

“Natural Enemies” or “An Injured and Oppressed Part of the Human
Species”?: Competing Concepts of Security in the Anti-Slavery Writing of
Ireland and The British West Indies

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Brenna Olrich

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Introduction

Thomas Paine called the end of the eighteenth century an “...age of revolutions, in which everything may be looked for.”¹ Political, economic, and intellectual upheaval in Europe and the Atlantic world spurred a range of responses spanning from reactionary anxiety to radical fervor. The question of slavery encapsulated these changes and challenged the British Empire to re-examine and redefine its identity in a modernizing world. Though the abolition of the slave trade was not seriously considered in Parliament until the 1780s and was not accomplished until the Slave Trade Act of 1807, the idea was present in literature – pamphlets, poems, and newspapers – from the 1740s onwards. Most of these pieces were written and published in Great Britain and the American colonies (later the United States); London was the administrative center of a colonial system dependent on slave-produced export commodities like rum and sugar, and the United States, with its medley of populations and ideas, was forced into a reckoning by its own revolution and the limits of its “liberal” character. However, while the contributions of the metropole were significant, they did not comprise the whole of the anti-slavery movement. The conversation also manifested in the British colonial periphery, where advocates tailored the subject to the interests and concerns of their unique audiences. Though the contributions of Ireland and the West Indies to the anti-slavery movement have gained attention in recent literature, the relationship between their communities’ writing and the broader narrative of anti-slavery has not been adequately addressed. In the Caribbean, where black slavery was the lifeblood of the economy and a major pillar of the social structure, elimination of the industry threatened to disrupt far more than the profit margins of slavers. Furthermore, slave-led

¹ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, (reprinted in London, 1910), 75, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015030803848>.

rebellion had rocked the region throughout the 18th century, fueling a sense of paranoia and isolation among the white population. These two forces – the trade’s importance to the Atlantic economy and the security concerns of the white population – culminated in a profoundly conservative strain of anti-slavery writing. The Irish anti-slavery community defined the opposite end of the conversation. The combination of two components – Ireland’s large consumer base for West Indian sugar and their own revolutionary tradition – resulted in an anti-slavery message that leaned towards the radical fringe. In the 1790s, anti-slavery advocates organized a large-scale boycott of West Indian sugar and rum that, alongside English participants, had observable impacts on the Atlantic economy. Ireland’s own thorny past with England was also relevant to the anti-slavery movement, as a new liberation force in the 1790s took on the cause of anti-slavery in order to justify their own rebellion. The potential for economic action and the engagement of active insurgent communities shaped a more radical anti-slavery message in Ireland.

Though individuals in the West Indies and Ireland fought for the same outcome, they did so in ways conditioned by their history and surroundings. This thesis will explore several iterations of a topic relevant to both spaces: conflicting concepts of security. The two sections, which focus on economic and physical security, will show how West Indian and Irish writers defined the conservative and radical ends of the British Atlantic anti-slavery movement. The issue of physical security had to do with insurrection. In the West Indies, the demographic imbalance, slave rebellion, and racist notions of barbaric character meant that concern for white security was central to the message, while in Ireland, distance from slave rebellion and their own grievances against the British led advocates to discount this concern. Economic security brought in debates over economic decline, the viability of abstention campaigns, and sustainable profit

margins for planters; logically, in the West Indies, planter profits were important, while in Ireland, the issue was more complex. These notions of security and the debates surrounding them were performed on white-defined terms, generally considering the personal and economic interest of the author's community. Though there were extraordinary literary contributions to the anti-slavery cause by slaves and freedmen like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana during this period, due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will only be analyzing content produced by white authors. The aim of this study is to demonstrate through the lens of security how two different communities understood and reflected the same problem – slavery – in starkly different ways. To achieve this, it will be necessary to reconstruct the conditions in which these advocates wrote in order to understand the broader forces to which they were reacting.

In the beginning of the 18th century, the slave population of the British West Indies exploded, doubling between 1700 and 1730 to comprise 85% of the region's total population.² The unbalanced demographic-power dynamic instilled a deep insecurity within the white population of the islands – even among those who advocated against the slave trade. One example was the Reverend James Ramsay, one of the best-known anti-slavery advocates in the British West Indies, who lent legitimacy to the idea that masters and slaves were "...natural enemies."³ Fears of a slave uprising were not unfounded – the West Indies had been a volatile region and experienced significant unrest in the 18th century. Notable interracial clashes began in Jamaica in 1738, with an uprising of runaway slaves called the "Maroons" and continued

² David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

³ James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent.* (London, 1784), 163.

throughout the Caribbean in the form of Tacky's War (1760) and the Haitian Revolution (1791).⁴ Because of their proximity to interracial rebellion, when West Indian authors presented arguments against slavery, the security of whites was often predominant.

In Ireland, "revolution" had a different connotation, also defined by place. By the 1790s, the cause of the West Indian slave had been co-opted by a republican group called the United Irishmen, who analogized their own oppression at British hands with the slaves' plight. Irish writers called upon their history to inform their picture of 'righteous rebellion' – centuries of uprisings against occupying forces and massive landholders, both British and Anglo-Irish, had formed a revolutionary tradition on the island.⁵ Though certain societal factions shared the security concerns of their West Indian compatriots when presented with political upheaval, those who engaged in anti-slavery sentiment often celebrated the exercise of liberties, even when it threatened other colonial Britons' security.⁶ Because the actions of slaves in these rebellions were projected over by the Irish' own experience, and the consequences of slave insurrection were far away, advocates in Ireland were able to regard black agency and insurrection in a neutral or favorable light. This was starkly different from the West Indian understanding of revolution, which was based on firsthand experience of interracial insurrection throughout the Caribbean. Though the Irish engaged meaningfully with Caribbean affairs, often providing

⁴ Monica Schuler, "Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas," *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 4 (1970): 374–85.

⁵ In discussing "British occupiers", I am referring to the Irish rebels' conception of their presence, not the reality of their settler identity, or the fact that many British individuals and families had resided on the island for generations – though there were certainly examples of administrative overreach and repression of native and Catholic Irish.

⁶ Though the majority of the anti-slavery community erred on the progressive side, not everyone did. One of the more conservative voices was that of Edmund Burke, arguably the best-known Irish anti-slavery advocate of his time. Though Burke was influenced by his time at the Quaker school in Ballitore, he remained a gradualist, an opponent of drastic action, and generally chose to focus his efforts on reform in British East India (Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 1612-1865*, 182-184).

comment on major events there, the Irish perspective was defined by its own history and present geopolitical context, just as the West Indian was shaped by slave rebellions.⁷ For both sets of writers, their ideas were formed by place and their community's history.

Economic security was as much of a concern in the slavery debate as physical security. The lifeblood of the 18th century economy was sugar, though the West Indian colonies also exported commodities such as tobacco and rum. Edward Long, a contemporary historian and pro-slavery advocate, described this democratization of consumption in his landmark book *The History of Jamaica* (1774); "...[t]he consumption of sugar has been extended among many thousand, perhaps millions, who before were equally unable either to procure or to pay for it."⁸ According to historian Richard Sheridan, consumption in England and Wales "...increased about twenty-fold in the period from 1663 to 1775."⁹ With the population of those areas increasing only by a factor of 1.67, one can mark a significant increase in per capita purchases.¹⁰ The rise in output was made possible by the demographic shift discussed above – the growth of the slave population in the early 18th century was positively correlated with higher sugar production. Despite this, by the 1770s, there was significant concern surrounding decline, prompted by soil erosion, rising costs of provision, and heightened competition from Atlantic competitors like the French.¹¹ Landholding in the Caribbean, once a relatively sure route to personal profit – the

⁷ Carol Baraniuk, *James Orr, Poet and Irish Radical* (Routledge, 2015), 183–85.

⁸ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island with Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government: In Three Volumes, Illustrated with Copper Plates*. (London: Printed for TLowndes, 1774), 280, 525,
http://ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOME?af=RN&ae=U102262071&srcht=a&ste=14&locID=mmlin_m_tufts.

⁹ Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; an Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 21.

¹⁰ Sheridan, 21.

¹¹ Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, (New York: The Century Co., 1928), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008966841>.

expression “as wealthy as a West Indian” was common for a while – was suddenly subject to uncertainty.¹² There were many proposed solutions to this decline, from free trade measures to amelioration, but in real-time, stagnation threatened West Indian interest. Anti-slavery advocates in the British West Indies were inclined to respond to these concerns; several incorporated comparative economic analyses of slave and free labor in their tracts in efforts to assuage planters’ fears.

Ireland, another important participant in the British Atlantic economy, responded to the same growth and decline of the West Indian market. Some Irishmen, such as the dynastic Blake family of Montserrat via Galway, owned land in the Caribbean themselves and therefore had a direct interest in the producer-side outcome. Nevertheless, most Irish anti-slavery writers approached the topic of economic security and market viability from the place of the emergent middle-class, educated consumer – an identity unique to the place and era. In the late 1700s, the Irish were massive consumers of sugar – between 1773/4, 76.2% of imported British brown sugar was re-exported to Ireland.¹³ Because they maintained a demand-side perspective, Irish anti-slavery writers were more apt to speak out against the slave trade without indulging West Indian interests. Consistent with this identity, the advocacy of a sugar boycott became a key theme in Irish anti-slavery literature in the late 1700s. Because of their distinct relationship with the sugar market, authors in Ireland and throughout the British Isles wrote in an intellectual environment friendlier to radical economic action on the demand side.

¹² Ragatz, vii.

¹³ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (UNC Press Books, 2012), 32. The re-export level had to be this high because though Irish sugar consumption was significant and growing, the British did not allow the Irish to import sugar directly from the West Indian colonies.

