his letters could be and were read in England as

37. Ruth Bogin, "'Liberty Further Extended': A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XL (1983), 83–105. For Haynes, see the rich and complex study by John Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemuel Haynes* (Oxford, 2003), Haynes cited on 16.

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Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano would
ie earlier publications succeeded more as inter-
es about the capacities of the African race than
he political future for colonial slavery. Because
very obliquely and, in most instances, without
tices, her British readers, in 1773, could fixate on
slaveholders, as they were inclined to do, rather
ade that first brought her to Boston. The British
her than a thinker. Because Sancho assumed the
, his letters could be and were read in England as

Further Extended': A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by
Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser., XL (1983), 83–105. For Haynes,
by John Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The*
aynes (Oxford, 2003), Haynes cited on 16.

effusions of sentiment rather than as protests against empire and slavery.[38] Black men and women like Sancho and Wheatley—those who had acquired the cultural knowledge necessary to acquire an audience for their words—must have despised Atlantic slavery almost uniformly. But before the 1780s, they seem not to have agitated publicly and explicitly for slave trade abolition or a comprehensive emancipation. A similar conclusion may be offered for the several thousand African men and women in Britain before and during the American war whose voices the surviving records do not report. The runaway ads attest to their desire for freedom. Through flight, they helped end slaveholding in Britain. Among blacks in Britain there must have been countless protests against the slave system during the eighteenth century that went unrecorded or remain undiscovered. But there is no evidence of a coordinated, organized campaign among blacks in England before the 1780s to abolish slavery in the colonies or slave trading in the Atlantic. If such a campaign did exist, it left no mark.

Events transpired differently during the 1770s in New England, where Africans and their descendants did organize a public campaign to abolish slavery in the region. In the years before the Revolutionary War, enslaved people across New England petitioned the colonial governments for their liberty. In Massachusetts, particularly, that campaign showed coordination, savvy, and persistence. It represented an extension of earlier attempts by some individuals to achieve liberty through freedom suits in the colony's courts, where slaves, unusually, had long enjoyed limited rights under the law. There, in Massachusetts, the enslaved lobbied for province-wide emancipation at least three times in 1773, twice in 1774, and again in 1777. These efforts were carefully orchestrated. Organizers launched the 1773 initiative through a kind of steering committee, perhaps modeled on the committees of correspondence that their white neighbors had formed when

38. About Wheatley, the *Monthly Review* mused on how "this ingenious young woman is yet a slave." "The people of Boston," it observed, "boast themselves chiefly on their principles of liberty. One such act as the purchase of her freedom would, in our opinion, have done more honour than hanging a thousand trees with ribbons and emblems." *Monthly Review*, XLIX (1773), 458–459. See also Isani, "The British Reception of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects*," *Jour. Negro Hist.*, LXVI (1981), 144–149; Wilcox, "The Body into Print," *Am. Lit.*, LXXI (1999), 1; and Carretta, ed., *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, xv–xx.

mobilizing against British authority. They distributed antislavery circulars to state legislators and town governments throughout the province. The Somerset case seems to have sparked the first antislavery petition in 1773. "Felix," the author, alluded vaguely to the hopes raised among blacks in New England who had learned of Mansfield's decision. Thereafter, though, the momentum for political organizing owed most to the broader spirit of rebellion in the colonies. A petition of April 1773 appealed explicitly to the honor of Massachusetts patriots, to "men who have made such a noble stand" for liberty. Two months later, with growing confidence, black petitioners invoked a claim to natural rights. By 1774, campaigners such as the "African" writing to the *Massachusetts Spy* were giving increasing attention to the hypocrisy of their white neighbors. Compare your experience with ours, insisted Caesar Sarter in the *Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet*. "Now if you are sensible that Slavery is in itself, and in its consequences, a great evil; why will you not Pity and relieve the poor, distressed, enslaved Africans?" By the time Prince Hall led a dozen black petitioners to the legislature in 1777, he and his colleagues had come to link American liberty with freedom for Africans in America: in petitioning for rights, we have acted as you acted, Prince Hall and his colleagues explained; like you, we have waited patiently for our grievances to be addressed; our peaceable requests too have been ignored; if your cause is legitimate, so is ours; "every principle from which America has acted in the Cours of their unhappy Deficulties with Great Britain pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favour of your petitioners." Hall and his associates did not threaten violence. But the logic of the argument in 1777 pointed to the possibility of even more direct forms of resistance.[39]

39. *The Appendix; or, Some Observations on the Expediency of the Petition of the Africans, Living in Boston etc. Lately Presented to the General Assembly of This Province; to Which Is Annexed, the Petition Referred to; Likewise, Thoughts on Slavery; with a Useful Extract from the Massachusetts Spy, of January 28, 1773, by Way of an Address to the Members of the Assembly; by a Lover of Constitutional Liberty* (Boston, [1773]), 13–15; James Swan, *A Disuasion to Great-Britain and the Colonies, from the Slave-Trade to Africa,* 2d ed. (Boston, 1773), ix–x; John Allen, *An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty, or the Essential Rights of the Americans; Delivered at the Second Baptist-Church in Boston, upon the Last Annual Thanksgiving, Dec. 3d, 1772, Dedicated to the Right Honorable the Earl of Dartmouth; Published by the . . . Request of Many; by a British Bostonian,* 4th ed. (Boston, 1773), 75–78; Sidney Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American*

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Revolution, 1770–1800, 2d ed. (Washington, D.
Davis, "Emancipation Rhetoric, Natural Rights
Note on Four Black Petitions in Massachusetts,
263; *Massachusetts Spy,* Feb. 10, 1774; *Essex Jo*
1774; Emily Vanessa Blanck, "Revolutionizing
in Revolutionary Massachusetts and South Car
2003), 70, 93–98, 128–129, 149–150, 223–225.
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Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in*
more, 2003), 228–239. See also Patricia Bradley,
Revolution (Jackson, Miss., 1998), 66–80, for
and elsewhere to the Somerset Case. For examp
and New Hampshire, see Gwendolyn Evans L
the American Revolution," *Connecticut Historic*
and Roger Bruns, ed., *Am I Not a Man and*
Revolutionary America (New York, 1977), 452–

40. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Tou*
Revolution (New York, 1938), 25; Merton L. D
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"If they could seize opportunity, they could not create it." So C. L. R. James wrote of enslaved men and women in Saint Domingue on the eve of the Haitian Revolution. Slave insurrections in the Americas often occurred in moments of political crisis or in time of war. The Stono Rebellion that unsettled white South Carolina in 1739 broke out the same weekend England declared war on Spain. The aborted conspiracy by Africans and Irish to burn Manhattan to the ground in 1741 took shape when the city stood vulnerable to the threat of Spanish invasion. Tacky's revolt in Jamaica, one of the bloodiest to occur in the British Caribbean during the eighteenth century, started in 1760, shortly after soldiers typically assigned to the slave patrols left to assist the British invasion of French Guadeloupe during the Seven Years' War. An insurrection scare occurred in Jamaica again in 1776, not long after the British government ordered a regiment from the island to assist the army in North America. Thousands of enslaved men and women escaped their bondage during the American Revolution.[40] Later, perhaps

Revolution, 1770–1800, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C., 1989), 12, 15, 16, 103; Thomas J. Davis, "Emancipation Rhetoric, Natural Rights, and Revolutionary New England: A Note on Four Black Petitions in Massachusetts, 1773–1777," *NEQ,* LXII (1989), 248–263; *Massachusetts Spy,* Feb. 10, 1774; *Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet,* July 20, 1774; Emily Vanessa Blanck, "Revolutionizing Slavery: The Legal Culture of Slavery in Revolutionary Massachusetts and South Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2003), 70, 93–98, 128–129, 149–150, 223–225. For the significance of freedom suits in New England between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution, see John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore, 2003), 228–239. See also Patricia Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution* (Jackson, Miss., 1998), 66–80, for reception and reaction in New England and elsewhere to the Somerset Case. For examples of freedom petitions in Connecticut and New Hampshire, see Gwendolyn Evans Logan, "The Slave in Connecticut during the American Revolution," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin,* XXX (1965), 73–78, and Roger Bruns, ed., *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America* (New York, 1977), 452–453.

40. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1938), 25; Merton L. Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies, 1619–1865* (Baton Rouge, La., 1990), 23–25; Thomas J. Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The "Great Negro Plot" in Colonial New York* (New York, 1985); Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), 125, 127, 138, 174; Richard B. Sheridan, "The Jamaican Insurrection Scare of 1776

most famously, the slave insurrection that culminated in the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian Revolution began when the overthrow of the French monarchy and divisions among elites in Saint Domingue destabilized the authoritarian regimes that discouraged slave rebellion. Without the American Revolution, without colonial resistance to imperial rule, it might have taken much longer for black men and women in New England to find an opportunity to campaign for a general emancipation. Organized resistance among the enslaved during the eighteenth century (and at other times, too) is less a measure of their desire to be free (which was constant) than an index to their shifting sense of the possible, to an awareness of broader changes in the social and political order.

A sustained challenge to established institutions frequently requires the prospect of success, however distant, or the presence of useful allies. Otherwise, inequities of power, the force of custom, and a limited sense of alternatives can conspire to discourage persistent attempts to promote permanent change. It can be difficult, in retrospect, to keep the novelty of abolitionism in view. In the 1780s, the British had few precedents for the kind of mass organizing later generations could take for granted. The British public had never mobilized previously around a cause centered on the welfare of foreigners overseas. Even the most concerned—like Granville Sharp, James Ramsay, Anthony Benezet, and John Fothergill—would long be inhibited by the immensity of the task, by the apparent necessity of the slave system and the dearth of ways to halt its progress. The antislavery movement would depend, ultimately, on a broad base of public support. Yet it could never have commenced without the leadership of those whom sociologists sometimes term "early risers," those individuals and groups positioned to conceive a political program and win access to those in power.[41] Anyone, hypothetically, could have originated an antislavery movement in Britain. In the abstract, perhaps, enslaved men and women could have taken the lead in defining the agenda in Britain and mobilizing public support. To have a strong chance of success, though, a

and the American Revolution," *Jour. Negro Hist.*, LXI (1976), 293, 300–301, 305–306; Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 53, 153; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J., 1992).

41. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1998), 71–90.

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42. Carretta, ed., *The Letters of the Late Ign*
Gronniosaw, *Wonderous Grace Displaye'd in*
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nascent movement first would need political entrepreneurs who possessed the status and resources sufficient to sustain a novel undertaking through its first tentative stages, through the period when even the sympathetic would regard the cause as futile. Any number of groups or coalitions in the British Isles could have qualified for this role. But the small, impoverished, socially dependent, politically powerless, and culturally marginal black population in Britain, though, may have been among the least equipped.

It would have been difficult for black men and women in Britain to do any more than they did before the American war. Few had the leisure to study the structure of the Atlantic slave system and draw up schemes for reform. And few possessed the social and economic independence required to canvass for legislative change. Not many could have imagined for themselves the role of "abolitionist" before the 1780s, when, with the exception of Granville Sharp, there was no such thing in Britain as an "abolitionist." The daily work of survival imposed far more limited horizons and suggested more restricted ambitions. Even Ignatius Sancho, among the most educated and cosmopolitan black men living in England before the Revolutionary War, would do little more than address sentimental appeals to Laurence Sterne. The great majority, like Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, battled more regularly with the everyday indignities of poverty, isolation, and despair. Olaudah Equiano was one of the fortunate few with sufficient earnings, autonomy, and patronage to agitate for reform. And even he appears not to have considered campaigning for slave trade abolition until the mid-1780s, after the beginning of the Quaker campaign in England and the publication of James Ramsay's *Essay* in 1784. As late as 1779, Equiano was making plans to serve as an Anglican missionary on the African coast, an indication perhaps of where the concerns of some literate blacks lay in the decade before the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade formed.[42]

42. Carretta, ed., *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, 331; James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *Wonderous Grace Displaye'd in the Life and Conversion of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, Giving an Account of the Religion, Customs, Manners, etc., of the Native of Zaara, in Africa; as Related by Himself* (Bath, 1772); Carretta, ed., *Olaudah Equiano: The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (New York, 1988), 220–223. Equiano took an interest in serving as an Anglican missionary on the coast at the encouragement of Matthias McNamara, who in 1775 had succeeded Charles O'Hara as the British governor of Senegambia.