Authors in the British West Indies and in Ireland had varying degrees of separation from the slave trade. Some were poets who took offense at what they perceived to be an attack on another man's "natural right" to liberty.¹⁴ Others were administrators or former soldiers who had lived and seen the excesses of the system. Some writers even had slaves of their own. Many were religious leaders – Methodist, Anglican, and Nonconformist – who understood slavery to be an affront to God's creation and believed the liberation of slaves, paired with their proselytization, would help advance the cause of "civilization".¹⁵ Many of the writers in the British Isles moved in the same literary and social circles, such as the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade or Cambridge University, where many abolitionist poets were converted to the cause. Others were connected through religion – Quakers in all geographies had opposed the trade from the outset and were leading moral voices when the movement started to progress. In the West Indies, social cohesion was defined predominantly by race; therefore, the fact that the anti-slavery advocates came from different backgrounds mattered less to the content of their writing. Some wrote after returning to Britain from several years abroad, while others chose to publish while in Kingston. Furthermore, though there existed anti-slavery groups in the Caribbean like the Abolition Society of Antigua, most content was written and distributed outside of their influence.¹⁶

¹⁴These writers include: Charles Crawford, *The Progress of Liberty: A Pindaric Ode* (Dublin, 1796); William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (London, 1789), <http://recoveredhistories.org/pamphlet1.php?page=1&orderby=date&catid=24>; James Mullalla, *A Compilation on the Slave Trade, Respectfully Addressed to the People of Ireland*. (Dublin, 1792).

¹⁵ These writers include: James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent.*; Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, *A Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of Slave Trade from the Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, Dean of Middleham*. (London, 1787); Mary Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her Own Sex* (Dublin, 1792).

¹⁶ Claudius K. Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation: Slavery and Abolitionism in the British West Indies, Antislavery, Abolition, and the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 46.

Anti-slavery advocacy in the Atlantic world manifested in many different forms. This thesis focuses on printed works – pamphlets, poems, newspapers, and published collections of letters. The time frame under study is 1740-1807, with a focus on the final two decades of the 18th century, the time in which anti-slavery ideas came to the fore of the literary and intellectual world. To date, no extensive study has been done that places this writing, imagined and produced on opposite sides of the Atlantic, into conversation. In order to bring the two spaces together, the secondary work I have chosen to review focuses on three variables that explicate the links between them: transatlantic trade, intellectual trends, and insurrection.

While the anti-slavery movement in Great Britain and the United States has been covered extensively, relatively little has been written on the contributions of other colonies in the British Atlantic. One of the first texts to be written on Ireland's involvement in anti-slavery efforts was Douglas Riach's 1975 doctoral thesis, *Ireland and the campaign against American slavery, 1830-1860*.¹⁷ This monograph relies heavily on primary source material: meeting minutes, trade ledgers, newspapers, correspondence, and government documents, to inform its reporting. The 607-page piece focuses on the links between Irish republicanism in the early decades of the 19th century and the rising abolition movement in the United States. He also considers ties between abolition and religious movements of all stripes within Ireland, a precedent that informs much of later scholarship on the issue. For this thesis, Riach's first chapter on initial Irish engagement with West Indian slavery has been particularly useful. Though the dissertation went unnoticed for several decades, a new wave of scholarship focused more on the human aspects of the slave trade has utilized Riach as a foundational scholar.

¹⁷ D. C. Riach, "Ireland and the Campaign against American Slavery, 1830-1860," 1975, <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/6832>.

The 1970s and 1980s saw an influx of studies on economic systems and population movements that have laid the foundation for newer scholars to take a more culturally-focused approach. R.B. McDowell began this phase of scholarship in 1979 with his study *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801*.¹⁸ Though wide-ranging in subject matter, this book is focused on elite action, providing explanations of the governmental and economic phenomena comprising the environment in which the anti-slavery movement evolved. McDowell's analysis of the "free trade" movement and Ireland's shifting relationship with England is particularly helpful in establishing Ireland's role in the Atlantic economic system. Thomas Truxes, a historian at NYU, continues McDowell's economic focus in his book *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783* by establishing the connection between Ireland and the Atlantic colonies.¹⁹ Relying on ledgers, newspaper advertisements, government records, and personal correspondence, Truxes reconstructs the ties between major port towns in Ireland, Britain, and the West Indies by examining their labor and import/export networks. Audrey Lockhart is another scholar of this era who focused on emigration within the Atlantic world.²⁰ His work is particularly useful because it surveys the mobile Irish population not as a whole, but according to its different social divisions, particularly its religious groups – Catholics, Protestants, and Ulster Presbyterians, or "Dissenters". The history of these groups within Ireland, as well as their connections to the sugar islands, are helpful in establishing basic timelines of social development and emigration. The last major scholar in this era was Seymour Drescher, who made the connection between this shifting population-economic system and the downfall of the British

¹⁸ R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801* (Clarendon Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Thomas M. Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁰ Audrey Lockhart, *Some Aspects of Emigration from Ireland to the North American Colonies between 1660 and 1775*, Irish-Americans (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

Atlantic slave trade.²¹ Though Drescher has written several articles on the same topic, he maintains the argument that abolition is attributable more to political economy and the strategic choices of capitalists than to any political “heroes” or “saints”. His conclusions have been hotly contested, as they diverge from the traditional view of the role of capitalism in the decline of the slave trade.²² In this thesis, though I do not fully address this controversy, I subscribe to the decline thesis, therefore diverging from Drescher’s thesis.

Two major works produced by Richard Dunn and Richard Sheridan also came out of the 1970s. Dunn’s *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* provides insight into British West Indian society through the lens of class.²³ Dunn utilizes a host of primary sources to describe the development of class relations, which did not translate smoothly from England. A limitation to Dunn’s contributions for this thesis is that his analysis ends in 1713; still, it will be of great help in constructing a historical foundation for West Indian anti-slavery writing. Sheridan’s work, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, covers the same topic as Dunn but is conducted through a specifically economic lens.²⁴ His description of sugar refining techniques is particularly useful in linking primary sources from the era to historical accounts of the labor conditions and mortality rates of slaves. These two books, anticipating the economic works produced later in the decade,

²¹ Seymour Drescher, “Capitalism and the Decline of Slavery: The British Case in Comparative Perspective,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 292, no. 1 (June 1, 1977): 132–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1977.tb47738.x>; Seymour Drescher, “Econocide, Capitalism and Slavery: A Commentary,” *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe*, no. 36 (1984): 49–65; Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom: Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

²² Foundational works on the other side of the issue include Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) and L.J. Ragatz’ *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean* (1928).

²³ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 2012.

²⁴ Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Kingston, Jamaica, W.I: University of the West Indies Press, 2012).

adeptly consider broad concepts of trade and populations to the confined geography of the British West Indies.

Diverting from the quantitative analysis-heavy monographs of prior decades, a new wave of more culturally- and anthropologically-focused scholars came in the 1990s and early 2000s. Beginning with scholars like Arthur Stinchcombe, literature in general moved away from the top-down focus and began to study populations and social movements.²⁵ Stinchcombe, like earlier scholars, primarily addresses the economic aspects of slavery in the West Indies. However, he moves past the older quantitative analyses to connect the economy with political struggle and social hierarchy within the sugar islands. His work, essential in understanding concepts of metropole-periphery relations and the ideological aspect of power in the West Indies, provides a useful introduction to white conceptions of security and economy in the era. Patrick Griffin also studies white settler populations in the West Indies, but tangents from Stinchcombe to focus on differentiating among white people. Griffin's conclusions are useful in challenging the assumption of the 'perpetually-persecuted Irish', lending complexity to the caricature of the Irish radical and the idea of Ireland's 'innocence' regarding the slave trade.²⁶

Nini Rodgers' 2007 book, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* acts as a seminal text for this thesis. Her earlier articles, published in 2000 on topics pertaining to Ireland's ties with the Black Atlantic and the role of women in anti-slavery movements, have often been cited by later scholars of Irish and Caribbean History.²⁷ Rodgers, a historian at Queens University in

²⁵ Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²⁶ Patrick Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots, America's Scots Irish, and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Nini Rodgers, "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," *Irish Historical Studies* 32, no. 126 (2000): 174–92; Nini Rodgers, "Two Quakers and a Utilitarian: The Reaction of Three Irish Women

Belfast, is one of few authors that have dedicated their career to situating Ireland in the Atlantic world. Her contributions to our understanding of Ireland's role in the Atlantic slave trade and anti-slavery advocacy are phenomenal. Her work supplements Riach's dissertation by giving more attention to groups outside of the mainstream, such as Quaker women and Irish-American emigres. Rodgers relies heavily on primary source material, but also intertwines the earlier era of economic and emigration scholarship to establish concrete ties between Ireland, the Caribbean, and North America. The only limitation to her work is that it is relatively recent – virtually all studies done in the past ten years on Ireland and anti-slavery cite Rodgers, but unfortunately, very few studies have been produced.

In recent years there has also been rich literature produced on the British West Indies. One landmark study, published in 2013, is Jack Greene's *Creating the British Atlantic: essays on transplantation, adaptation, and continuity*.²⁸ Greene, a scholar of colonial American and Atlantic history, has produced numerous articles on the evolution of British identity in the West Indies.²⁹ His chapter on the shifting and contested identity of British West Indians is particularly useful in naming the intellectual currents that interacted with social hierarchy in the 18th century. Natalie Zacek, a historian of Caribbean and Atlantic history, wrote another useful monograph in

Writers to the Problem of Slavery 1789-1807," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 100C, no. 4 (2000): 137–57.

²⁸ Jack P. Greene, *Creating the British Atlantic: Essays on Transplantation, Adaptation, and Continuity*, Early American Histories (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctt6wrq68>.

²⁹ Jack Greene, "Britain's Overseas Empire before 1780: Overwhelmingly Successful and Bureaucratically Challenged," in *Creating the British Atlantic* (University of Virginia Press, 2013); Jack P. Greene, "Liberty, Slavery, and the Transformation of British Identity in the Eighteenth-century West Indies," *Slavery & Abolition* 21, no. 1 (April 2000): 1–31; Jack P. Greene, "'A Plain and Natural Right to Life and Liberty': An Early Natural Rights Attack on the Excesses of the Slave System in Colonial British America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2000): 793–808, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2674156>.

2010 - *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670-1776*.³⁰ This work, more socially-focused than Stinchcombe or Griffin, is essential in portraying everyday life of white settlers on the islands. Her work also moves into the realm of conceptualizing white security and unity in the region, which had a major influence on slavery and anti-slavery alike. Lastly, the edited volume from O'Neill and Lloyd, *The Black and Green Atlantic: cross-currents of the African and Irish diasporas*, takes all of these concepts – economy, race, identity – and uses them to establish concrete connections between the populations of Ireland and the West Indies. These essays describe two diverse communities that lived within the same economic system and reacted to the same global events.³¹

The final works on which I draw heavily are Claudius Fergus' 2013 book, *Revolutionary Emancipation: slavery and abolitionism in the British West Indies* and Kevin Whelan's chapter, "The Green Atlantic: radical reciprocities between Ireland and America in the long eighteenth century," from Kathleen Wilson's edited volume, *A New Imperial History*.³² Fergus' work is a monograph on the concept of security in the West Indies and accurately portrays race relations through its extensive use of primary source material. Fergus is a member of the new social history school, led by CLR James, that emphasizes the agency of black revolutionaries alongside white abolition advocates. Fergus also highlights the fact that many of the white advocates held their beliefs out of a racism-infused physical and economic self-interest. A good number of West Indian whites were in favor of abolition not for humanitarian ends, but because they felt

³⁰ Natalie Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670-1776* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Other scholars such as Higman (2011) have also contributed to West Indian scholarship.

³¹ Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd December 20-, *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (Basingstoke England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

³² Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation*; Kevin Whelan, "The Green Atlantic: Radical Reciprocities between Ireland and America in the Long Eighteenth Century," in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

there were too many black people in the Caribbean – importation of more slaves ran the risk of a violent uprising and the ‘unseasoned’ slaves would bog down crop and sugar production.³³

Fergus effectively situates black and white West Indians within their sociopolitical environment, and his explanation of the physical and economic security concerns of white West Indians is something that I will incorporate into my own analyses. Kevin Whelan also focuses on the security situation in the West Indies, discussing the relevant insurrections and development of a white solidarity in the Caribbean post-1760. However, instead of discussing the West Indian response to insecurity, he focuses on the reaction of the Irish radical community to destabilizing events. Whelan’s work is useful in that it systematically addresses primary literature in which the Irish radical community projects their own experiences onto that of the West Indian slave.

The shift from quantitative to cultural analyses is part of a larger trend in academia. The effort to elevate the voices of people of color, of women, and of others whose stories have not been shared, is something admirable and relatively recent. With that said, this thesis will not especially focus on marginalized voices. Those with the ability and time to be writing about abolition were generally white and of the upper echelons of society. In the case of the colonial periphery, however, the protagonists have not yet been studied in conversation with each other. This thesis will strive to place West Indian and Irish anti-slavery literature in dialogue by connecting the work of older scholars like McDowell and Truxes with newer, more popularly-focused academics like Rodgers, Fergus, and Whelan. Though the secondary literature reviewed for this thesis is diverse, it is necessarily so. In order to construct an accurate picture of the administrative and economic bounds of anti-slavery writers in the West Indies and Ireland, it is necessary to have a solid understanding of the basic foundations of their livelihoods and events

³³ Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation*, 73–78.

that influenced their behavior. Understanding the nuances of these anti-slavery writers' identities and worlds allows for scholars to accurately identify the internal and external influences on their work. Because of the history of rebellion in both spaces and their relative positions in the British Atlantic economy, I chose the broad lens of security to put the two places into dialogue.

In this thesis, I will investigate the anti-slavery writing of Ireland and the British West Indies from 1740-1807. I am choosing these dates for the following reasons: the 1740s was the first decade in which significant anti-slavery works were produced in the colonies and 1807 was the year in which the British Parliament passed an act to abolish the slave trade.³⁴ In defining "writing", I include pamphlets as well as published poems, essays, and compilations of letters. Within each chapter, I will focus on a few major writers in each place and supplement their arguments with other contemporary works.³⁵ The authors of Ireland and the British West Indies were diffuse in character and background – the ones I incorporate were preachers and administrators, men and women, expats, poets, and planters. What they had in common were their intellectual, political and economic presence in the British Atlantic world and their colonial character. The manner in which they engaged with large-scale debates like slavery in the Atlantic world were defined by geography – their proximity to the trade and slave populations – and their community history – the major events that defined their relationship with the metropolitan British and the enslaved population.

³⁴ Though Great Britain abolished the trade in 1807, the practice of slavery went on until the last apprenticeships designated by the Slavery Abolition Act (1833) ended around 1840.

³⁵ These writers include: (West Indies) Rev. James Ramsay, Charles Crawford, Bryan Edwards' early work, and Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls; (Ireland) Mary Shackleton Leadbeater, Mary Birkett, James Mullalla, Hugh Mulligan, and James Orr.

In this thesis, I will place the ideas proposed by West Indian and Irish anti-slavery advocates in their social, political and economic context by drawing on the quantitative and social research of scholars like Truxes, Rodgers, and Zacek. By recreating the world in which they wrote, I will be able to accurately situate the diverse (and divergent) moral and pragmatic concerns each community expressed. In considering the primary literature, I will trace several key debates that speak to white economic and physical security, including that between abolition, amelioration, and emancipation, whether to proselytize West Indian slaves, and the non-consumption campaign against West Indian sugar. Within each chapter, after I review secondary literature and establish a solid historical foundation, I will introduce the major primary works and how they relate to the chapter topic. Each of the debates discussed speak to the tension between concepts of security and liberty – the more immediate concern of personal well-being versus the ascendant 18th-century conception of liberation (at least for white men). In this thesis, my own methodology will be similar to that of Rodgers and Fergus, who cite the work of older scholars like McDowell and Sheridan but rely on their own interpretations of primary source material to situate the actors within their world. I will also rely heavily on the cultural analyses produced by the newer school of social historians – Swaminathan, Burnard, Roberts, and Baraniuk, among others – to better understand the role of identity and historical structures in the lives of anti-slavery writers.

There will be limitations to this work. This thesis does not focus on political debates *per se*, though much of the literature was created in response to acts of Parliament and influenced the same. Instead, it will focus on events outside of Parliament – rebellions, decline, and cultural movements – that helped to shape the conversation around anti-slavery. Furthermore, this thesis will analyze works written by white authors. While this excludes important voices, it also allows

us to understand the range of self-serving, contradictory and human motives that led the Empire towards abolition.

I have chosen to look at Ireland and the British West Indies in tandem because their contributions to the anti-slavery movement were strikingly different and show the breadth of a movement that has historically been understood as simple and righteous. I also chose these spaces because they are understudied and have not been represented in conversations of the British Atlantic world. The last reason these spaces call for further study is their intriguing similarities and differences. Ireland and the West Indies existed within the British colonial space together and played important roles in the Atlantic economy, but neither fully controlled the regulation of their own space.³⁶ Both islands (or group of islands) held significant populations of English, Old English, Native Irish, and Dissenter, which impacted intra-white relations in both spaces. Significant differences between the two realms arose in their responses to a declining sugar market and various events that threatened white security. The arena of anti-slavery is unique and worthwhile because it unites a multitude of interests and communities in a complicated and often contradictory fight for the future of the British Atlantic world.

³⁶ With that said, the West India lobby held sway in Parliament, and after 1782, the Dublin Parliament administered Ireland with a degree of autonomy, though still subject to Westminster under Poyning's Law.

Section I: Economics of security, economics of liberty

Introduction

The British Atlantic economy flourished through the first half of the 18th century, enriching West Indian planters and expanding government revenue. By the end of the 1700s, however, the commodity production that had powered the system was in decline. As British and Irish demand for sugar outpaced supply, foreign competition filled in the gaps. Furthermore, the increased demand was ill-matched to production; in attempts to meet demand, labor conditions worsened, slave mortality rates increased, and more inexperienced slaves had to be imported. All of these forces culminated in an environment where planter profits steadily grew less secure. The rise of the mainstream abolitionist movement coincided and made cause with these shifts in the economy. Anti-slavery advocates were aware of the opportunities opened by change and capitalized on the anxieties and moral sensibilities of their countrymen and women. While West Indian and Irish anti-slavery writers used “the economy” as a tool of advocacy, each tailored their arguments to their constituency. West Indian anti-slavery advocates, aware of the anxiety over diminishing profits rampant among the planter class, used statistics to argue that amelioration of slave conditions and the abolition of the trade would be economically advantageous. Irish advocates, aware of their position in a major importing market, wrote to a different public – one comprised of consumers. Therefore, their arguments focused on consumer action: a sugar and rum boycott as well as the establishment of ‘legitimate’ (non-slave) commerce with the west coast of Africa. In this chapter, “economic security” refers to the certainty of a profit source; in the West Indies, this concept was predominant, while in Ireland, it was secondary to the goals of their activism. Though each group wrote with distinct motives and

means, few of which were purely humanitarian, the growth and decline of the slave-powered mercantile system provided common inroads for reformers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Because the character of their audience was different, the economic rhetoric of anti-slavery writing in the West Indies differed in tone and topic from their Irish counterparts'. As a conglomeration of production-based economies, calling for a boycott would have found a hostile reception; in 1773, Jamaica alone exported 1,048,300 cwt of the product.³⁷ A production-focused audience made of planters, administrators, and the general public mean that anti-slavery arguments were centralized around securing planter profits. Two specific themes were repeated often as a wise monetary choice for planters: ameliorating slave conditions and abolishing the trade. Adam Smith's theory of free labor, dismal reports of death and reproduction rates, and doomsday market predictions all played a role in the development of the economic anti-slavery message in the Caribbean. In 1784, James Ramsay, a reverend and long-time resident of Barbados, wrote a seminal address on the economic aspects of abolition and amelioration entitled *An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves*.³⁸ The structure and content of his arguments inundated readers with statistics and anecdotes that focused on planter outcomes for 'good' and 'poor' treatment of slaves. Though Ramsay used condemning and moral language against abusive slave owners, his use of specific economic and demographic data set his school apart from the majority of Irish anti-slavery writing. Arguments about the morality of sugar consumption were ineffective among the individuals whose slaves produced the sugar. Those that addressed planters' real concerns about declining profit margins and provided evidence-based solutions had a better chance of gaining traction. Unlike most of the Irish reading public,

³⁷ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; an Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, 34.