Antislavery organizing among blacks in New England emerged from the opportunities that followed from colonial resistance to imperial authority. In a similar way, antislavery organizing among blacks in Britain would develop during the late 1780s as new allies surfaced and new openings became apparent. The era of the Revolutionary War left many free blacks convinced that they had earned recognition as loyal subjects of the crown. At the Court of King's Bench, they had received from Lord Mansfield in 1772 the right to protection from involuntary exile. The British army in North America had granted liberty to enslaved men and women who expressed their "allegiance" to the king by fleeing from colonists in rebellion. Some fugitives had won protection from the British state after the American war and escaped with the British army to Nova Scotia or London. A coalition of London philanthropists, the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, had formed in 1786 to care for those black loyalists in the city that suffered from want of work, shelter, and sustenance. In these years, moreover, the British government took small but important steps toward formalizing its commitments to its free black subjects. The liberated found that they could declare a corporate identity that had legitimacy in the eyes of the state. They were "Dunmore's Regiment" or "the Black Pioneers." Brigadier General Samuel Birch in New York City presented black loyalists with passports granting them the right to leave North America with the British army. Black loyalists in London destined for Sierra Leone each secured from the state certificates that declared the bearer a "faithful Loyal Subject" and "a *Freeman* of the Colony of Sierra Leona." London philanthropists designated as "corporals" the representatives elected by "the Black Poor."[43]

This inclination to grant recognition and protection invited free blacks to make claims on the imperial state. It encouraged free blacks throughout

43. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 19–33; Todd W. Braisted, "The Black Pioneers and Others: The Military Role of Black Loyalists in the American War for Independence," in John W. Pulis, ed., *Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World* (New York, 1999), 11–18; James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783–1870* (1976; rpt. Toronto, 1992), 11; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists,* 91–93, 103–104. This paragraph and the two that follow are informed throughout by Saillant, "Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity," *Church Hist.*, LXIX (1999), an important essay that covers far more than its title indicates. As Saillant shows, recognition by the state and an orientation toward state power were crucial for

the postwar empire to negotiate the tern based. Because the British government h as wards of the state, black loyalists star terest group. Once recognized as royal free blacks from acting as other loyal su their understanding of British comm creasingly, during the 1780s, they brou British government. The Nova Scotia s province and thereafter the administrat land and supplies they had been promi When that did not work, they petitione The elected leaders of "the Black Poo ideal setting for resettlement and then, they became concerned about the gove them to the coast.[44]

A formal relationship with the state Olaudah Equiano turned his position platform from which to criticize his en ish naval board in 1786 appointed Equ and Stores for the Black Poor to Sierra a British emissary. But Equiano becar and corruption that plagued the plann British officials responded by treating ary. They dismissed him and then com tantly, he presented those protests, a He stood forward as the spokesman f and denounced the abuse of African r British treachery.[45]

allowing certain black writers to tackle th collectively (100–115). See also James W. St The Black Loyalists Revisited," *Acadiensis,*

44. Gary B. Nash, "Thomas Peters: Mill Sweet, *Struggle and Survival in Colonial An* "Myth, History, and Revisions," *Acadiensis, and White Philanthropists,* 129–143; Romn

45. Carretta, ed., *Olaudah Equiano,* 2

the postwar empire to negotiate the terms on which their loyalty would be based. Because the British government had begun to think of black loyalists as wards of the state, black loyalists started to think of themselves as an interest group. Once recognized as royal subjects, it would be hard to deter free blacks from acting as other loyal subjects would. They fought to have their understanding of British commitments manifest in practice. Increasingly, during the 1780s, they brought their grievances directly to the British government. The Nova Scotia settlers lobbied the governors of the province and thereafter the administration of William Pitt to insist on the land and supplies they had been promised on embarking from New York. When that did not work, they petitioned for transportation to Sierra Leone. The elected leaders of "the Black Poor" insisted on Sierra Leone as the ideal setting for resettlement and then, months later, fought the scheme as they became concerned about the government's true intentions in shipping them to the coast.[44]

A formal relationship with the state seemed to allow a right to be heard. Olaudah Equiano turned his position as a government functionary into a platform from which to criticize his employers. Administrators at the British naval board in 1786 appointed Equiano as "Commissary of Provisions and Stores for the Black Poor to Sierra Leona." He was to serve, in effect, as a British emissary. But Equiano became unsettled by the mismanagement and corruption that plagued the planning for the expedition and its launch. British officials responded by treating Equiano like a troublesome functionary. They dismissed him and then compensated him for his service. Importantly, he presented those protests, and himself, in explicitly racial terms. He stood forward as the spokesman for a constituency, not merely himself, and denounced the abuse of African migrants as disconcerting evidence of British treachery.[45]

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allowing certain black writers to tackle the problem of slavery comprehensively and collectively (100–115). See also James W. St. G. Walker, "Myth, History, and Revisions: The Black Loyalists Revisited," *Acadiensis,* XXIX (1999), 99.

44. Gary B. Nash, "Thomas Peters: Millwright and Deliverer," in Nash and David G. Sweet, *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1981), 77–84; Walker, "Myth, History, and Revisions," *Acadiensis,* XXIX (1999), 88–89; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists,* 129–143; Rommel-Ruiz, "Atlantic Revolutions," 354–357.

45. Carretta, ed., *Olaudah Equiano,* 226–231; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White*

Black leaders like Equiano who emerged in London during the 1780s increasingly took public positions on what the imperial state ought to do. They took advantage of the emerging antislavery movement to claim a public voice for themselves. The campaign against the British slave trade transformed Equiano's life even as he helped to shape it. In 1785 Equiano had seen the progress of Quaker antislavery movements in Philadelphia. Later in the year, he led a delegation of eight Africans to Grace Church Street Meeting in London to thank the Society of Friends for publishing antislavery tracts. He conducted a spirited attack on proslavery writers in the daily press in the winter of 1788, when the first antislavery petitions descended on the House of Commons. In those months, he headed a committee of free blacks in sending public letters of praise to allies like Granville Sharp and avowed sympathizers in Parliament such as William Pitt, Charles James Fox, and William Dolben. Equiano was almost certainly the most famous black person in England by 1788, even before the publication of the now classic narrative of his own life in 1789. But he represented just one of many blacks in England who took the opportunity presented by the developing antislavery movement to denounce human bondage and tell their own story.[46]

If the British antislavery movement helped Africans attain a place on the public stage, it could not impose a script. The emerging class of African leaders sometimes pushed the antislavery cause far beyond the aims of its British organizers. In some respects, Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787) represented a pastiche of earlier works by Anthony Benezet, James Ramsay, and Thomas Clarkson, pamphlets that Quaker abolitionists in London subsidized and republished. He paraphrased their tracts liberally. In other respects, though, Cugoano took an unusually broad view of the problem of slavery. Most British antislavery writers avoided sweeping critiques of the imperial project when trying to win support for slave trade abolition. Cugoano, by contrast, described the exploitation of Africans as symptomatic of the larger crimes attending

Philanthropists, 102–103, 149–158. This aspect of Equiano's career is also treated at length in Walvin, *An African's Life,* 141–149.

46. Carretta, ed., *Olaudah Equiano,* 224–225, 326–348; *Morning Chronicle,* Feb. 20, 1788; Donna T. Andrew, comp., *London Debating Societies, 1776–1797,* London Record Society, *Publications,* XXX (1994), records 1312, 1318, 1513.

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47. Keith Sandiford provides an especially r
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On Cugoano's invocation of state power, see
slavery Activity," *Church Hist.*, LXIX (1999),

48. Iain McCalman, ed., *The Horrors of S*
derburn (Edinburgh, 1991); Peter Linebaugh
Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and Commoners, and
Atlantic (Boston, 2000), 287–326.

European expansion, a point that he developed through lengthy quotations from William Robertson's *History of America,* which detailed Spanish depredations in the Indies. No less unusual was the pronounced emphasis Cugoano placed on the sovereign authority of divine law. At a time when most abolitionists in Britain favored reasoned arguments over impassioned jeremiads, Cugoano drew on Granville Sharp's Revolutionary era quartet to cast reform as a Christian duty and moral obligation. If Cugoano drew inspiration from the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, he displayed no fidelity to their restricted goals. The committee would never have endorsed Cugoano's bold denunciations of the crown, the Church of England, and Parliament for licensing oppression. Nor would the abolitionists have embraced his call for a "total abolition of slavery," or "a universal emancipation of slaves." Cugoano understood the antislavery potential of an imperial state vested with expansive powers of enforcement. He may have been the first of any color to recommend that the Royal Navy patrol the Atlantic Ocean and intercept merchants trafficking in slaves. His *Thoughts and Sentiments* represented the most radical antislavery publication printed in Britain before 1788.[47]

The emerging antislavery campaigns of the 1780s, then, broadened the sense of the possible among some exiled Africans. Thereafter, black radicals like Robert Wedderburn would hold forth publicly on the "Horrors of Slavery," and sometimes with a directness that would make white abolitionists uncomfortable.[48] The difference in tone, spirit, content, and form that separates the works of Ignatius Sancho in the 1760s from Ottobah Cugoano in the 1780s hints at the sharp break separating the moments in which they wrote. Before the 1780s, before the antislavery movements crystallized,

47. Keith Sandiford provides an especially nuanced treatment of Cugoano in *Measuring the Moment,* 93–177. See also Paul Edwards's introduction to Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery,* ed. Paul Edwards (London, 1969) [Originally published as Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species . . .* (London, 1787)]. On Cugoano's invocation of state power, see Saillant, "Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity," *Church Hist.,* LXIX (1999), 108–109.

48. Iain McCalman, ed., *The Horrors of Slavery, and Other Writings by Robert Wedderburn* (Edinburgh, 1991); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000), 287–326.

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The campaign against the British slave trade
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le abolition. Cugoano, by contrast, described the
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9–158. This aspect of Equiano's career is also treated at
's *Life,* 141–149.
h *Equiano,* 224–225, 326–348; *Morning Chronicle,* Feb. 20,
ap., *London Debating Societies, 1776–1797,* London Record
1994), records 1312, 1318, 1513.

blacks in Britain had far more modest goals, goals that reflected the situations in which they found themselves and the possibilities they could conceive. Most often, they aspired less to abolish slavery than escape from its clutches. They tried to secure autonomy and personal security for themselves rather than influence the course of parliamentary politics. Like nearly everyone else in Britain, blacks in the British Isles could scarcely imagine a successful campaign to abolish the British slave system before the American war. Until the late 1780s, and for very many long after, they organized pro-liberty movements far more than abolitionist movements. As late as the summer of 1786, there was as much interest in going to Africa as going to Parliament.

[111] Sir Guy Carleton learned a good deal about black pro-liberty movements during the fourteen months he commanded British forces in North America at the close of the Revolutionary War. His predecessor, Henry Clinton, had offered freedom to slaves who deserted patriot owners and then organized the escaped into labor and auxiliary corps. As a result, when Carleton arrived in New York in May 1782, he found more than three thousand black loyalists residing in the vicinity of British army headquarters. Some had participated in the campaigns against the American rebels. Others had exploited the chaos of war to find refuge behind British lines. Carleton also knew of similar aspirations among the far larger body of runaways who had fled to the British army in the South. During the months before Carleton arrived in North America, the "spirit and enterprise" of black freedom-seekers had inspired British and loyalist officers there to propose ambitious plans for reconquering the rebellious colonies with regiments of liberated soldiers. Put ten thousand black men in arms, advised the South Carolina loyalist John Cruden in 1782. This would "bring the most violent" of the rebels "to their senses."[49]

49. Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution,* 19–32, 111–157; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York, 1976), 62–65; Frey, *Water from the Rock,* 63–172; Braisted, "The Black Pioneers and Others," in Pulis, ed., *Moving On,* 7–25; Graham Russell Hodges, "Black Revolt in New York City and the Neutral Zone: 1775–1783," in Paul A. Gilje and William Pencak, eds., *New York in the Age of the Constitution, 1775–1800* (Cranbury, N.J., 1982), 20–47; Judith Van Buskirk, "Crossing the Lines: African-Americans in the New York City Region during the British Occupation, 1776–1783," in

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Carleton took charge of the North American command too late to consider establishing an army of former bondsmen. The British government intended to negotiate a peace in 1782, not prolong the war. In conducting the retreat, though, Carleton had a free hand and thus decisive influence on the fate of fugitive slaves who had come to the British seeking protection and liberty. The seventh article of the preliminary peace terms circulated in the spring of 1783 required Britain to withdraw from the United States "without causing any destruction or carrying away any Negroes or other Property of the American inhabitants," as South Carolina merchant-planter Henry Laurens had advised. By the time word of the agreement reached North America, the British already had evacuated from Georgia and South Carolina as many as ten thousand black men, women, and children, many of whom were destined for enslavement to British loyalists in the Floridas or the Caribbean. Re-enslavement also would have been the fate of the black loyalists residing in New York if Carleton had chosen to honor the American interpretation of the peace treaty. At a pivotal meeting at Orangetown, New York, on May 6, 1783, Carleton informed a shocked George Washington of his intention to take the liberated slaves living in New York to Nova Scotia. British proclamations had freed the rebels' slaves from servitude, Carleton explained. They could no longer be considered property. Carleton and his entourage (which included the emancipationist Maurice Morgann) took great pleasure, it is clear, in posturing as liberators before the commander in chief of the Continental Army. Washington and his aides insisted that all escaped slaves should be regarded as property and therefore returned to their rightful owners. With equal passion, the British delegates maintained that they had a moral duty to honor their promise to the black men and women who had earned protection from the crown.[50]

Explorations in Early American Culture, supplemental issue to *Pennsylvania History*, LXV (1998), 74–100; Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613–1863* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), 147–153; John Cruden to earl of Dunmore, Jan. 5, 1782, in George Livermore, *An Historical Research respecting the Opinions of the Founders of the Republic on Negroes as Slaves, as Citizens, and as Soldiers; Read before the Massachusetts Historical Society, August 14, 1862* (Boston, 1862), 186.

50. The Orangetown meeting is described in Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*, 47–57, and Paul R. Reynolds, *Guy Carleton: A Biography* (New York, 1980), 145–146. For the transportation of British slaves owned by loyalists from North America to the British Caribbean, see Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 182; Michael Craton, "Loyalists Mainly to

By standing his ground, Carleton determined British policy toward the black loyalists in New York. "The English had compassion upon us," recalled the Methodist preacher and South Carolina fugitive Boston King. True to his word, Carleton provided for their transportation to Nova Scotia with twenty-three thousand other American loyalists and tried to arrange for their proper settlement in the province.[51] Although Carleton had acted on his own, his actions received the blessing of His Majesty's ministers. In the words of first minister Lord North, who returned to office in April 1782, the government deemed the policy "an act of justice" and "perfectly justifiable." Secretary of State Charles James Fox declared that returning the former slaves after offering "a Promise of Liberty" during the war would be a cause for shame for a "Man of Honour to execute." Home Office secretary Thomas Townshend (Lord Sydney) in 1784 directed Nova Scotia governor John Parr to give "protection and favour" to the black emigrants. When they evaded these orders in the late 1780s, Nova Scotia administrators, in the end, would incur the wrath of the Pitt ministry. The black veteran Thomas Peters traveled to London in 1791 to expose the way Canadian officials mistreated black families and conspired to exploit their poverty. William Pitt's government responded with a curt directive that ordered Nova Scotia administrators to award the former slaves the land and provisions they were due. "In consideration of their Services," Henry

Themselves: The 'Black Loyalist' Diaspora to the Bahamas, 1783–c.1820," in Verene A. Shepherd, ed., *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (New York, 2002), 44–68; John W. Pulis, "Bridging Troubled Waters: Moses Baker, George Liele, and African American Diaspora to Jamaica," in Pulis, ed., *Moving On,* 183–219.

51. "I recommend them to your protection, and beg you will apply to Governor Parr, that in case they settle near any of the towns they have a town lot as at Shelburne, and about twenty acres in vicinage, granted them; and if as towns at a distance, their grant may be extended to over one hundred acres." Guy Carleton to Charles James Fox, Oct. 21, 1783, in Great Britain, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Report on Historical Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London, 1909), IV, 420. See also Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* (New York, 1996), xvi; "Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher; Written by Himself, during His Residence at Kingswood-School," *Methodist Magazine* (March 1798), in Carretta, ed., *Unchained Voices,* 356.

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52. Lord North to Sir Guy Carleton, Aug. 8
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53. On the initial Sierra Leone expedition
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54. Arnett G. Lindsay, "Diplomatic Relat
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(1920), 391–419.

Dundas explained, George III was "anxious that they should be gratified."[52] The British government backed these commitments with money—the Treasury spent more than thirty thousand pounds transporting black loyalists from Nova Scotia and London to Sierra Leone between 1786 and 1792.[53] Of equal importance, successive administrations refused to return to America those who had sought freedom with the British army and refused to compensate United States slaveowners for the laborers they had lost, as the peace treaty of 1783 seemed to require.[54]

The protection that British authorities extended to the black loyalists would seem to indicate a measure of official sympathy for the "Negro." But there was a less heartening story here, too. If British commanders sometimes acted like liberators, they did not usually behave like humanitarians. Slaves of loyalists before the American war remained slaves of loyalists after the American war. Enslaved men and women seized as "contraband" during the conflict faced an uncertain fate. Loyalists appropriated some as compensation for their lost property. Others seem to have been shipped to the Caribbean and sold as slaves, though the exact numbers may never be known. Black freedom-seekers, moreover, often suffered egregiously from the sometimes dire conditions in British military camps. Countless thousands died from disease and inadequate provisions. Many found themselves left behind during the British evacuations at war's end. Cornwallis, alone, expelled and then abandoned more than two thousand black men, women, and children when leaving Yorktown in the summer of 1782. Even the liberated who left with the British often fared poorly. Black loyalists in Nova Scotia received the smallest, least promising lots and suffered the

52. Lord North to Sir Guy Carleton, Aug. 8, Dec. 4, 1783, Lord Sydney to John Parr, Oct. 5, 1784, and Henry Dundas to Parr, Aug. 6, 1791, all in Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 17n30, 21, 26, 115; North to Carleton, Dec. 4, 1783, in Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*, 60n45; Charles James Fox cited in Philip M. Hamer et al., eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, 16 vols. (Columbia, S.C., [1968]–2003), XVI, 231n1.

53. On the initial Sierra Leone expedition organized in 1786 and 1787, the Treasury disbursed £14,747 135s. 9d. The exodus from Nova Scotia cost nearly £15,592 13s. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, 161; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 135–136, 143n59.

54. Arnett G. Lindsay, "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Great Britain Bearing on the Return of the Negro Slaves, 1788–1828," *Jour. Negro Hist.*, V (1920), 391–419.

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longest delays in having their claims to land fulfilled. If the Treasury made an effort to find a home for the exiles in Sierra Leone, it also rushed the first group of settlers out of England on an ill-prepared expedition that led to the death of nearly all the colonists.[55]

This record of disregard, this frequent tendency among British officials to neglect the interests of black fugitives, makes the less common instances of charity even more perplexing. Agents of the crown treated poorly most black men and women who came under their control. Under the circumstances, though, it may be surprising that they did not treat them worse. Britain had far more to gain from abandoning the black loyalists entirely. All of the former slaves could have been sent to the Caribbean to make up for the labor shortage that affected certain West Indian islands in the last years of the American war. All of the escaped could have been "given" to those British Americans who had remained loyal to the crown and clamored for compensation for the property they lost during the war.[56] Further, returning the runaways to their owners in the new United States, as the peace treaty prescribed, would have provided a way to expedite the repayment of prewar debts to British merchants. In material terms, Britain had little to gain by securing the liberty of the black loyalists in Nova Scotia.

What, then, were British officials doing when they guaranteed freedom and protection to escaped slaves in the years after the American war concluded? And what do these actions suggest about British attitudes toward blacks in the years when abolitionism first took shape? Many in Britain thought extreme those writers who denied the very humanity of Africans. David Hume and Edward Long stood out for the lengths they went to degrade the black race. Far more acceptable at the time was the image of the "Negro" as the exemplar of primitive ignorance and innocence, a view that

55. Frey, *Water from the Rock,* 107, 127–128, 141–142, 148, 155–156, 159–160, 170–171, 175, 182; Walker, *The Black Loyalists,* 18–63; Rommel-Ruiz, "Atlantic Revolutions," 351–354; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists,* 136–161; Philip Ranlet, "The British, Slaves, and Smallpox in Revolutionary Virginia," *Jour. Negro Hist.*, LXXXIV (1999), 217–226. For a revisiting of the number of enslaved men and women who escaped to the British, see Cassandra Pybus, "Jefferson's Faulty Math: The Question of Slave Defections in the American Revolution," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., LXII (2005), 243–264.

56. J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750–1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford, 1988), 283; O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided,* 166.

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, reflected a nostalgia for a precommercial world civilized Europe had lost and, at the same time, reassured Britons of their cultural superiority. Perceptions and reactions varied. In England, Africans could provoke ridicule or anxiety or affection or contempt or pity, or some combination of all of these at once. Few in Britain, though, seem to have thought of Africans as natural slaves. There were too many reservations about slavery considered in the abstract, to regard bondage as natural to anyone. But the prevailing state of "barbarism" in Africa, in the view of many, did seem to leave its peoples equipped only for servile labor. If there had to be slaves, and that might be regretted, it perhaps was to be expected that those slaves would be Africans. The British, generally, assumed the pertinence of racial difference, rather than insisting on its importance.[57]

If the British thought of blacks as inferiors, practices in the Atlantic were shaped as much by experiences *with* Africans as attitudes *toward* Africans. Although most in Britain held Africans in low regard, they could not always indulge in fantasies of superiority. In too many parts of the Atlantic, they had no control over the black people with whom they came in contact. In North America and most of the Caribbean, where the British held Africans as slaves and servants, colonists had the freedom to establish racial hierarchies. In other instances, though, British migrants sometimes had to accede to their own political or military weakness. In the Americas, this was most apparent in relations with maroon communities, whom British colonists sometimes treated as sovereign states. Jamaican maroons secured near complete independence from British colonists in 1739 after several decades of intermittent conflict. British settlers negotiated with the Caribs of Saint Vincent after an unsuccessful attempt in 1773 to seize their lands for plantation agriculture. When white men found themselves fighting alongside black men while at war, allegiance could at least temporarily take precedence over race. In the marketplace as well, the British sometimes had to treat with blacks on equal terms. Historian Michael Jarvis has described how Jamaican planters, for example, found themselves negotiating the sale of ship cargoes with enslaved sailors employed as agents for Bermuda merchants. Long-standing personal relationships between merchants in Bristol and Liverpool and the Ekpe of Old Calabar facilitated the expansion

57. From the large and varied literature on this subject, I am indebted here particularly to Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*.

of the British slave trade in the Bight of Biafra in the late eighteenth century. The Ekpe traders sent their children to Liverpool to reside temporarily with British merchants so that they could build and strengthen connections with prominent families in the trade. The correspondence that resulted from these exchanges between British and Old Calabar merchants was "permeated," according to one study, by "the language of sociability."[58]

British traders on the West African coast depended entirely on the goodwill of their hosts. There, no matter how much they may have disliked black people, Englishmen could not afford the luxury of racism. The English derived their influence in Africa from their ability to provide wanted goods, including firearms, to African purchasers. So British traders placed a priority on cultivating peaceable relations with local merchants and sovereigns in the hopes of keeping commerce open and on favorable terms. Atop the slaving forts dotting the coast, armaments pointed seaward. English traders were in no position to wage war on the peoples with whom they traded. But they had a particular interest in keeping merchants from other European nations from intruding on the sections of the coast they regarded as their own. Such attempts at monopoly, though, were rarely successful. African traders appreciated the importance of playing competitors off one another,

58. Craton, *Testing the Chains,* 61–96, 151–152; Michael Craton, "Planters, British Imperial Policy, and the Black Caribs of St. Vincent's," in Craton, ed., *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1997), 129; Robin F. A. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges: Britons, Native Americans, and Caribs, 1759–1775* (Gainesville, Fla., 2000), 195–198; Philip D. Morgan, "British Encounters with Africans and African Americans, circa 1600–1780," in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989), 188–190; Michael J. Jarvis, "Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680–1783," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., LIX (2002), 607; Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade," *American Historical Review,* CIV (1999), 333–355, "the language of sociability" cited on 344. See also Lovejoy and Richardson, "Letters of the Old Calibar Slave Tade, 1760–1789," in Carretta and Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage,* 89–115, and Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (London, 2001), 63–64. April Lee Hatfield makes a similar point about the ways experience and circumstances shaped attitudes in "A 'Very Wary People in their Bargaining' or 'Very Good Marchandise': English Traders' Views of Free and Enslaved Africans, 1550–1650," *Slavery and Abolition,* XXV, no. 3 (December 2004), 1–17.