³⁸ Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent*.

economic security was an unavoidable topic in the West Indian community – sugar production was the lifeblood of the economy and culture.³⁹

Irish anti-slavery activists focused their efforts on the consumption end because their audience was one of the fastest-growing importing markets in the British Isles.⁴⁰ Economic arguments against the slave trade, therefore, had to be directed towards the consumer. Unlike the West Indian planters, most consumers did not concern themselves with planter profit – on the contrary, in Ireland, rising sugar prices and high tariffs drew the ire of the public. Because most individuals maintained a degree of separation from the trade, the Irish public needed a call to action and a compelling narrative in order to take action. To create this case, soaring rhetoric, cutting satire, and political poetry (all familiar forms of public expression in Ireland) were employed to spread the anti-slavery message. Messaging around the sugar boycott gave anti-slavery writers a chance to present their case based on moral language rather than administrative or economic arguments. After William Wilberforce's first motion to abolish the slave trade was rejected in 1791, some 500,000 members of the British public were inspired to take radical action and boycott West Indian sugar.⁴¹ Within England and Ireland, the boycott had proponents and opponents, but its ideational influence was greater than its economic impact – for Irish activists, it provided their first opportunity to engage directly with British anti-slavery forces. Furthermore, it gave a community with little influence at Westminster the opportunity to circumvent the institution entirely. The sugar boycott also provided an opportunity for women,

³⁹ There were certainly Irish plantation owners in the West Indies that were adversely affected by the prospects of ending the slave trade. However, the “reading public” – middle- and upper-middle-class individuals clustered in urban centers – did not hold land in the Caribbean and therefore did not have a direct interest in the planters' lot.

⁴⁰ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; an Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, 32–33. Between 1716 and 1774, the percentage of brown sugar re-exported from Britain to Ireland grew from 10.8% to 76.2%.

⁴¹ Julie L. Holcomb, “Blood-Stained Sugar: Gender, Commerce and the British Slave-Trade Debates,” *Slavery & Abolition* 35, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 612, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2014.927988>.

who were generally charged with household consumption, to raise their voices.⁴² Many influential women participated and wrote in favor of the non-consumption campaign. In her 1792 piece *A Poem on the African Slave Trade, Addressed to Her Own Sex*, Mary Birkett encouraged women readers to participate: "...in all the evils - all the wrongs they bear; / And tho' their woes *entire* we can't remove, / We may th' *increasing* mis'ries which they prove, / Push far away the plant for which they die."⁴³ Birkett recognized that Ireland maintained a degree of separation from Westminster and for this, anti-slavery advocates would be assigned a limited role. Nevertheless, she entreats her readers to participate in the boycott. Her poem was effective as a propaganda piece because it presented the problem of slavery alongside a clear, tangible solution.⁴⁴ Similar calls were made by Birkett's female contemporaries in England – notably Anna Letitia Barbauld and Hannah More – who wrote in favor of Wilberforce's abolition bill and the sugar boycott.⁴⁵ These women, alongside their male counterparts such as Thomas Clarkson and William Fox, helped to shape the economic anti-slavery narrative of the 1780s on the east side of the Atlantic.⁴⁶

Literature Review

In recent decades, significant scholarly work has been produced on the economics of the British Atlantic slave system and the role of economic arguments in the anti-slavery movement. A new wave of scholarship has utilized work done by 20th-century historians like Richard

⁴² Rodgers, "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," 2000, 189.

⁴³ Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her Own Sex*, 17. Italics original.

⁴⁴ In using the term "propaganda", I do not mean it in the pejorative sense, but in the sense of writing and art used to inform and persuade its consumers towards a particular action.

⁴⁵ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (London, 1791); Hannah More, *Slavery, a Poem*. (London, 1788).

⁴⁶ Deirdre Coleman, "Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s," *ELH* 61, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.1994.0011>.

Sheridan and Thomas Truxes to analyze the social impact of economic difference and change.⁴⁷

The older scholarship, predominant throughout the 1970s and 1980s, relied on government reports and trade ledgers to reconstruct economic histories of the British Atlantic world.

Historians like Matthew Mulcahy and Nini Rodgers, who cite the early scholarship in their own analyses, move beyond the economic lens to include social analysis. Relevant to this chapter in

particular, Rodgers' "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," a piece that

heavily cites Thomas Truxes, provides an excellent analysis of the impact of sugar and rum in

Ireland in the late 18th century.⁴⁸ I will use her analyses to lay a foundation for my exploration of

the Irish sugar and rum boycott. Mulcahy takes a similar approach to Rodgers – interspersing

societal and economic arguments on the impact of commodity crops – but focuses his efforts on

the Caribbean and the southern North American colonies.⁴⁹ This chapter incorporates the work

of Sheridan, Truxes, Rodgers, and Mulcahy to establish the economic context in which anti-

slavery writers labored. This chapter also relies on another recent wave of scholarship which

explores the economic arguments and theories present in anti-slavery writing. This school is led

by historians like Srividhya Swaminathan, Deirdre Coleman and Julie Holcomb, who use literary

analysis to connect anti-slavery pieces to other prevalent intellectual influences of the time.⁵⁰

Swaminathan's analysis of the influence of Adam Smith's writings, for example, is central to this

chapter and serves as a rhetorical link between the two colonial spaces. Coleman and Holcomb

⁴⁷ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; an Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*; Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660-1783*.

⁴⁸ Rodgers, "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," 2000.

⁴⁹ Matthew Mulcahy, *Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean*, Regional Perspectives on Early America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

⁵⁰ Srividhya Swaminathan, "Adam Smith's Moral Economy and the Debate to Abolish the Slave Trade," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (October 2007): 481–507, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773940601148305>; Deirdre Coleman, "Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s," *ELH* 61, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 341–62, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.1994.0011>; Julie L. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (Cornell University Press, 2016).

employ two different lenses – gender and religion – to their analyses of the boycott, which will also be discussed. These three historians and their contemporaries provide insight into the personal and communal economic concerns that anti-slavery writers on both sides of the Atlantic addressed.⁵¹

This chapter will combine the old and new branches of scholarship to explain why the economic arguments present in West Indian and Irish anti-slavery writing appear there. I will use the work of Truxes and Sheridan to describe the economic conditions in which these writers lived; this will include sources of income and the issue of declining profits in the West Indies and the rise of sugar import levels and prices in Ireland. Assessing the surrounding economic conditions will allow me to contextualize the arguments that anti-slavery writers proposed regarding new markets and shifting profits. The newer wave of scholarship, focused on the primary source material, will provide additional analysis of intellectual trends, gender, and religion in economic anti-slavery writing.

This chapter will be structured as follows. First, I will provide an overview of the British Atlantic economic system, including the main sources of profit, relevant trends and challenges to plantation owners and consumers, and the social and mercantile ties that bound one side of the Atlantic to the other. Second, I will look specifically at the roles Ireland and the West Indies played in this economic system. This will allow me to place the anti-slavery messaging within its socioeconomic and political context. After I establish the economic background, I will

⁵¹ A note on this literature review: in scholarly work on the anti-slavery movement, there is a significant debate over the role of economic decline in the abolition of the trade. The two sides are hallmarked by Eric Williams and Seymour Drescher. Though I am familiar with their arguments, I did not include the debate here, as my own analyses will focus more on the content and impact of the anti-slavery writing itself, not on the surrounding economic conditions.

address the role of economic messaging in anti-slavery writing more generally, including whom was using it, what influences affected both communities of writers, and towards what ends the arguments were posited. Then, I will look at the two groups of writers and analyze dominant themes in both geographies. For Irish writers, the British Atlantic economy was a potential instrument of moral action. For their West Indian counterparts, the fears of planters surrounding their prospects in a shifting Atlantic system provided an opportunity to propose more humane, but still economically advantageous, alternatives. To conclude, I will look at the role that economic anti-slavery arguments played in the movement overall, including the monetary impact and how the arguments presented shifted the terms of debate.

Overview of the British Atlantic Mercantile System

The 18th century British Atlantic economy was powerful, but its future was uncertain. Atlantic commerce was powered by sugar that was produced in the West Indies and refined in England and Ireland. By the 1780s, inelastic West Indian production methods could not keep up with growing domestic demand. Furthermore, Atlantic challengers, namely the French and Dutch, were ready to fill the gap. The administrative response to these hurdles resulted in planters concerned about sustaining profits and consumers complaining about inflated prices.⁵² Regulation of British Atlantic commerce was directed by Westminster, and though the British West Indian islands often called their own assemblies, the absentee landlord class exercised most of their power in Parliament. The Caribbean interest was well-represented in Westminster, with many absentee landlords and contracted agents. In 1744, the government ledger *Parliamentary History* noted ‘how many were... deeply concerned in one part or other of the sugar trade, and

⁵² Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; an Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, 23.

that the cause itself was always popular in the House of Commons.”⁵³ Anglo-Irish economic interests were represented in London as well, with about 80 Anglo-Irish Members sitting in Parliament between 1754-1790. Later, a somewhat more autonomous Dublin Parliament met biannually between 1782-1800, representing a more ideologically and socially diverse Irish constituency.

The British West Indies and Ireland both sustained the Atlantic economic system; however, they did so on different ends of the process. The West Indian islands comprised an export economy, relying on slave produce to sustain planter profits. London also relied on West Indian commodities, as re-exportation fees – money made by importing sugar to Britain, marking up the price, and re-exporting to Ireland, Scotland and mainland Europe – provided significant amounts of government revenue. Because the main role of the West Indies was that of producer, their anti-slavery advocates made arguments that spoke to the economic anxieties of the slave owners. On the other side of the Atlantic, Ireland consumed what the West Indies exported; throughout the 18th century, Irish consumption of West Indian sugar grew exponentially. The increase can be partially attributed to decisions made by Westminster; in 1733, Parliament had passed the *Molasses Act* which guaranteed a protected market in Ireland for West Indian producers. As a result, by 1775, sugar importation into Ireland had grown fivefold.⁵⁴ Because of their engagement on either end of the British Atlantic economic system, the connections between Ireland and the West Indies were strong. Growing imports, Irish exports (Irish salt beef, herring, and linens were imported to the Caribbean for whites and slaves alike) and Irish dynastic families, several of whom had established branches in the Caribbean, maintained connections

⁵³ Sheridan, 66.

⁵⁴ Sheridan, 31; Rodgers, “Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century,” 2000, 5–6.

between the two spaces throughout the 1700s.⁵⁵ The networks established between Ireland, Great Britain, and the West Indies were essential for the diffusion of ideas, resources, and people that would allow individuals on both sides of the Atlantic to engage in the anti-slavery debate.

West Indian Context

The West Indian planter economy, though still a driving force in the British Atlantic system, was in decline by the second half of the 18th century due to extensive soil degradation and the grueling work conditions endured by enslaved Africans. According to historian Richard Dunn, the mortality rate of enslaved Africans was so high that "...slave masters gave up trying to keep their Negroes alive long enough to breed up a new generation and instead routinely bought replacement slaves year in and year out."⁵⁶ Beyond the humanitarian concerns, rising demand for sugar in the British Isles necessitated a shift to more efficient and sustainable practices on both the environmental and human end. Though adoption of new technologies allowed some planters to meet this demand, most did not have the liquid capital necessary to invest in new machinery or restructure their plantations. In fact, many planters were deep in debt. The situation was dire enough that one historian labeled the British West Indies the "sick man" of the European slave colonies.⁵⁷ This uncertainty provided anti-slavery advocates an opportunity to propose alternative practices that they argued would be more gainful – namely, amelioration of slave conditions and abolition of the trade. To back their points, West Indian anti-slavery

⁵⁵ Rodgers, "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," 2000, 4.

⁵⁶ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 31.

⁵⁷ Drescher, "Capitalism and the Decline of Slavery," 133. Drescher does not agree with the decline thesis as a whole, but his description of the British West Indies at this point in time is accurate.

advocates often cited higher birth rates, lower mortality rates, and higher production potential of well-treated slaves.

Irish Context

The Irish economy, and along with it, Irish society, was profoundly impacted by colonial trade as well. New wealth generated by slave plantations, concentrated in the hands of dynastic planter families and successful merchants, helped cities on the coast to develop and become proto-urban centers. Revenue from slave produce also lifted two relatively marginalized groups, the emergent Catholic middle class and Dissenters in the north; ironically, their causes were to be tied up with the anti-slavery rhetoric of the 1800s.⁵⁸ Though the wealth from exporters, planters, and merchants helped to spur growth on the island, Ireland's character in the British Atlantic system remained that of a net importer. The Dublin Parliament, autonomous between 1782 and 1800, recognized this character and pushed for greater "free trade" for the island – that is, trade free from the British middleman. Administrators in Dublin wanted to end British re-exportation fees because it would allow the government to charge their own importation taxes and build significant revenue streams. Consumers on the island believed that they were extorted by the British middleman; thus, if it was eliminated, sugar prices would fall. In reality, both aims met with mixed results, but the arguments were clear and easy to make – a liberated Irish economy would result in government profit and cheap sugar for its citizens. The economic growth of the era enabled and was antagonized by anti-slavery writers. Though slave-based revenue had built up their cities and allowed their communities to develop, therefore empowering authors to engage with a reading public, an overarching theme in Irish anti-slavery writing was a boycott of

⁵⁸ Rodgers, "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," 2000, 179.

this system.⁵⁹ The abstention campaign, which was also popular in Great Britain, was made possible by the expanding consumption of sugar and an incipient working-middle class. If sugar had remained a luxury good, the boycott would have been an ineffective campaign. The democratization of consumption opened the door to collective action.

Economic messaging in the anti-slavery movement

Though the moral argument against slavery was important to the overall movement, the arguments that anti-slavery advocates made around the economic prospects and struggles of planters and their compatriots were some of the most influential because they addressed real concerns and were suited to the environment of their audience. In the West Indies, the arguments revolved around planter profit and efficient cultivation practices. In Ireland, a more detached audience required mobilization; therefore, boycott-centered economic writing was driven by narrative and moral language. In summary, the challenge to West Indian anti-slavery advocates was to get their audience to act in a certain way. The challenge for Irish writers was to get their reading public to act at all.

Anti-Slavery Lingua Franca: Adam Smith and Thomas Clarkson

Though this thesis focuses on the differences between the West and East Atlantic, there were certain pieces that maintained relevance on both sides of the ocean, including the North American colonies/United States. Among others, these included Adam Smith's *Wealth of*

⁵⁹ Rodgers, 192.

Nations (1776) and Thomas Clarkson's seminal works, *An Essay on the slavery and Commerce of the Human species* (1786) and *An essay on the impolicy of the African slave trade* (1788).⁶⁰

Though Smith did not write explicitly on abolition, much of the economic anti-slavery writing of the period was influenced by his printed works. For writers on both sides of the Atlantic, the arguments around the production levels of free vs. slave labor and the process of "sympathy" outlined in *The theory of moral sentiments* provided a rhetorical touchstone.⁶¹ Many scholars believe that Smith himself expressed clear anti-slavery sentiment in his free labor arguments in *The Wealth of Nations*.⁶² One pamphlet, published anonymously in Cork, Ireland in 1792, provides an example of the way many authors paraphrased Smith's arguments on the efficiency of free labor. The author, superficially addressing planter interest, states that ending the practice of slavery would spur the liberated slaves to "...work voluntarily, more effectually than they do now constrainedly" in a sharecropping-like system.⁶³ This quote is a mirror of Smith's social argument for the inefficiency of slavery: his chapter on the "wages of labour" in *Wealth of Nations* explains how enslaved people were not given an incentive to work as hard as a wage-earning individual, who would have an opportunity to increase wealth through better work practices. The Rev. James Ramsay, writing from Barbados, similarly revealed his familiarity

⁶⁰ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Dublin: Printed for MessrsWhitestone and 19 others, 1776); Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African, Translated from a Latin Dissertation Which Was Honoured with the First Prize in the University of Cambridge, for the Year 1785, with Additions, by Thomas Clarkson* (London 1786) (London, 1786); Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade : In Two Parts by the Rev. T. Clarkson.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1788).

⁶¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Printed for AMillar, and AKincaid and JBell, 1759); Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Dublin: Printed for Messrs. Whitestone and 19 others, 1776),

⁶² Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 94–130; Swaminathan, "Adam Smith's Moral Economy and the Debate to Abolish the Slave Trade."

⁶³ Unknown, *An Essay on the Slave Trade; Enumerating Its Horrors, and Shewing the Vice of Encouraging It by the Consumption of West-India Productions: And Also Shewing the Certainty of Its Abolition by the Disuse of Them.* (Cork, 1792), 42.

with the tract in his 1784 work, *An essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*. In the seventh section of the first chapter, entitled “Master and slave in particular instances”, Ramsay outlines the practices of two planters. One abuses his slaves, and as a result, struggles economically; the other is humane towards his slaves and prospers.⁶⁴ Ramsay’s argument throughout is that higher production possibilities and profit opportunities were possible through amelioration of slaves’ work conditions.⁶⁵ The citation of Smith in these pamphlets (and many others) shows the transatlantic nature of intellectual currents in the late 18th century.

Another writer influential on both sides of the Atlantic was Thomas Clarkson. Clarkson was a British abolitionist whose work exposed the dangerous conditions on slave ships and contradicted the common belief that abolition would vitiate the colonial economy. During his



Figure 1. From Thomas Clarkson, *Letters on the Slave-Trade, and the State of the Natives in Those Parts of Africa Which Are Contiguous to Fort St. Louis and Goree, Written at Paris in December 1789, and January 1790*, 37. (London, 1791).

active years, Clarkson interviewed more than 20,000 sailors and collected physical evidence of the abuses of enslaved Africans. He then incorporated engravings of this evidence – tools like thumbscrews, shackles, branding irons, and more – into his pamphlets, adding a visual aid to his moral and economic arguments.⁶⁶ Though both communities quoted Clarkson, West Indian writers often chose to focus on the dangers of the Middle Passage for British seamen, while Irish writers aimed their attention at the conditions of the slaves

⁶⁴ Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent., 91–101.

⁶⁵ Ramsay, 21.

⁶⁶ Rodgers, “Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century,” 2000, 188.

upon those ships. Both sets of writers also included the economic arguments present in *Impolicy*, though to differing degrees. Generally, the data in *Impolicy* provided a foundation for the West Indian writers' arguments, while Irish writers tended to address specific data as an afterthought to a morality-based economic message.

Irish Writers

Irish anti-slavery advocates wrote to a community of consumers and therefore focused their arguments on consumer action. This meant that the majority of pieces, particularly those published between 1788-92, were written to promote the abstention campaign. In Britain, the boycott had begun in earnest in 1791 after Wilberforce's first motion for abolition was rejected. It caught on in Ireland because it was an option that bypassed Parliament (during this time, more power was concentrated in Dublin and therefore Irish interest was weak in London) and it followed a familiar format – Ireland had engaged in other, smaller-scale boycotts in previous years.⁶⁷ The campaign was relatively successful; according to Thomas Clarkson, the British government's sugar revenue had fallen by 200,000 pounds in the last quarter of 1791.⁶⁸ Two important components of abstentionist writing were the connection between bloodshed and sugar consumption and the role of women as a newly empowered community of advocates. The idea put forward by advocates that the addition of sugar to one's tea or cakes amounted to cannibalism or murder naturally disturbed Irish and British consumers. Political cartoonists like James Gillray supported this line of messaging by giving readers a visual aid to the unsettling allegations.⁶⁹ His cartoon (below) depicts how Irish and British individuals "consumed" slaves –

⁶⁷ Nini Rodgers, "Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century," *Irish Historical Studies* 32, no. 126 (2000): 189.