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59. [Tweed], *Considerations and Remar
with Some Account of the British Settlemen
Natives since the Peace; Candidly Stated
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A Treatise upon the Trade from Great-Bri
Attention of Government* (London, 1772).

60. Thomas Rutherford to Thomas T
153; Oldham, *Convicts to the Colonies,* ed.

61. See, for example, Horace Riggs P
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62. "The castle Slaves are so closely
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n the Bight of Biafra in the late eighteenth century. heir children to Liverpool to reside temporarily that they could build and strengthen connections in the trade. The correspondence that resulted tween British and Old Calabar merchants was o one study, by "the language of sociability."[58] Vest African coast depended entirely on the good- no matter how much they may have disliked black d not afford the luxury of racism. The English Africa from their ability to provide wanted goods, ican purchasers. So British traders placed a pri- able relations with local merchants and sovereigns ommerce open and on favorable terms. Atop the oast, armaments pointed seaward. English traders ge war on the peoples with whom they traded. But erest in keeping merchants from other European n the sections of the coast they regarded as their onopoly, though, were rarely successful. African nportance of playing competitors off one another,

tains, 61–96, 151–152; Michael Craton, "Planters, British Caribs of St. Vincent's," in Craton, ed., *Empire, Enslave- ribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1997), 129; Robin F. A. Fabel, *Native Americans, and Caribs, 1759–1775* (Gainesville,). Morgan, "British Encounters with Africans and African in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, N.C., rvis, "Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, LIX (2002), 607; Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, ic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Cal- *Historical Review,* CIV (1999), 333–355, "the language of also Lovejoy and Richardson, "Letters of the Old Calibar arretta and Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage,* 89–115, and *ured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English* 1), 63–64. April Lee Hatfield makes a similar point about mstances shaped attitudes in "A 'Very Wary People in their archandise': English Traders' Views of Free and Enslaved *and Abolition,* XXV, no. 3 (December 2004), 1–17.

and did so exceedingly well. For this reason, British agents in Africa fretted incessantly about their fragile position on the coast.[59] Within the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, there was a preoccupation with accommodating the needs and interests of their African partners. British slave traders, for example, opposed government plans to transport large shipments of English convicts to Cape Coast Castle in the early 1780s because they feared the scheme "would render the British Nation odious to the Natives of the Country, and be thereby a Means of greatly injuring the African Trade."[60] The Fantees and Commendas lost several hundred soldiers helping the British seize the Dutch trading fort of Elmina in 1780 during the American Revolution. When the British returned the fort to the Dutch at the close of the war, their angered allies at Commenda, "exasperated to the point of Madness" by 1786, threatened to halt all trade with English merchants until they were compensated for the soldiers needlessly sacrificed in what looked, in the aftermath, to be a frivolous expedition.[61]

The British shipped tens of thousands of Africans across the Atlantic each year by the end of the eighteenth century. When the wrong Africans ended up enslaved, however, extravagant attempts to atone for the error often followed. An act of Parliament prohibited British traders from kidnapping Africans from the coast and selling them into slavery in the colonies. And the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa routinely directed its employees to prevent illegal seizures.[62] But these measures could not

59. [Tweed], *Considerations and Remarks on the Present State of the Trade to Africa; with Some Account of the British Settlements in That Country, and the Intrigues of the Natives since the Peace; Candidly Stated and Considered in a Letter Addressed to the People in Power More Particularly, and the Nation in General; by a Gentleman, Who Resided Upwards of Fifteen Years in That Country* (London, 1771); John Peter Demarin, *A Treatise upon the Trade from Great-Britain to Africa: Humbly Recommended to the Attention of Government* (London, 1772).

60. Thomas Rutherford to Thomas Townshend, Oct. 2, 1782, PRO T 70/69, fol. 153; Oldham, *Convicts to the Colonies,* ed. Oldham, 73, 80–81.

61. See, for example, Horace Riggs Popham to Edward Thompson, Jan. 10, 1786, PRO T 1/633.

62. "The castle Slaves are so closely connected with the people of the country by Marriages and other social Ties, that an attempt to remove any of the former would infalliably occasion very great Disturbances and Insurrections among the Natives; and render the Safety of the forts and Settlements highly precarious, as their Defence de-

stop unscrupulous ship captains from ensnaring free persons or castle slaves supposedly fixed to the coast. In 1777 Captain Benjamin Hughes of Liverpool sold into slavery two freemen he had hired at Annamaboe to assist in navigating his ship to the West Indies. Several years earlier, the prince of Badagry on the Slave Coast had responded to a similar stunt by Captain James Johnson also of Liverpool by taking nine British hostages from a later ship in retaliation. To head off a similar conflict, the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa went to unusual lengths to assuage the injured parties at Annamaboe. First, they arranged passage to Jamaica for a kinsman, Cofee Aboan, so he could identify the surviving captive, Quamino Amissah. The committee then brought Aboan and Amissah back to England and, on Amissah's behalf, filed a suit against Captain Hughes. Considerable effort was made to return Amissah home in good health. Damages recovered in the suit were sent forward to Annamaboe in the hope of making restitution.[63] Throughout the ordeal, the committee of merchants made a point of alerting Amissah's "Friends and Relations" to "the Pains the Committee have taken to see Justice done to him." The reason for these pains, they made explicit: "His safe Arrival in Africa, is of great importance to the trade of this Country." Because Amissah's compatriot, Aboan, had shown some reluctance to leave England, the committee called on the governor at Cape Coast Castle to see that Aboan returned home to his kin, "lest his absence should be attended by any bad consequence to the trade." On such matters, where profits were at stake, the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa displayed exceptional vigilance. Four years after the fact, and long after the nine English hostages had perished, the committee was still trying to bring Captain James Johnson to justice.[64]

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pends more on the attachment of the Slaves, than on their feeble Force in Civil and Military Servants." Rutherford to William Knox, Sept. 23, 1778, PRO T 70/69, fol. 130.

63. Samuel Poirer to Samuel Green, Dec. 21, 1776, Feb. 1, 6, 1777, Poirer to Charles Hope, Dec. 25, 1776, Company of Merchants Trading to Africa to governor at Cape Coast Castle, Jan. 2, 1777, Dec. 30, 1778, Rutherford to Benjamin Hughes, Aug. 27, Sept. 3, 1777, Rutherford to Capt. Thomas Eagles, May 27, Oct. 21, Nov. 11, 1778, Rutherford to Guion Forbes, Mar. 3, 1779, and Rutherford to Capt. Joseph Roberts Wood, Mar. 3, 1779, all in PRO T 70/69, fols. 122–125, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134.

64. Company of Merchants Trading to Africa to governor and council, Cape Coast Castle, Dec. 30, 1778, Rutherford to Capt. Thoburn, Mar. 5, 1779, Rutherford to governor and council at Cape Coast Castle, Mar. 11, 1779, Rutherford to James Clegg, Aug. 9,

The British were in no position to treat situation required prudent adjustments to ci of Senegambia the Francophone Africans British officer from the coast in 1775. The known, charged that British governor Charl property, appropriated their slaves, banne inland wars on peaceful villages to generat trade. Secretary of State Lord George Germ because he worried that further alienating th British enterprise on the Senegal River.[65] T mulattoes less likely to subvert British inte protection from the British crown. In 1777 committee of free blacks in the Caribbean George III against colonial laws that stri enjoyed under French rule. The Board of the petitioners and asked the colonial as provisions of the recently enacted laws. Bu important to back British settlers attemptin on the newly acquired island than to hon lished black and mulatto inhabitants.[66]

1780, Rutherford to Green, Aug. 9, 1780, and Rut son, Aug. 17, 1780, all ibid., fols. 133, 134, 139, 140 these cases in which the "wrongfully enslaved" w For additional instances, see Lovejoy and Richa History," *AHR*, CIV (1999), 91, 98; Lovejoy and I Slave Trade," in Carretta and Gould, eds., *Geni* Sparks, "Two Princes of Calabar: An Atlantic *WMQ*, 3d Ser., LIX (2002), 555–584.

65. "A Petition Present. by the Inhabitants o Injustice Done to Them by His Excellency. Gc August, 1775," PRO CO 267/1; Searing, *West A* 114; Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Tr*

66. "Petition of the Free Negroes, Mullatos, Passed There for Regulating the Manumissio Bruono Largarite [1777]," and "Petition of Bru 71/1; "Report of the Lord Commissioners of Plantations on the Dominica Manumission Law

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t Castle, Mar. 11, 1779, Rutherford to James Clegg, Aug. 9,

The British were in no position to treat all black people alike. Each situation required prudent adjustments to circumstance. In the new colony of Senegambia the Francophone Africans forced the recall of the chief British officer from the coast in 1775. The *habitants,* as the traders were known, charged that British governor Charles O'Hara had destroyed their property, appropriated their slaves, banned Catholicism, and instigated inland wars on peaceful villages to generate captives for the transatlantic trade. Secretary of State Lord George Germain recalled O'Hara a year later, because he worried that further alienating the local elites would undermine British enterprise on the Senegal River.[65] Those Francophone blacks and mulattoes less likely to subvert British interests, however, received far less protection from the British crown. In 1777 Bruono Largarite organized a committee of free blacks in the Caribbean island of Dominica to petition George III against colonial laws that stripped them of rights they had enjoyed under French rule. The Board of Trade expressed sympathy for the petitioners and asked the colonial assembly to mitigate the harsher provisions of the recently enacted laws. But the board thought it far more important to back British settlers attempting to develop the sugar economy on the newly acquired island than to honor the complaints of the established black and mulatto inhabitants.[66]

1780, Rutherford to Green, Aug. 9, 1780, and Rutherford to Messrs. Clegg and Williamson, Aug. 17, 1780, all ibid., fols. 133, 134, 139, 140. There is still much to be learned from these cases in which the "wrongfully enslaved" were returned to the West African coast. For additional instances, see Lovejoy and Richardson, "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History," *AHR,* CIV (1999), 91, 98; Lovejoy and Richardson, "Letters of the Old Calabar Slave Trade," in Carretta and Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage,* 345–346; and Randy J. Sparks, "Two Princes of Calabar: An Atlantic Odyssey from Slavery to Freedom," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., LIX (2002), 555–584.

65. "A Petition Present. by the Inhabitants of Senegal Request. for a Redress of the Injustice Done to Them by His Excellency. Gov. O'Hara at Difft. Times. Senegal, 22 August, 1775," PRO CO 267/1; Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce,* 114; Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade,* 68.