⁶⁸ Coleman, "Conspicuous Consumption," 344.

⁶⁹ Coleman, 348.

instead of describing the actual sacrifice of slaves' bodies and lives in the refining process, Gillray shows the driver forcing the enslaved person into the vat of boiling sugar. The title of the graphic, "Barbarities in the West Indies", was another commonly-repeated argument on the east side of the Atlantic. This line of messaging claimed that slave owners, not the slaves themselves, were the true "barbarian" class. The slaves, as portrayed by advocates, remained uncivilized; however, their depiction in British and Irish anti-slavery writing was more akin to that of the "noble savage". This imagery, though often over-the-top, had staying power because it played to consumers' emotions rather than their economic sense.



FIGURE 3. James Gillray. "Barbarities in the West Indies," 1791. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, London.

Another reason the arguments put forward by anti-slavery advocates were compelling was the exponential growth of the consumer base for sugar. Particularly in the latter half of the 18th century, demand for sugar ballooned in England, Scotland and Ireland, causing overall

production to rise and prices to fall.⁷⁰ This allowed for more consumers to enter the Atlantic market. No longer was sugar considered a luxury confined to the upper class; by the late 18th century, sugar was present on the tables of most middle-class and some lower-class households. It grew so common that when prices rose, the Charitable Society of Belfast was faced with a dilemma regarding allowances of tea and sugar. If they continued to provide these goods, the Society would have been accused of giving luxuries to the poor, while failure to do so would have caused the guests, who worked in the poorhouse, to steal the yarn they spun in order to buy the commodities themselves.⁷¹ This democratization of sugar consumption was generally celebrated as a sign of market growth; nevertheless, some wealthy individuals feared the cultural change brought on by the economic empowerment of the nascent middle and working classes.⁷² A related aspect to the sugar phenomenon was the incorporation of the women into the economic discourse. The rapid spread of the commodity subjected women to new scrutiny, as domestic consumption was generally managed by women in the home. The inclusion of women in economic discourse, even in a negative way, created a space for women to provide commentary. Though still in the vast minority, significant female voices arose in the late 1780s and early 1790s to call for a boycott of West Indian sugar. Historian Nini Rodgers sums the situation as thus: “[i]n Ireland, as in Britain and America, the moral and imaginative appeal of anti-slavery worked to launch women into the public sphere.”⁷³

The Economics of Liberty: the Murder Motif and the Sugar Boycott

⁷⁰ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery; an Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*, 24–33.

⁷¹ Rodgers, “Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century,” 2000, 178.

⁷² Coleman, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 344. Coleman associates the democratization of sugar consumption with a “[all] in prestige” of the item and, in turn, its consumers.

⁷³ Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 188.

Mary Birkett, an 18-year-old Dublin woman, became a well-known anti-slavery advocate in 1792 when she published *A poem on the African slave trade addressed to her own sex*.⁷⁴ In the piece, Birkett wrote to other women about their power to affect the outcome of the anti-slavery movement by engaging in the sugar boycott, calling Irishwomen to “Push far away the plant for which they die”.⁷⁵ Though the piece is wide-ranging, incorporating evangelical, feminist, and nationalist themes, one of the consistencies throughout is the “murder” motif. Early in the piece, Birkett establishes the blame structure, stating “...our traders snatch a thousand lives / No pain, no punishment on them derives.”⁷⁶ She continues in a passage addressing slavers, with “...[w]hen all your basely murder’d slaves shall rise, / And publish all your crimes throughout the skies.”⁷⁷ Descriptions like these, placed early in the piece, served not only to accuse slavers of wrongdoing but to prepare the reader to accept the call to action – joining the sugar boycott. If the reader chose not to engage in the boycott, they, too, would be complicit in the murder of slaves.⁷⁸ After explaining the dire situation of African slaves to her readers, Birkett moves on to her call to action – “Yes, sisters, yes, to us the task belongs, / ‘Tis we increase or mitigate their wrongs.”⁷⁹ The poem is addressed specifically to other women and anticipates the reasons some might hesitate to join the movement, like doubting their impact and fear of ridicule from men. Birkett assuages these fears with her line “Say not that small’s the sphere in which we move”, but tempers this declaration with a recommendation for how to

⁷⁴ Rodgers, 190.

⁷⁵ Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her Own Sex*, 15.

⁷⁶ Birkett, 3.

⁷⁷ Birkett, 8.

⁷⁸ Birkett, 14.

⁷⁹ Birkett, 14.

present the idea of abstention to men: “Will these reject your small, your just request, / When urg’d with meekness – yet with warmth exprest [sic]?”⁸⁰

Another anti-slavery piece entitled “An Essay on the slave trade; enumerating its horrors, and shewing the vice of encouraging it by the consumption of West-India productions: And also shewing the certainty of its abolition by the disuse of them” was published in Cork, Ireland in the same year.⁸¹ The pamphlet expressed an urgency regarding the abstention campaign that surpassed even Birkett’s. In early pages, the author is incredulous at those engaged in the trade and those who consume its produce, writing:

“Future ages will discredit the reports of history which will tell them, that the most enlightened nations of Europe have sacrificed millions of their fellow creatures, at a monstrous expence of men and money, simply to improve the modes of intoxication, and to give new allurements to drunkenness. At best it is to procure an indulgence for debauched palates, that countries have been desolated, the dearest ties of love and tenderness broken through, and the agonizing victims borne to other lands, to chuse the dreadful alternative of incessant labour, or a lingering death.”⁸²

The murder motif is central to this piece as it was to Birkett’s. The author’s description of “sacrifice”, “lingering death”, and later on the page, “African murders”, set the tone and clearly mark slave owners as the antagonist. The descriptions of slave conditions on plantations and during the Middle Passage, reflective of Clarkson’s *An Essay on the slavery and Commerce of the Human species*, frame planters in a similar light to Gillray’s cartoons – unlike their West Indian anti-slavery counterparts, the author of this pamphlet had little sympathy for “humane” planters. On pages 26-27, the author argues that even if the slaves led “more comfortable lives than the poor of England” (a common argument addressing the insecurities surrounding

⁸⁰ Birkett, 15, 46.

⁸¹ Unknown, *An Essay on the Slave Trade; Enumerating Its Horrors, and Shewing the Vice of Encouraging It by the Consumption of West-India Productions*.

⁸² Unknown, 6.

industrialization), they could not be expected to be happy in their situation, as they had been stolen from their homeland. According to the author, those who thought otherwise passed "...the most presuming judgment that ever arrogance passed."⁸³ The author even criticized proponents of amelioration, citing the same argument, that even if conditions in the West Indies were improved, the fact that the slaves had been forcibly taken from their homes remained unchanged.⁸⁴

Though most Irish anti-slavery advocates supported a sugar boycott during the height of its popularity, there were notable figures who did not. James Mullalla, a patriot historian and a Trinity College graduate, wrote a pamphlet "...in favour of the consumption of Sugar, in opposition to the feelings and sentiments of the fairest Daughters of Ireland."⁸⁵ Mullalla opposed the abstention campaign because he felt it would be ineffective and diminish one of the Irish government's main revenue streams.⁸⁶ Instead of a boycott to end the slave trade, he argued that only kings and governments could effect the kind of wholesale change that would be necessary.⁸⁷ In the meantime, he argued, consumers should not abstain from something that "custom has endeared to us."⁸⁸

Irish anti-slavery writing, particularly in the 1790s, focused heavily on the abstention campaign because the reading public had an established relationship with colonial trade. Profits from exports and revenue from sugar had built up port cities and helped to foster a nascent middle class, opening the markets and raising the standard of living for many. This new human

⁸³ Unknown, 26–27, 23.

⁸⁴ Unknown, 23.

⁸⁵ Mullalla, *A Compilation on the Slave Trade, Respectfully Addressed to the People of Ireland.*, 5.

⁸⁶ Mullalla, 22.

⁸⁷ Mullalla, 24.

⁸⁸ Mullalla, 22.

and economic development meant that the Irish public was ready to engage in the anti-slavery movement. The main hindrance to this was their relative distance from the practice – though Irish individuals had engaged in different roles related to the slave trade, the Irish government had never directly involved itself, and most Irishmen maintained a degree of separation. This had the potential to turn people off from the atrocities being committed. The abstention campaign was attractive to anti-slavery advocates because it gave them a way to directly impact the colonial market and include people in the movement. However, to overcome the distance and spur people to action, it was necessary for Irish anti-slavery writers to engage in hyperbole and dramatic narrative. This explains the omnipresence of the “murder” (or in some cases, cannibalism) motif and the sweeping accusations against West Indian planters present in poems and pamphlets published in the country. The role of “consumer” that defined the majority of Irishmen within the context of colonial trade also defined how they were addressed by forces seeking to dismantle it.

West Indian Writers

West Indian anti-slavery advocates were a less coherent group than their Irish counterparts. Though each that I include in this thesis had been born or spent a significant portion of their life in the West Indies, their backgrounds were diverse. Some were there to proselytize, others were local officials, and a few even owned slaves themselves. Their ideas related to one another, but they were not conversational within their geographical community to the extent of the Irish writers.⁸⁹ Where their writing did coincide was in its presumed audience. Most anti-slavery works produced by West Indian authors, even by those no longer residing in

⁸⁹ Though there was a notable Irish presence in the sugar islands, the majority were either servants or in the secondary-market merchant community – this diminished social status as compared to the planter class generally precluded West Indies-residing Irishmen from the level of wealth and civic engagement necessary to comment on the slave trade.

the Caribbean, were directed toward the planter class. The arguments made by West Indian anti-slavery advocates were more detail-oriented and solutions-based than Irish writing. West Indian writers had to convince sugar producers that investment in a reformed system would lead to better outcomes than maintaining the status quo. Irish consumers could mostly be convinced on humanitarian grounds that reform was the best option; though sugar importation affected consumer choice and government revenue, the production process affected few on the island directly. In contrast, the livelihoods of the West Indian reading public and their absentee counterparts would be directly impacted by abolition or amelioration.