66. "Petition of the Free Negroes, Mullatos, and Mustees of Dominica against an Act Passed There for Regulating the Manumission of Slaves [1774–1775]," "Petition of Bruono Largarite [1777]," and "Petition of Bruono Largarite [1778]," all in PRO CO 71/1; "Report of the Lord Commissioners of Trade to the Committee of Council for Plantations on the Dominica Manumission Law, the Petition of Free Blacks of Dominica,

A similar pragmatism and careful weighing of interests was evident in the way the British dealt with the recruitment of black soldiers. Opinion varied among commanders and shifted from situation to situation. Most important, no strict principle determined policy for any length of time anywhere in the British Empire. On-the-spot decisions were the rule. British officers opposed arming blacks until they found a reason to be for it. On his appointment in 1765, Charles O'Hara was directed by the Board of Trade to incorporate black soldiers into his garrisons in Senegal as vacancies occurred. O'Hara refused to follow through on what he described as the "impolitic" suggestion because it would "destroy that subordination," which, he thought "the Negroes" were obliged to accept. Less than a dozen years later, though, when the French threatened to overrun the British outpost at Saint Louis, O'Hara's successor, Matthias McNamara, recommended the purchase of five dozen adolescent Senegalese boys to fortify His Majesty's forces.[67] Similar reversals occurred elsewhere. Acting on his own, the earl of Dunmore in 1775 established a regiment of escaped slaves to quell rebellion in Virginia. Less than two years later, when William Howe arrived in New York and found black men serving in loyalist regiments, he ordered all "Negroes, Mollattoes, and other Improper Persons" discharged in 1777 in order to put the provincial forces on "the most respectable footing." But this was a year after Sir Henry Clinton in North Carolina and East Florida governor Patrick Tonyn had begun to form corps of black pioneers and militia to assist the war effort in the South. Clinton, as commander of British forces, offered freedom to rebel-owned slaves in 1779, though he resisted the temptation to follow Dunmore in establishing slave regiments.[68]

and the Petitions of Bruono Largarite," PRO PC 1/60; Board of Trade to Privy Council Committee for Plantation Affairs, May 6, 1777, PRO CO 271/2, fol. 405.

67. Charles O' Hara to earl of Dartmouth and Board of Trade, c. 1765, and Lt. Gov. Matthias McNamara to Board of Trade, Jan. 26, 1776, both in PRO 267/1. In these years, there was a similar record of ambivalence about arming slaves at Cape Coast Castle, the administrative headquarters for the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa. Reese, "The Drudgery of the Slave Trade," in Coclanis, ed., *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,* 290.

68. Orderly Book Collection, King's American Department Orderly Book, William L. Clements Library; Alexander Innes to Sir Henry Clinton, Nov. 9, 1779, in Alfred E. Jones, ed., "A Letter regarding the Queen's Rangers," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* XXX (1922), 368–372.

Yet Clinton issued the Phillipsburg Proclar superior, Lord North, had promised the par cial investigation into Dunmore's decision t rebels. It took some time for official policy tice.[69] Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy has shown nial legislatures armed blacks in great num during the American war. But only with the France, more than a decade later, during th the British formally establish slave regiment

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69. Braisted, "Black Pioneers and Others," ir promised investigation does not appear to have t

70. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided,* 174- *Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 179* additional details on this complex history in the eighteenth century, see Andrew O'Shaughnessy during the American Revolution," in Christoph eds., *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to* 2006).

71. Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The M Americas* (New York, 1993); O'Shaughnessy, "The British in Asia," in Marshall, ed., *Oxfor Eighteenth Century,* 499; Colin G. Calloway, *T try: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Cu*

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g the Queen's Rangers," *Virginia Magazine of History*
-372.

Yet Clinton issued the Phillipsburg Proclamation just one year after his superior, Lord North, had promised the parliamentary opposition an official investigation into Dunmore's decision to arm slaves against American rebels. It took some time for official policy to catch up with actual practice.[69] Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy has shown that both the army and colonial legislatures armed blacks in great numbers in the British Caribbean during the American war. But only with the pressing needs of the war with France, more than a decade later, during the revolutions of the 1790s, did the British formally establish slave regiments.[70]

A wider view of these measures diminishes their apparent novelty. The British had employed slaves in the Caribbean earlier in the century to wage war against European rivals, as they would again during the American Revolution. There was little new, more generally, in using foreign troops to advance imperial ends. "Military multiculturalism," as Linda Colley has dubbed the practice, had become common by the late eighteenth century. The East India Company used sepoy armies for its victories in Bengal during the 1750s and to sustain its authority on the subcontinent thereafter. Controversially, British commanders armed Native Americans against colonial rebels in the early stages of the American Revolution.[71] British officials were more committed to keeping the empire under British control than establishing racial purity. Which is better? John Cruden asked rhetorically in reference to his proposal to arm ten thousand slaves, "to make this vast continent become an acquisition of power, strength, and consequence to

69. Braisted, "Black Pioneers and Others," in Pulis, ed., *Moving On*, 11–12, 19. The promised investigation does not appear to have taken place.

70. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, 174–181; Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795–1815* (New Haven, Conn., 1979). For additional details on this complex history in the Anglo-American context during the long eighteenth century, see Andrew O'Shaughnessy and Philip D. Morgan, "Arming Slaves during the American Revolution," in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, Conn., 2006).

71. Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York, 1993); O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, 45–46; Marshall, "The British in Asia," in Marshall, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, II, *The Eighteenth Century*, 499; Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York, 1995).

Great Britain again, or tamely give it up to France, who will reap the fruits of American Independence, to the utter ruin of Britain?"[72] British commanders, as Maurice Morgann and others had anticipated, did not regard blacks only as a source for labor or the object of police, as their American brethren did. These officers, therefore, proved less committed to strict racialized thinking. It was not difficult for British officers to think of blacks, in some contexts, as British subjects, as more than simply labor or the property of British colonists. Like Native Americans or Indians in Bengal, blacks in America represented a reservoir of manpower that might be harnessed to the cause of state power, that might be enlisted as allies in the service of empire. Such practices made sense to military men aware of the broad changes taking place throughout British dominions. Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Thompson liked to refer to the Independent Troop of Black Dragoons he directed in South Carolina as his "Sepoy Troop."[73]

The service blacks rendered the crown during the American Revolution impressed British officers like Benjamin Thompson. If enslaved men and women deserted American plantations and households to help themselves, their assistance during the war took on special importance to British commanders in America. The escaped seemed to display loyalty to the crown at a time when many American colonists were renouncing their allegiance to the throne. And the ex-slaves offered themselves to the British army in large numbers just as British officers grew disillusioned with the quality of assistance from white loyalists. The South Carolina command wished to establish black regiments at the end of the war because they thought it the only way to recover North America. But what recommended the enlistment of black soldiers in particular was evidence of their desire to be faithful subjects. The former slaves, Dunmore explained in 1782, were "not only better fitted for service in this warm climate than white men, but they are also better guides, may be got on much easier terms and are perfectly attached to our sovereign." Lieutenant General James Moncrief wrote, too, of the "great advantages" to be gained by "embodying a Brigade of Negroes in this Country," particularly because of the "confidence in which they have placed in us." Several officers left North America convinced that the former slaves deserved the privileges of British liberty. In London, returned com-

72. Cruden to Dunmore, Jan. 5, 1782, in Livermore, *Historical Researches,* 184.

73. Braisted, "Black Pioneers and Others," in Pulis, ed., *Moving On,* 22.

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74. Dunmore to Clinton, Feb. 2, 1782, in Liv
Moncrief to Clinton, Mar. 13, 1782, James Mo
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Braisted, "Black Pioneers and Others," in P
Norton, "The Fate of Some Black Loyalists o
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manders stood forward on behalf of former slaves who had served the crown with distinction. Stephen Norris, the deputy commissioner for provisions in New York, reported that John Thompson "was under arms and very active with the King's Regimt." The black loyalists who received compensation from the Commission of Claims held letters of recommendation from the earl of Dunmore for their service in the Ethiopian Regiment. Henry Clinton in 1791 introduced Nova Scotia emissary Thomas Peters to Lord Grenville as formerly "a very active Serjt. in a very usefull Corps."[74]

The British liberated to win a war, not to promote emancipation. Yet once they had cast themselves as liberators, they became less willing to compromise self-imposed commitments. The protection the British state offered to some black loyalists in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War represented a partial attempt to honor obligations. "I had no right to deprive them of that liberty I found them possessed of," Guy Carleton explained to George Washington. Carleton won approbation in some quarters for the assistance he gave to black freedom struggles. "In this, as in every thing else," stated one loyalist, he "has acted with Openness and Candor." In every instance, the evacuation of black loyalists from New York was characterized as fulfilling a national promise. "It would be inhuman to the last Degree and a base Violation of Public Faith to send those Negroes back to their Masters who would beat them with the utmost Cruelty." A contributor to the *Public Advertiser* condemned the way that black loyalists in London had been "left to perish by famine and cold in the sight of that people for whom they have hazarded their lives, and even (many of them) spilt their blood." White loyalists who had lost property during the war had been compensated. "Shall these poor humble assertors of [Britain's] rights be left to the agonies of want and despair?" Henry Clinton worried in 1791 that the black loyalists of Nova Scotia "seem to be the only Loyalists that have been neglected."[75]

74. Dunmore to Clinton, Feb. 2, 1782, in Livermore, *Historical Researches*, 187; James Moncrief to Clinton, Mar. 13, 1782, James Moncrief MS Letterbook, William L. Clements Library; Walker, "Myth, History, and Revisions," *Acadiensis*, XXIX (1999), 90n; Braisted, "Black Pioneers and Others," in Pulis, ed., *Moving On*, 4–5; Mary Beth Norton, "The Fate of Some Black Loyalists of the American Revolution," *Jour. Negro Hist.*, LVIII (1973), 406; Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*, 179.

75. Walker, "Myth, History, and Revisions," *Acadiensis*, XXIX (1999), 90, 92; Cath-

In this way, moral purpose emerged from an entirely amoral set of decisions. British commanders did not set out to undermine North American slavery. Yet, once they started the process, they often found little incentive to reverse course. The British government never authorized manumissions en masse. But once the practice began, the North ministry made almost no effort to prevent it. Expedients determined practice. Practice determined policy. And policy, over time, drifted toward becoming a matter of principle. Recognizing the liberty of those who had fought for the crown became an end in itself by the early 1780s. If the British stood to gain little in material terms by guaranteeing the liberty of the escaped, there seemed no reason to squander the moral capital their emerging reputation for benevolence produced. A note of self-approbation suffused the postwar attempts to establish black loyalists on a secure footing. Gestures of fidelity to wartime allies served as a kind of psychic compensation for the prestige the war sacrificed. Indeed, in a less explicit way, the patronage extended to black loyalists functioned much as the Somerset verdict had. If the Americas were to be a zone of slavery, those who sought protection from the crown might expect to benefit from British liberty. Some agents of the crown such as Guy Carleton felt morally obliged to the slaves the king's forces had freed. But they also liked what the fulfillment of those obligations said about the character of the British government. As early as 1784, William Pitt was explaining to U.S. emissary John Adams that the British had protected black loyalists "in obedience to the dictates of the higher law of humanity."[76] By the end of the American war, the British government had learned that displays of benevolence toward liberated Africans could help sanctify the pursuit of national interest.

FIGURE 4. *Reception of the American Loyalist*
Engraving by H. Moses after an inset in the po
Benjamin West (1812). Circa 1815. From John I
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Loyalists, after the Close of the War between Gr
(1815), ed. George Athan Billias (Boston, 1972)

Among those receiving Britannia's protectio
represented as "looking up to Britannia in grat
for slavery," in the words of the former loyalist
Wilmot (vii).

erine S. Crary, *The Price of Loyalty: Tory Writings from the Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1973), 362; "Z" from *Public Advertiser,* Jan. 19, 1786, cited in Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists,* 68; Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks,* 55–56. As Kathleen Wilson correctly observes, there also was public hostility to the black loyalists in England. Not everyone agreed that allegiance mattered more than nation. Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003), 46–48.

76. John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York, 1977), 112.

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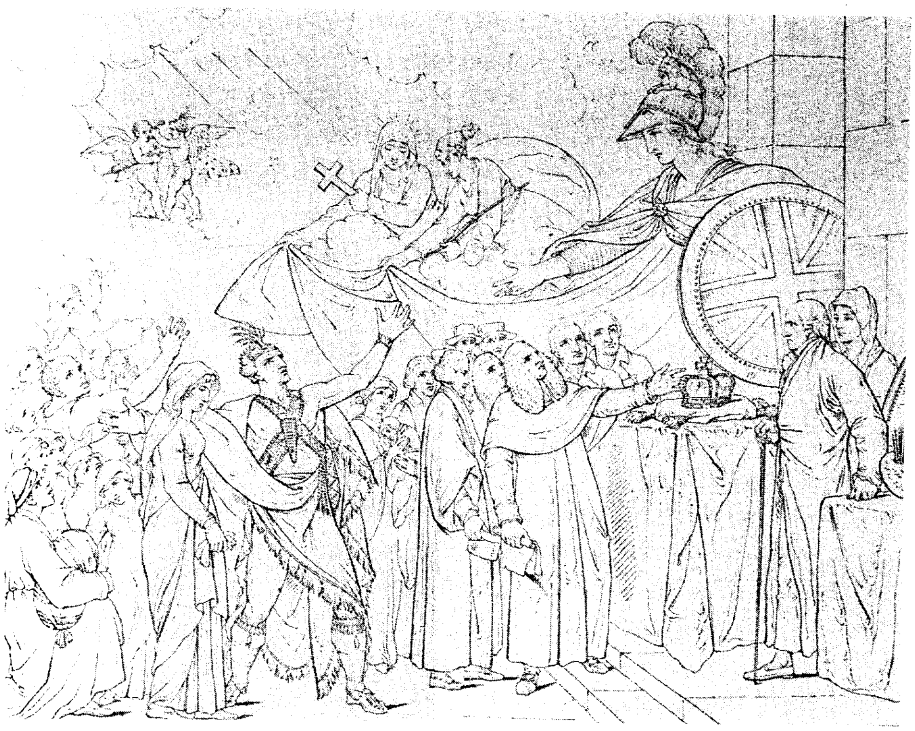

FIGURE 4. *Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain, in the Year 1783.* Engraving by H. Moses after an inset in the portrait of John Eardley Wilmot by Benjamin West (1812). Circa 1815. From John Eardley Wilmot, *Historical View of the Commissioners for Enquiring into the Losses, Services, and Claims of the American Loyalists, after the Close of the War between Great Britain and Her Colonies in 1783* (1815), ed. George Athan Billias (Boston, 1972).

Among those receiving Britannia's protection are two Africans, far left, who are represented as "looking up to Britannia in grateful remembrance of their emancipation for slavery," in the words of the former loyalist claims commissioner John Eardley Wilmot (vii).

[IV]

If generosity toward certain "needy" Africans could serve the needs of state, such gestures might also ennoble *commercial* ventures, Henry Smeathman concluded in the aftermath of the American war. Indeed, this looked like the only way to salvage his languishing hopes of establishing a colonial settlement under British authority near Sierra Leone. Few in Britain had taken an interest in the journal of his travels along the African coast. Unable to attract sufficient subscribers, he could not publish his memoirs. The mercurial adventurer, nonetheless, was determined to find a sponsor. "I must and will go to Africa," he would tell John Coakley Lettsom in 1784. And so he readied himself the next year to travel to the coast as a manager for "an eminent African merchant house in the city" to oversee "a very important enterprise of commerce and agriculture." Yet he had understood as early as 1783 that a "humanitarian" enterprise would win more consistent patronage in the postwar era than a strictly commercial venture, a suspicion borne out by the unexpected backing he received from Treasury officials looking to establish a new home for the black loyalists three years later. He could sense the emerging attention, in 1783, to the exploitation of Africans and the problem of slavery. Smeathman knew that Fothergill and Lettsom had recommended sugar production on the West African coast as a substitute for plantations in the West Indies. He knew that the Society of Friends had petitioned Parliament for an abolition of the slave trade in June 1783. So he lobbied Quakers that fall, and for many months after, for funds to establish a free labor experiment in Sierra Leone. This would give him the opportunity, it must have seemed to the ambitious Smeathman, for wealth, power, fame, and respect.[77]

The colonization of Africa could serve moral as well as commercial ends, Smeathman would tell the Society of Friends. It could transform empire into an agent of civilization, justice, and mercy as well as an engine of wealth. The Senegambia veterans had emphasized the prospects for British profit. Smeathman, by contrast, thought a free labor settlement strategically placed could transform Africa itself, although he never lost

77. Smeathman to Lettsom, Apr. 17, July 16, 1784, Oct. 15, 1785, and Elizabeth Smeathman to Lettsom, Jan. 3, 1787, all in Pettigrew, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of J. C. Lettsom,* III, 261, 270, 275–276, 281–287; Curtin, *The Image of Africa,* 95–97.

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78. "Substance of Two Letters Addressed to
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sight of the ways he might profit personally. In this way, Smeathman's plan recalled the expansionist aims promoted at midcentury by Malachy Postlethwayt, perhaps more than the more limited efforts to promote commercial agriculture in Africa. The peoples of the Grain Coast, Smeathman observed, failed to value private property and thus neglected the land's natural bounty. Rather than exploiting their potential wealth, "their strength is in general exhausted upon silly and trivial exertions." Smeathman did not attribute these shortcomings to a natural deficiency among black peoples. Indeed, he denounced those who regarded Africans as inferior to Europeans. "Laziness," he explained, resulted from debilitating customs. This meant, of course, that "good government and education would change them wonderfully." Therein lay the value to Africa of a British colony; it promised to teach Africans better habits. In 1783 Smeathman wanted to gather for his settlement outcasts from around the British Atlantic world—white craftsmen from England, black loyalists from America, and captives redeemed from slave stations at Goree and Senegal. He hoped that free "people of colour" in the West Indies would migrate to the colony to "enjoy those privileges never allowed them in a government framed solely by white people." At the same time, across West Africa, the defenseless and dispossessed, he predicted, would flock to Sierra Leone in search of protection and liberty. "Very soon" the colony would "civilize the country, and gradually absorb all the petty tyrannies, and change them into subordinate free states, by offering advantages to all ranks too inviting to be resisted." The result in Sierra Leone would be a "free commonwealth," "a sanctuary for the oppressed people of colour," which, by emancipating several thousand slaves every year, would "gradually abolish the slave trade in the human species." The American Revolution, he understood, had established a new standard. Within a generation or two, he predicted, the Sierra Leone settlement would extend "a saving influence . . . wider than even *American Independence*."[78]

78. "Substance of Two Letters Addressed to Dr. Knowles of London, on the Productions and Colonization of Africa" [1783], and *Substance of a Plan of a Settlement, to Be Made near Sierra Leone, on the Grain Coast of Africa, Intended More Particularly for the Service and Happy Establishment of Blacks and People of Colour to Be Shipped as Freemen, under the Direction of the Committee for Relieving the Black Poor, and under the Protection of the British Government; by Henry Smeathman Who Resided in That*

London Quakers, as a group, refused Smeathman's request for funding in 1783 and 1784. They doubted his integrity and intentions. As pacifists, they preferred not to participate in the founding of an armed settlement. And they disliked Smeathman's declared plan to purchase the slaves he would liberate; they thought this an encouragement to the slave trade, not a challenge.[79] These features of the Smeathman scheme troubled Granville Sharp, too. Ten years of unsuccessful campaigning against the British slave trade, though, had left him more open to considering new possibilities, regardless of their origin or the character of their proponents. Sharp, therefore, embraced the fundamentals of the Sierra Leone project at once. In the fall of 1783 he commented publicly on how the proposed settlement, properly conceived, could serve the cause of liberty. New colonies, Granville Sharp observed, presented the unusual opportunity to design public institutions from scratch. Sharp hoped to revive and transplant to West Africa the archaic Anglo-Saxon system of frankpledge, which he thought the only form of government capable of guaranteeing authority, order, and liberty. Like the Georgia trustees a half century earlier, Sharp wanted to forbid the engrossment of land in the new colony. He proposed a ban on private landholdings and recommended a day's labor as the medium of exchange, so debtors could clear obligations by service to public works. In great detail, he prescribed the forms of worship he thought most likely to encourage the propagation of the gospel among settlers in West Africa. Because Sharp had given the subject some thought, and because he had a

Country Near Four Years (London, 1786), both printed in C. B. Wadstrom, *An Essay on Colonization, Particularly Applied to the Western Coast of Africa . . .*, II, pt. 2 (London, 1794), 197–209, citations on 200, 201, 203, 204.

79. Smeathman to Lettsom, July 16, 1784, in Pettigrew, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of J. C. Lettsom*, III, 275–276. As Deirdre Coleman has pointed out, Smeathman seems to have been either deeply ambivalent or thoroughly inconsistent about the ethics of slaving. In letters to patrons in England, he described in lurid detail the heart-wrenching misery of captives aboard ships bound for the Americas. At the same time, he seems to have been a sometime participant in the slave trade, catching slaves for sale in the years he was catching termites to study. His emancipation scheme promised liberty and opportunity for the unfree and dispossessed. Yet he hoped to create a settlement of industrious, malleable workers who, as refugees and exiles, had lost all moorings to family, custom, or culture. Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, 30, 32, 38–39, 49–51.

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80. Granville Sharp, "Memorandum on a
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well-earned reputation as an advocate for former slaves, he would have substantial influence over the regulations established for the "Black Poor" sent to Sierra Leone in 1787. Although he took steps to encourage the cultivation of export crops in the colony, his primary concern was to establish an exemplary polity in the eastern Atlantic. "A Province of Freedom" that could serve as a model for the rest of the British Empire.[80] By 1787 Granville Sharp had transformed a primarily commercial enterprise into a philanthropic venture that aimed to advance an antislavery agenda.

Antislavery colonization had other advocates as well in the mid-1780s. Before and after Henry Smeathman's death, the Quaker ingenue William Thornton promoted a similar project as an antislavery initiative on both sides of the Atlantic. The native of Tortola in the Virgin Islands first took to the idea in 1784, when he kept company in Paris with Smeathman, who just then was looking for patrons for his Sierra Leone fantasy. In London, a year later, Thornton talked up the plan among his Quaker brethren as a sure way to abolish the slave trade. In New York and Rhode Island, where he resided in the late 1780s, he put the scheme before free blacks looking to migrate to an independent settlement of their own. Like Smeathman, Thornton hoped to combine commerce and philanthropy, though, in this case, his philanthropy seems to have been more sincerely meant. Thornton placed less emphasis on the wealth the colony would produce for investors and rather more on the resources it might make available to all merchants operating in the Atlantic. He envisioned his new settlement as an eastern Atlantic entrepôt, a free port open without discrimination to all ships sent from Europe and the Americas seeking to purchase tropical produce. Like Smeathman, Thornton proposed to redeem from bondage enslaved Africans destined for sale into the Atlantic slave trade. But he had the good sense not to compare himself, at least on paper, to Muhammad or William Penn. The principal difference between their plans, though, related to the identity of the proposed settlers. Smeathman hoped to attract a menagerie

80. Granville Sharp, "Memorandum on a Late Proposal for a New Settlement to Be Made on the Coast of Africa, 1 August 1783," in Sharp, *An Account of the Constitutional Polity of Congregational Courts*, 2d ed. (London, 1786), 263–281; Sharp, *Short Sketch of Temporary Regulations (Until Better Shall Be Proposed) for the Intended Settlement on the Grain Coast of Africa, Near Sierra Leona* (London, 1786); Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, 99–102; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, 16–18, 185–186.

of castoffs from around the British Atlantic. Thornton, by contrast, hoped to bring over to Africa those slaves who had been manumitted in the Americas.[81]

These proposals differed in aim and purpose from the colonization plans that dominated antislavery efforts in the United States several decades later, during the early nineteenth century. Abolitionists in the early Republic would hope to encourage manumissions in America by reassuring their fellow citizens that liberated slaves would leave the nation's shores once free. Some colonizationists in the United States did care about the welfare of black Americans. The projects tended to gain political support in the early Republic, however, because they seemed to solve the problem of slavery by ridding the nation of black men and women, perhaps entirely. British colonizationists also hoped that liberated slaves would migrate from the plantation colonies to establish new free settlements in Africa. Smeathman, Sharp, and Thornton, though, had no desire to cleanse the British Caribbean colonies of its black population. The British public and the British state, they knew, worried far more about the preservation of wealth and power than the promotion of racial purity in the sugar islands. Colonization, to these British idealists, represented an effort to reconceive the definition of national interest and the orientation of imperial trade. It represented an attempt to put empire on what they considered a more politically favorable because a more morally defensible footing. The Reverend George Gregory in 1785 paired an emancipation scheme for the British West Indies with a proposal to establish a colony of English and black settlers on the African coast. As slavery was phased out in the Caribbean, he argued, new sources

81. Thornton sent details of his scheme in 1789 to the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Societie des Amis des Noirs, hoping that abolitionists would help defray the initial costs. Even with their lack of support, Thornton gave up on the project grudgingly. In 1792, he shifted his energies toward sketching a design for the new United States Capitol in the District of Columbia, for which he is best known by students of the early American Republic. But as late as 1791, while in Tortola, his birthplace, he was petitioning the governing council of the British Virgin Islands to express enthusiasm for a free settlement in Africa. These activities are now splendidly detailed in C. M. Harris, ed., *Papers of William Thornton,* I, *1781–1802* (Charlottesville, Va., 1995), 19–62, 70–85, 99–117, 123–127, 129–130. For an early version of Thornton's Africa scheme, see Thornton, "General Outlines of a Settlement on the Tooth or Ivory Coast of Africa," ibid., 38–41.