In this section, I will focus on the anti-slavery writing of Rev. James Ramsay, a ship's surgeon and Anglican priest, William Dickson, a Quaker and the private secretary to Barbados' governor, and the Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, a native of the West Indies who later became the dean of Middleham in Yorkshire, England. Though these men were moral leaders, their arguments rarely focused on the morality of the trade. Most of the content revolves around efficient production processes; though an undercurrent of humanitarianism can be read into some of their chapters, slave outcomes within their reform arguments are an afterthought.

In 1747, the governor of Jamaica, Edward Trelawny, composed one of the first non-Quaker anti-slavery pamphlets. The piece, entitled *An Essay concerning slavery, and the danger Jamaica is expos'd to from the too great number of slaves ... and a proposal to prevent the further importation of negroes into that island*, was controversial among the planter class because it suggested the abolition of the slave trade (though not the practice of slavery). Trelawny, as governor, understood that emancipation would harm the livelihoods of his white constituents: "I cou'd wish with all my Heart, that Slavery was abolish'd entirely, and I hope in Time it may be so; but to do it at once, would be itself a great Evil, and a Ruin to Thousands

whose Wealth is wholly, or chiefly vested in them."⁹⁰ As suggested in the title, the pamphlet focused more on the physical security of whites in Jamaica – Trelawny had overseen the end of the First Maroon War and maintained the racist notion that African slaves were inherently violent – but within, he provided a schematic for balancing an abolition message and pro-planter sentiment.

To craft an argument that spoke to planter interests in the 1780s and beyond, anti-slavery advocates had to reference issues related to economic decline. In the later decades of the 18th century, planters throughout the West Indies were struggling to with soil exhaustion, lacked the liquid capital to invest in innovative practices or technology, and had taken on significant debt. Possessing an understanding of this situation, men like Rev. James Ramsay and William Dickson spoke about high mortality rates within the slave population, the economic inefficiency of importing slaves every year, and higher production potential with ameliorated work conditions. The economic arguments were framed within moral language; Ramsay described the presence of slavery in the British West Indies as owing to "...the capital across the vast atlantic [sic]," and as a result "...sunk human nature down to the lowest depth of wretchedness."⁹¹ These sentences were few and far between, however; most of the content amounted to planter apologetics.

The Economics of Security: Planter Interest

James Ramsay was one of the more sympathetic anti-slavery figures in the West Indies. Though his arguments were directed at planters, he was apt to use moral language and call out

⁹⁰ Edward Trelawny, *An Essay Concerning Slavery, and the Danger Jamaica Is Expos'd to from the Too Great Number of Slaves ... and a Proposal to Prevent the Further Importation of Negroes into That Island* (London, 1746), 6.

⁹¹ Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent.*, 89.

the abuses of certain slave owners. In *An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves*, Ramsay discusses the conditions of certain African slaves: "...a state differing but in name from brutal, by a treatment less generous, less considerate, than a horse or an ox receives from [its master]."⁹² However, by the end of the same paragraph, Ramsay turns to defending their actions with "...an apology for any thing [sic] seemingly severe," explaining that some slave owners are cruel because "...[o]ppression makes the wretches stupid, and their stupidity becomes their crime, and provokes their farther punishment."⁹³ In the section "Master and Slave in the British Colonies", Ramsay describes a standard workday for field slaves, who are called to the fields at 4 a.m. and work until "near midnight" with only a few short breaks for meals.⁹⁴ He also describes common punishments of slaves for the "common crimes of neglect, absence from work, eating the sugar cane, [and] theft," including "...cart whipping, beating with a stick, sometimes the breaking of bones, the chain, an iron crook about the neck, a large iron pudding or ring about the ancle [sic], and confinement in the dungeon."⁹⁵ These descriptions comprise his moral argument against the trade – as an Anglican minister who had had often interacted with slaves and welcomed blacks and whites alike in his Barbados parish, these arguments were to the fore, though not the entirety, of the 1784 pamphlet. They also serve as a foundation for his economic arguments on improving work conditions – by comparing slaves in the West Indies to freemen in Europe and by highlighting their high mortality rates, Ramsay shows that their current condition is not only inhumane but inefficient. Ramsay describes how "...[i]n a free

⁹² Ramsay, 58.

⁹³ Ramsay, 58.

⁹⁴ Ramsay, 59–63.

⁹⁵ Ramsay, 73.

country, a peasant in general executes twice the work of a slave in the sugar colonies.” He goes on to describe the variable impact of death rates in both places:

“...in a free state, the death of an individual is like a stone cast in the water...[b]ut to his master, the death of a slave is a sensible severe loss, which he must immediately repair, at a heavy expence, that, after being incurred, will not make him the same profitable returns, as the labor of a peasant for which he pays... only such a value as he ought to expend in the maintenance of his slaves.”⁹⁶

The Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, another West Indian churchman, mirrored Ramsay’s tone and argument in his 1787 work, *A letter to the treasurer of the society instituted for the purpose of effecting the abolition of slave trade*.⁹⁷ In this pamphlet, Boucher Nickolls begins with moral language, telling planters: “...if the slave trade be consistent with the moral law or with the gospel, pursue it – if not, give it up, or call not yourselves moralists or Christians.”⁹⁸ But, again emulating Ramsay, he soon curbs his criticism, writing “[a]mong the... West Indian gentleman to whom I am known, I am convinced there is great worth and humanity...”⁹⁹ This tone is a far cry from Irish writing of the same era; within four years, James Mullalla, the Irish patriot historian, had written “...[w]ho ever justifies so odious a system deserves the philosopher’s contempt and the Negro’s dagger.”¹⁰⁰ Boucher Nickolls’ argument is the same as Ramsay: amelioration of work conditions would lead to higher birth rates among slave populations, thereby making the importation of more slaves unnecessary. However, the bulk of the pamphlet is not concerned with slave outcomes. Instead, it discusses how ending the trade would affect everyone else: planters, British merchants, the British nation, the American states,

⁹⁶ Ramsay, 106–7.

⁹⁷ Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, *Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. A New Edition with Considerable Additions*, A new ed. with cnsiderable [sic] additions. (London, 1788).

⁹⁸ Boucher Nickolls, 11.

⁹⁹ Boucher Nickolls, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Mullalla, *A Compilation on the Slave Trade, Respectfully Addressed to the People of Ireland.*, 17.

“all the world”, “government” in general, “states not yet born”, and the reign of King George III, in that order.¹⁰¹ Though there is some intellectual language in this pamphlet, particularly in the sections on “all the world” and “government”, the arguments that Boucher Nickolls presents are economic. He highlights the higher production potential of humanely-treated slaves, the opportunity for planters and merchants to settle outstanding debt with Britain and cheaper sugar prices for British consumers resulting from more efficient production.¹⁰² Later in the pamphlet, he again addresses the lack of “utility” of the slave system, providing a numbered list of counterarguments. The first one is as follows: “[the trade] is disadvantageous, because it is a drawback on the profits of West-India estates.”¹⁰³ Boucher Nickolls discusses the costs of yearly importation as well as the lost profit during the period of “seasoning” for new slaves.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, the audience that Boucher Nickolls and Ramsay were addressing was one comprised of those on the producing end of the sugar economy. Therefore, economic arguments were framed in terms of personal economic security and the prospects of British government revenue.

The Economics of Security: Political Mathematics

One of the most common tools of West Indian anti-slavery advocates was the weaving of hard data into their narrative arguments. In *An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves*, Ramsay describes how, on average, one “valuable” slave cost between £50 and £300 sterling; “...hence the death of a valuable slave becomes a most serious matter to the master...”¹⁰⁵ This tactic was employed often throughout the 1784 pamphlet as well as his other

¹⁰¹ Boucher Nickolls, *Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. A New Edition with Considerable Additions*, 28–31.

¹⁰² Boucher Nickolls, 29.

¹⁰³ Boucher Nickolls, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Boucher Nickolls, 49–53.

¹⁰⁵ Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent.*, 107.

significant works. In 1788, Ramsay once again took up his pen to comment on the abolition bill that had been introduced by Wilberforce in Parliament. *An address on the proposed bill for the abolition of the slave trade, humbly submitted to the consideration of the legislature* is a brief and pointed piece that addresses common concerns over the bill.¹⁰⁶ Ramsay breaks down his rebuttals into a numbered list, the first of which is “The importance of the Slave Trade has been greatly over-rated.”¹⁰⁷ In this section, he uses numbers to enhance his argument: “Our annual purchase of slaves is within 40,000. Their average price per head... is within £18... The annual demand then on British manufactures for the Slave Trade is less than half a million.”¹⁰⁸ Ramsay’s argument is that amelioration of conditions would lead to increased birth rates among African slaves, meaning that importation of enslaved people would no longer be necessary, allowing for an abolition process that would not economically harm planters.¹⁰⁹ Ramsay also addresses the issue of planter debt, stating that “...no small plantation in debt is a possession worth holding,” and that each new slave imported only adds “...new burdens on it.”¹¹⁰ The usage of statistics in tandem with moral language allowed anti-slavery advocates in the West Indies to connect with an audience concerned for their prospects in a fluctuating economic environment.

¹⁰⁶ James Ramsay, *An Address on the Proposed Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Humbly Submitted to the Consideration of the Legislature by the Rev. James Ramsay*. (London, 1788).

¹⁰⁷ Ramsay, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ramsay, 4–5.

¹⁰⁹ Ramsay, 9–12.

¹¹⁰ Ramsay, 19–20.

William Dickson, a West Indian anti-slavery advocate and the former private secretary to the governor of Jamaica, utilized similar tactics to Ramsay in his published compilation, *Letters on Slavery*.¹¹¹ In his description of the mortality rates on the island, he cites specific numbers of slave bodies interred by a Kingston cemetery in 1786 (right).¹¹² Later, Dickson

A list in the Jamaica Gazette of Nov. 21. 1787; will enable us to form some idea of the extent in which this shocking practice prevails in that island.