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82. G[eorge] Gregory, *Essays Historical a*

83. Diary of Thomas Wilkinson, n.d., 178
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84. Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Expe*
British Emancipation (Oxford, 2002), 88–
projects are discussed in detail in Coleman.
Slavery, chaps. 2 and 3.

of wealth could flow into the British Isles from the eastern Atlantic. In the long run, he insisted, this made good economic sense. "It will hardly be believed," he wrote of the Atlantic slave trade, "that a commercial nation extended itself so strenuously to destroy and exterminate those people who might have been excellent customers."[82]

The peculiar character of the chief promoters injured the reputation of these initiatives at the time and since. A coarse and grandiose adventurer (Smeathman), a self-absorbed and immature Quaker (Thornton), and an eccentric philanthropist (Sharp) numbered among the most committed proponents of antislavery colonization. Acquaintances often doubted their judgment. Smeathman was "always in a hurry," Lettsom reflected in 1787, "unfortunate in his projects, and disappointed in most of his schemes." The Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Rhode Island considered William Thornton "flighty and unsteady," as did most of the free blacks in Newport and Boston to whom Thornton failed to sell his scheme.[83] The sympathetic, it seems, respected Sharp's ardor more than his good sense. This was not, on the whole, an auspicious collection of leaders for what was, in any case, a difficult undertaking. The colonization schemes, moreover, left an undistinguished legacy. They would prove ineffective as an antislavery strategy, as both British and American experience in the nineteenth century would show.[84] The future of the British antislavery movement, it may seem apparent in retrospect, lay with an attack on the slave trade, not with the modest and unsuccessful attempts to colonize Africa in the decades that followed.

But understanding what did not happen (once again) is as important as detailing what did. The variety of antislavery measures floated in the 1770s and 1780s—from comprehensive emancipation to the colonization of Africa—underscores the uncertainty with which the first antislavery activists proceeded. No one knew which antislavery strategy would have the

82. G[eorge] Gregory, *Essays Historical and Moral* (London, 1785), 326–328.

83. Diary of Thomas Wilkinson, n.d., 1785, Lettsom to William Thornton, Nov. 28, 1786, and Samuel Hopkins to Moses Brown, Mar. 7, 1787, all in Harris, ed., *Papers of William Thornton*, 29n, 36, 57n, 58n.

84. Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slave Labor in British Emancipation* (Oxford, 2002), 88–100. Subsequent antislavery colonization projects are discussed in detail in Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, chaps. 2 and 3.

best chance of success. Every imaginable means of bringing down the slave system looked unpromising. Establishing a "Province of Freedom" on the West African coast may look wholly inadequate in retrospect. But when Smeathman and Sharp published their colonization schemes in the mid-1780s, few expected that slave trade legislation could become the subject of popular agitation in a matter of years or that the British government could be persuaded to enact abolitionist agitation two decades later. Indeed, for all their limits, this was one clear advantage of the colonization schemes. They could be launched by private subscription and with limited state assistance. They did not require, necessarily, the coercive force of legislation or a direct confrontation with vested interests.

Colonization, moreover, made sense in the context of what its proponents thought they knew at the time. They simply assumed that the "luxuriant" African soil would support agricultural "improvement." They felt certain that local elites in Sierra Leone would accept the presence of colonial settlers, if those settlers traded peaceably and refrained from participation in the slave trade. The antislavery potential of these schemes followed a logic comprehensible to utopian reformers in the late eighteenth century. Like Maurice Morgann before them, the planners thought change would be most easily achieved by modeling alternatives, by allowing the force of example to argue against established practices. They intended these schemes as pilot initiatives, as opportunities to instruct Africans and Europeans alike about their own best interests. West Africans would learn of the European demand for staple crops. European merchants would discover the riches to be drawn from the African soil. And all of Europe and America would be persuaded by the productivity and efficiency of free labor in a tropical climate. The colonizationists were naive in thinking that lucrative practices like the Atlantic slave trade and colonial slavery would be surrendered voluntarily. They were far too optimistic about how quickly change could be accomplished this way. The planners, moreover, overlooked or ignored the obvious obstacles. They disregarded the mortality rates suffered by migrants to the coast. They recognized only gradually the problem of controlling the actions of the men and women they sent to Sierra Leone. They showed little appreciation of the touchy diplomatic questions that would arise over relations with local elites. And they severely underestimated the financial costs that such an experiment would require. The vague, unspecific manner in which they invoked the idea of "Africa" be-

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trayed the ways that the imagination had outraced actual information.[85] Yet these shortcomings, and their consequences, proved far more evident in retrospect than at the time. Granville Sharp nearly exhausted his personal wealth to sustain the floundering venture in 1788 because he thought the Sierra Leone project "the most effectual means of destroying the *slave trade*." The more level-headed Evangelicals gathered around Member of Parliament William Wilberforce would endorse the antislavery potential of the Sierra Leone experiment in 1791 by securing from Parliament a government-chartered company to place the project on a more secure financial footing.[86]

The nascent campaign against the British slave trade, in fact, shared much with the proposals to plant a British empire in Africa. They both assumed Africa possessed substantial natural wealth that could find a profitable market in Europe. They both aimed at the same ultimate goal: the overthrow of slavery in British America. And the chain of effects they predicted derived from similar judgments about the power of economic incentive. Outlawing the Atlantic slave trade, abolitionists argued, necessarily would clear the way for legitimate commerce with Africa and encourage manumission in the British West Indies, predictions that proved nearly as naive as the faith colonizationists placed in the far-reaching effects that would follow from a tiny settlement in Sierra Leone. The programs differed less in assumptions, goals, or rationale than in how and where their proponents elected to intervene. If colonizationists looked with hope to experiments at the margins of the empire, the abolitionists chose to challenge established interests at the center. If colonizationists planned to model alternatives to slavery, abolitionists hoped to cripple human bondage in the colonies by preventing planters from purchasing new slaves.

Slave trade abolition, as a political agenda, had certain advantages over the emancipation schemes considered in the previous chapter. No one contested the right of Parliament to regulate British overseas trade. Abolition did not require, as emancipation would, a protracted struggle with the colonial legislatures. Still, as an intervention in colonial policy, abolition presented problems of its own. It entailed, it seemed to contemporaries, far

85. The limits to British understanding of Africa in this period are summarized clearly in Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, 115–119.

86. Sharp to Lettsom, Oct. 13, 1788, in Harris, ed., *Papers of William Thornton*, 90.

more than the elimination of the Middle Passage. It also threatened a diminished labor force in the British West Indies, a decline in colonial trade, the sacrifice of African markets, an accession of wealth and power for European rivals, and a loss of prestige for Britain in the eastern Atlantic. For these reasons, it would not be enough to argue that the slave trade *should* be abolished. Campaigners would also need to show that the slave trade *could* be abolished, that tropical crops *could* be produced without the transportation of Africans to the Americas, that British products might be sold in Africa without purchasing slaves in return. The moral case *against* the slave trade was familiar, by the mid-1780s, and easy to rehearse. But if they wanted to be heard, if they wanted to influence commercial policy, those intending to stand against the slave trade would have to stand *for* something else. The early abolitionists, then, needed what men like Henry Smeathman had in abundance: the capacity to imagine the future as radically different from the past, a vision for enterprise in Africa focused on agricultural exports rather than on the transportation of African people. They had to present a moral cause in the language of commercial and national interest.

The early efforts to diversify the Africa trade, the black loyalist campaign for independence, the government and state support for the Sierra Leone scheme—in different ways, each helped make the reordering of British enterprise in Africa a plausible project. They provided the context that allowed slave trade abolition to become not merely a humane wish but a viable political program. The abolitionist movement "constituted one major impulse leading to British imperialism in Africa," as has long been clear.[87] But it is just as true that aspirations for an empire in Africa contributed "one major impulse," in its own way, to the campaign against the slave trade.

The first abolitionists leaned heavily on those authorities like Malachy Postlethwayt who had envisioned radically different ways of organizing the Africa trade. Anthony Benezet drew his portrait of Africa from a variety of sources, most of which he generously cited. In tone and substance, though, key passages seemed to owe an unacknowledged debt to the work of

87. Ralph A. Austen and Woodruff D. Smith, "Images of Africa and British Slave-Trade Abolition: The Transition to an Imperialist Ideology, 1787–1807," *African Historical Studies,* II (1969), 83.

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88. Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Acco*
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Postlethwayt, the erstwhile propagandist for the Royal Africa Company. Benezet dwelled at length on the fertility of the African soil in his three major publications on the slave trade, first printed in 1762, 1767, and 1771, respectively. The continent produced "vast quantities of rice and other grain," he wrote in *Some Historical Account of Guinea,* and "plenty of fruits and roots; palm wine and oyl, and fish in great abundance with much tame and wild cattle." Benezet intended these statements to show that European demand for slave labor destroyed otherwise peaceful and productive societies. Benezet was far more consistently the moralist. But he followed Postlethwayt closely when describing how the Atlantic slave trade harmed African societies and the welcome consequences that would follow from its abolition. Benezet regretted that by breeding "Confusion and Bloodshed, and all the Extremities of temporary Misery," British traders had instilled in Africans "a general Detestation and Scorn of the Christian Name." If Europeans would honor their faith, the "cruel wars amongst the blacks" would end and, he added, again following Postlethwayt, "a fair and honourable commerce, in time, take place throughout that vast country." Benezet, in truth, had only the most limited interest in the growth of Atlantic commerce or imperial power. The Quaker schoolteacher tended to be suspicious of the profit motive. Yet he believed that even the statesmen unmoved by appeals to humanity could not ignore the fact that Africa held "vast treasures of materials necessary for the trade and manufactures of Great-Britain" and could supply "most of the commodities" typically imported from the colonies.[88]

88. Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce, and the General Disposition of Its Inhabitants; with an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave Trade, Its Nature, and Lamentable Effects; Also a Republication of the Sentiments of Several Authors of Note, on This Interesting Subject; Particularly an Extract of a Treatise Written by Granville Sharp* (London, 1772), 22–23, 68, 144; Benezet, *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (Philadelphia, 1767), 20. Several commentators have noted the way Benezet could be cagey about his sources. David Brion Davis called attention to Benezet's choice to avoid reference to insurrections and sympathy for slave insurrections in his antislavery tracts. Maurice Jackson has suggested convincingly that Benezet likely drew much of his information about Africa from the enslaved men and women he instructed at his school in Philadelphia. Davis, "New Sidelights on Early Antislavery Radicalism," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 590–

Boston abolitionist James Swan also emphasized the benefits the empire stood to win from a reorganization of the Africa trade. In a conscious echo of Anthony Benezet, he described in 1772 how the Atlantic slave trade fomented war in Africa, discouraged agriculture, and depopulated the continent. And he agreed with Benezet that Britain, therefore, missed an opportunity to propagate the Christian religion in Africa. Swan, however, was less hesitant than Benezet to embrace the idea of a commercial empire in Africa. Nor did Swan have qualms about openly praising Postlethwayt and his writings. For too long, Swan agreed, the British slave trade had blinded British merchants to their true interests, so that they "never once think of such commodities as *Europe* might consume." Writing during the Seven Years' War, Postlethwayt had been unwilling to espouse slave trade abolition outright. Despite his growing reservations, he understood its importance to imperial trade. In 1772, in the midst of the Revolutionary movement in colonial America, Swan felt able to dispense with such caution. He called on European merchants to give up the slave trade entirely. In its place, he offered a variation on Postlethwayt's initial proposal: an establishment of incorporated trading companies that would export European and American manufactures to the coast in exchange for crops and minerals drawn from the African soil.[89]

These economic arguments on behalf of abolition went unnoticed in Britain before the Revolutionary War. British commentators before 1775 preferred to castigate American colonists for owning slaves. They cared rather less about the Atlantic slave trade in African labor. That inclination dissipated as American abolitionists began to point out the hypocrisy of British critics of colonial slavery, as the experience of defeat in Britain prompted more careful scrutiny of imperial institutions and practices. Moreover, the postwar schemes to colonize Africa, as we have seen, facilitated the evolution of abolitionist argument. If Henry Smeathman proved unable to persuade the Society of Friends to support the colonization of Sierra Leone in 1783, he showed them how to link antislavery with schemes to improve British enterprise in Africa. The Quaker leadership broached

594; Maurice Jackson, "'Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Her Hands unto God': Anthony Benezet and the Atlantic Antislavery Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2001), 196–197.

89. Swan, *A Disuasion to Great-Britain and the Colonies*, 29.

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91. James Ramsay, *An Inquiry into the Effec
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of the Essay on the Treatment and Conversion
Colonies* (London, 1784), 21, 40.

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the issue gingerly in their opening salvo against the slave trade in 1783, alluding vaguely to the "rich" "vegetable and mineral productions" of Africa and the "advantages" to be expected from a "well-regulated commerce."[90]

James Ramsay of Teston, however, was the first in Britain to describe in detail how abolition could promote British commercial growth. His second antislavery publication—*An Inquiry into the Effects of Putting a Stop to the African Slave Trade, and of Granting Liberty to the Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784)—dealt with the subject at length. In several respects, the pamphlet simply repackaged ideas that others had floated before. Ramsay argued that Britain should lead the way in civilizing Africa thereby, promoting a taste for and dependence on European goods. The slave trade, he maintained, harmed the national interest. Ramsay deplored a system that allowed British traders operating on the West African coast to provide thousands of slaves each year to French and Dutch merchants. On this matter, Ramsay could be quite arch. "If we deliberately contribute to our rivals' naval importance, shall we deserve pity when we are crushed under it?" Here was yet another instance in which private interests had been permitted to undermine the public good. Ramsay was certain that a commodity trade with Africa held out far better prospects for the development of national wealth. Staple crop production in the eastern Atlantic, moreover, would prevent further dependence on the strategically vulnerable Caribbean colonies. As a start in this direction, he recommended the introduction of sugar, tobacco, and indigo in the former Portuguese island colony of São Tomé, where the inhabitants, he noted, already were acculturated to Christianity and European mores. From there, "negroe teachers and artisans" might be sent to the African mainland to "instruct and improve the heathen."[91]

In 1784 James Ramsay still aimed first at the amelioration and reform of colonial slavery. He regarded the abolition of the slave trade as a means

90. Society of Friends, London Meeting for Sufferings, *The Case of Our Fellow-Creatures, the Oppressed Africans, Respectfully Recommended to the Serious Consideration of the Legislature of Great-Britain, by the People Called Quakers* (London, 1783), 5.

91. James Ramsay, *An Inquiry into the Effects of Putting a Stop to the African Slave Trade, and of Granting Liberty to the Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies; by the Author of the Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), 21, 40.

toward that end. It seemed to him, and others, that abolition of the slave trade would force planters to take better care of the men, women, and children in their charge. In this way, abolition might accomplish the kind of gradual emancipation that he now accepted lay outside the power of Parliament to effect. But if Ramsay had decided to live with the limits on imperial authority, he remained angered by the audacity of the North American rebels. And in this, his second antislavery treatise, he made no effort to disguise his irritation. Ramsay acknowledged that slave trade abolition might drive the West Indian colonies into a union with the new United States. His own opinion was that a second American Revolution in the Caribbean was unlikely since the comparatively expensive sugar produced in the British West Indies could only find a market in Britain, where it did not have to compete with cheaper French sugar and where consumers were accustomed to its artificially inflated price. But if the West Indian colonies did pursue independence, Ramsay added truculently, they should be permitted to go. Instead, Britain should turn to Africa where it might enjoy an extensive and free trade without the inflation-producing monopolies favored by the West Indian sugar producers or the unpaid debts of Caribbean landholders. Indeed, Ramsay seemed to think this, in the long run, the best way of responding to American independence. If the sun was setting on the western empire, he thought there dawned in the east hopes for new enterprise unburdened by ungrateful British colonists.[92]

The reevaluation of commercial policy after the American war helped those hostile to slavery locate new avenues for attack. Josiah Tucker took the occasion of the debate in 1785 on Irish trade duties to call for a restructuring of the sugar trade. And he cast his antislavery proposals as part of a broader protest against the restraints imposed on British commerce by mercantilist regulations. Josiah Tucker wanted the slave trade abolished and thought the hidden hand of free markets could do the work. "All the reasonings, moral arguments, or eloquence in the world" would achieve little, he wrote in an echo of John Fothergill, "till some other method can be devised for supplying Europe with sugars, and other produce of the southern climates at a *cheaper rate* than what we receive through the medium of slavery." Tucker had long thought free labor cheaper than slave labor. Foreign colonies produced sugar at less expense, he wrote in 1785, because

92. Ibid.

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the institution was less brutal and more carefully regulated by metropolitan authorities. Free workers in India, he noted, produced the cheapest sugar of all. This proved that "the inhabitants of Great Britain are tied down at present to such exorbitant prices as the monopolizing planter or his agent shall be pleased to extort from them" and verified "that of all the monopolies, slavery is the most prejudicial to the true interests of a great trading nation." Liberalization of Irish trade, then, presented an opportunity to expose the irrationalities of the mercantilist system. Free markets would increase the demand for cheaper sugars grown by free labor. Unable to fix prices, British Caribbean planters would no longer be able to compete. Then imports could be drawn from Africa instead, where, Tucker thought, they would be found cheapest of all, since "the sugar-cane grows spontaneously," and "rice, cotton, indico, and other articles of great value, may be raised with very little trouble." In less than half a century, as a consequence, "not only Great Britain and Ireland, but also all of Europe may be supplied (if they please) with sugars and all the products of the warmer climates, without slavery, without colonies, without governments and placemen, without fees and perquisites, without forts and guarda-costas, without contracts, and without jobbs."[93]

In the nineteenth century, the antislavery movement came to serve the broader attack on mercantilism and the promotion of what historians know as free trade imperialism, just as Josiah Tucker had hoped. In the late eighteenth century, though, most antislavery campaigners displayed only the most limited interest in the emerging science of political economy. Instead, insofar as possible, the abolitionists embraced established orthodoxies. They did not want to appear as if they would innovate too much. Indeed, in the first years of the campaign, the Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade declared a commitment to the essential principles of mercantilism. Its publicists professed a fidelity to maxims earlier antislavery enthusiasts had rejected, ignored, or slighted: sugar cultivation was vital to British interests; naval strength should remain a priority; competitive advantage should be sought over European rivals; and British goods ought to be carried in British ships. To these maxims, the abolitionists added two correctives: slavery neither was the only nor the best way to

93. Josiah Tucker, *Reflections on the Present Matters in Dispute between Great Britain and Ireland* . . . (London, 1785), 9, 13, 14, 16, 17.

cultivate sugar, and the slave trade interfered with the nation's true commercial interests in Africa.

These arguments received their most complete elaboration in the work of Thomas Clarkson, the driving spirit behind the Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade at its founding in 1787 and, in the early years, its chief propagandist. His *Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788) represented the first British antislavery tract to pass over the moral problem of slavery entirely and confine itself exclusively to the political and economic case for abolition. It synthesized and publicized the wide range of arguments on behalf of legitimate commerce that had circulated in Britain since Postlethwayt published in the 1750s, if not before. Indeed, Clarkson explicitly cited Postlethwayt to show that even erstwhile defenders of the slave trade preferred an export trade in tropical produce once they understood the vast gains that abolition would yield. Clarkson departed from his predecessors, however, by putting empirical meat on the theoretical bones of abolitionist argument. He armed himself with specifics. He tabulated the potential value to British manufacturers of African woods, spices, dyes, and medicines; he calculated the advantage of purchasing rice, indigo, and tobacco from Africa rather than America; he recounted, one individual at a time, the loss of twenty-two of the twenty-five British sailors employed on a recent slaving voyage; he cited twenty-six plantations where planters cultivated sugar without purchasing new slaves; and he relayed anecdote after anecdote evidencing that good treatment and plentiful provisions resulted in productive and less rebellious workers. All of the data served to buttress the key claim: abolishing the slave trade would further commerce, promote manufactures, and bolster national strength.[94]

By the time Clarkson published in the summer of 1788, just five years after Smeathman first circulated his colonization scheme, the potential benefits of legitimate commerce had become a familiar talking point in abolitionist circles. Baptist minister Robert Robinson told his Cambridge congregation that "the numerous emoluments of African commerce are capable of amazing augmentation." In Birmingham, Joseph Priestley spoke of purchasing sugar from Africa with British manufactures and "without

94. T[homas] Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (London, 1788), Postlethwayt cited on 25–26.

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95. Robert Robinson, *Slavery Inconsistent u*
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the expense of settling and defending plantations of our own." A black writer in Britain cataloged for Charles Jenkinson, the first minister of trade, the many benefits that slave trade abolition might bring. "A commercial Intercourse with Africa," Olaudah Equiano explained, "opens an inexhaustible Source of Wealth to the manufacturing interest of Great Britain; and to all which the Slave Trade is a physical Obstruction." "The Population, Bowels, and Surface of Africa abound in valuable and useful Returns; the hidden treasures of Countries will be brought to light and Circulation." "Industry, Enterprise, and Mining will have their full Scope, proportionably as they civilize. In a Word, it lays open an endless Field of Commerce to the British Manufacturer and Merchant Adventurer."[95]

In retrospect, Equiano's enthusiasm for British expansion into Africa may seem deeply ironic, if not tragic. Later generations in West Africa and elsewhere would have their doubts about extractive economies and commercial dependence, what would come to be known in the nineteenth century as informal empire. But few, in the 1780s, including Equiano, could anticipate the injustices that would ensue from the ideas all abolitionists embraced. Even if foreseen, very few in the eighteenth century had a language with which to critique practices that remained, at this juncture, fantasies more than institutions. The abolitionists did not intend to exchange one form of exploitation for another. They took up the ideas of profiteers like Henry Smeathman to make slave trade abolition viable, so they could lobby skeptical politicians and an uncertain public. In the process, though, they succeeded where men like Postlethwayt had consistently failed, in popularizing the purported benefits of enhancing British power on the West African coast. Postlethwayt had been sure that opening new channels of trade with Africa would aid merchants and the state. He could not have guessed that the opponents of the slave trade would make this case more effectively than those like him, concerned, above all, with the

95. Robert Robinson, *Slavery Inconsistent with the Spirit of Christianity; a Sermon Preached at Cambridge, on Sunday, Feb. 10, 1788* (Cambridge, 1788), 37–38; Joseph Priestley, *A Sermon on the Subject of the Slave Trade; Delivered to a Society of Protestant Dissenters, at the New Meeting, in Birmingham* (Birmingham, Eng., 1788), 28; Gustavus Vassa, late commissary for the African settlement, to Right Honourable Lord Hawkesbury, Mar. 13, 1788, in Carretta, ed., *Olaudah Equiano*, 333–334.

assertion of imperial authority and the expansion of British commerce. In the eighteenth century, abolitionists would need the vision of men like Postlethwayt to make the case for slave trade abolition. In the nineteenth century, British merchants would need the moral capital accrued during the abolition campaign to make the colonization of Africa conform to new definitions of imperial purpose.[96]

96. Curtin, *The Image of Africa,* pts. II and III; Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger, 1841–1842* (New Haven, Conn., 1991); T. C. McCaskie, "Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century," in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire,* III, *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 664–689.

PART IV

The Conflict Resolved