‘ Account of negroes *interred* in the parish of Kingston, by order of the *Coroner*, during the year 1786.’

“ Jan. 12. a man	“ July 31. a man	“ Oct. 11. a man
Feb. 1. a man	Aug. 10. a man	15. a man
3. a woman	24. a man	22. a woman
4. a man	Sept. 6. a man	30. a man
Mar. 2. a man	10. a woman	Nov. 15. a woman
4. a man	12. a woman	16. a man
21. a woman	13. a man	27. a man
Apr. 15. a woman	22. a woman	Dec. 4. a man
27. a man	23. a girl	10. a man
May 24. a woman	25. a man	20. a man
June 19. a man	27. a woman	24. a mulatta girl
24. a man	27. a man	26. a negro ♀
Jul. 25. a man	Oct. 4. a man	27. a negro ♀

“ Total 39 bodies.”

In 1734,	—	—	SLAVES.
Imported, from 1734 to 1739, inclusive, in 154 vessels,			86,546
Negroes	—	36,996	
Indians	—	41	
		<u>37,037</u>	
		123,583	
Deduct on the island 1740	—	99,239	
Decrease in 6 years	—	<u>24,344</u>	
On the island, in 1740	—	99,239	
Imported from 1740 to 1745, inclusive, in 163 vessels	—	36,493	
		<u>135,732</u>	
Deduct on the island in 1745	—	112,428	
Decrease in 6 years	—	<u>23,304</u>	
Is does not appear what number of slaves were on the island in 1713; but supposing there were no slaves then on the island, the number imported in 33 years, in 949 vessels, is			
Negroes	—	221,534	
Indians	—	115	
Total	—	<u>221,649</u>	
Deduct on the island in 1745	—	112,428	
Decrease in 33 years	—	109,221	
every six years	—	<u>19,858</u>	
		No	

demonstrates the mathematics of mortality rates and slave importation in Jamaica. He explains that in the span of seven years (1761-68), the slave population had decreased by 33,000 even with a moderate birth rate and 27,000 new imports.¹¹³ The image to the left is Dickson’s proof for his calculations – because he was unable to collect “...authentic data on which to found a comparative view on the waste of human life”, he based his 1760s projections on data from past decades.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (London, 1789).

¹¹² Dickson, 129.

¹¹³ Dickson, 160–61.

¹¹⁴ Dickson, 159–60.

The presence of mathematical arguments to support his moral position is a hallmark of the “West Indian” approach – little time is spent constructing a narrative around the abuses of slaves because his readership is already familiar with them. Dickson’s goal, instead, is to show the impolicy of planters’ actions as they pertain to their own interest.

The Sugar Economy and Anti-Slavery

The sugar economy was the driving force of social and economic change throughout the British Atlantic world in the 18th century. This economy was powered by slave labor, and when it showed signs of deterioration, anti-slavery advocates found a new resonant space for their arguments. In Ireland, a new, expanded consumer base was presented with descriptive narratives of malevolent planters and their African victims. They responded by instituting a sugar boycott. For Irish anti-slavery writers, the economy was an advocacy tool and a way for their readership to connect to the broader movement, especially due to their limited influence in British politics. On the other side of the Atlantic, the economy was also central to the anti-slavery message. However, its connotations were reversed: instead of something to be manipulated, it needed preserving. Anti-slavery advocates in the West Indies found a resonant message in economic security, specifically, planters’ anxieties over declining production and profit margins. To address these concerns, it was necessary for advocates to utilize hard economic and demographic data – dramatizations of slave life did not hold the same weight in a geographic space where it was normalized. By proposing feasible alternatives such as amelioration and arguing for more radical steps like abolition, anti-slavery writers in the West Indies centralized the economy in their message of liberation. Even though the reading publics of Ireland and the West Indies had vastly different interests, anti-slavery advocates in both places were able to craft impactful economic arguments due to the power and reach of the British sugar economy. In the next

chapter, I will examine how the same communities reacted to security in a physical sense.

Utilizing many of the same sources, I will explore how advocates on either side of the Atlantic highlighted or diminished the importance of planter security in efforts to speak beyond the plight of slaves to the interests of their audience.

Section II: “Dangerous internal enemies” or “New Spartacus”? Competing concepts of physical security in the anti-slavery movement

Introduction

In May 1760, the deadliest slave rebellion experienced by the British West Indian colonies began in Jamaica. Tacky’s War cost the lives of 60 whites, an estimated 400 enslaved people, and around £100,000 in property damage, not including the expense of rebuilding.¹¹⁵ This uprising, though certainly not the first in the region, ushered in an era of heightened tensions and paranoia among the white population. Referring to events in the Atlantic world, historian Trevor Burnard argues "...[i]n terms of its shock to the imperial system, only the American Revolution surpassed Tacky's War in the eighteenth century."¹¹⁶ In the following decades, more slave rebellions alongside the American, French, and Haitian Revolution kept physical security a priority for white people of all social strata in the Caribbean. Anti-slavery writers in Ireland had a different perspective on insurrection, shaped by their distance from slave revolts and rooted in their own interest to be liberated from the British. The radical sect of the Irish anti-slavery community, concentrated in Belfast and Dublin, saw slave insurrection as an opportunity more than a threat. By equating the West Indian planter and the ‘tyrannical’ British government, those writers also tied their liberation to that of the West Indian slave. The main communities of anti-slavery writers in Ireland were non-Anglican Christian sects – radical Presbyterians in Ulster and the small but influential Quaker community in Dublin. Because the experiences of their audiences were different, the logic of arguments regarding white security made by authors in the West Indies differed from their Irish counterparts. The rebellions of the

¹¹⁵ Claudius Fergus, “‘Dread of Insurrection’: Abolitionism, Security, and Labor in Britain’s West Indian Colonies, 1760-1823,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 758.

¹¹⁶ Trevor G Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 10.

18th century, fused with the intellectual currents sweeping through Europe and its colonies, drove anti-slavery advocates to starkly different conclusions regarding white security – that is, the physical well-being of oneself – and the legitimacy of “internal commotion”. In Ireland, the real and imagined tradition of rebellion, their understanding of revolution as an activity performed by and on behalf of white men, their rising patriotic tide, and their distance from black-led rebellion culminated in a community of writers who were either disengaged from or dismissive of planter security.¹¹⁷ West Indian anti-slavery writers generally espoused more conservative, measured views on planter security because their perspective was shaped by a region plagued by conflict, both imperial and slave-led.

Security was not confined to conversations of insurrection, however. The question of proselytization also serves as a useful lens through which to understand the authors’ understanding of the relative “threat” posed by the enslaved population. While writers in both communities supported the idea of Christianizing and “civilizing” the enslaved population, the speed at which this was to be done and the purpose for which enslaved people would be baptized differed. In Ireland, writers like Mary Birkett and Mary Shackleton-Leadbetter advanced an argument that proselytization would also assist with the enslaved population’s moral and intellectual ‘improvement’. This point is accentuated by the fact that the Irish proselytization message was often not aimed at West Indian slaves specifically, but towards all people of color in Africa and the Americas; the focus was on the individual instead of the individual’s relationship to their broader community. The West Indian argument was the same *prima facie* –

¹¹⁷ In the period under specific study, 1780-1807, Irish “patriotism” (a sentiment more akin to autonomy within the British structure) developed into a more coherent nationalism (support for a separate Irish nation). Though elements of republicanism manifested in the radical Ulster community in the 1790s, it was not as common even among insurgent communities until the explicitly republican movement of the 1820s and 1830s.

slaves should be Christianized – but their underlying motivation was different from their Irish counterparts’. For example, the Revs. James Ramsay and Robert Boucher Nickolls argued for the Christianization of slaves on the premise that conversion would quell their ‘inherently violent’ nature, therefore lessening the chances of their rebellion.

The wars and rebellions of the 18th century Atlantic were reflected clearly in the written works produced there. The topic of slavery was central in this conversation because of the presence of black insurrection. Because of their proximity to this insurrection, West Indian anti-slavery advocates had to consider the demographics of their environment – enslaved people, even those who had not demonstrated any tendency towards rebellion, posed an ostensible threat to the well-being of the white population. The fact that the white population was vastly outnumbered by people of color exponentiated fears held by white planters and abolitionists alike. In the Irish anti-slavery community, advocates projected their own grievances against the British over the realities of slave insurrection. Because many identified closely with the slaves’ plight (though their experiences were not equal), the natural ancillary was to associate their own British ‘oppressors’ with the West Indian planter.¹¹⁸ The distance between the majority of the reading public and the actuality of slave rebellion allowed the writers there to make bold accusations against the planter class and support the cause of the rebelling slave, at least in rhetoric. In both spaces, geography and history shaped ideas surrounding the liberation of slaves and white well-being.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Russell, *A Letter to the People of Ireland, on the Present Situation of the Country*, by Thomas Russell, - *an United Irishman* (Belfast: printed at the Northern Star Office, 1796), 14, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/9bD8D2>.

Literature Review

Significant scholarship on slave rebellions and insurrection in Ireland has been published in recent decades, as well as a separate but growing strain of literature focused on the transatlantic nature and reciprocities of conflict. However, very few of these studies connect the physical and ideational influence of insurrection in the West Indies with that of Ireland, and none have studied how this conflict was translated into the work of anti-slavery advocates in those spaces. In this chapter, I will focus on two related avenues through which we can understand the competing concepts of security in Ireland and the West Indies: conflict and “civilization”. By including a focus on the relative ‘threat’ of slaves as a group and on the individual level, I will be able to draw in a broader group of primary source authors. The secondary work I use in this chapter analyzes anti-slavery advocates’ concerns surrounding “internal commotion” and the spread of Enlightenment-era civic and religious ideas. I will rely on three groups of secondary authors: one focused on conflict in the West Indies, another focused on Irish and European-based rebellion, and a third that connects these worlds by considering the era’s major intellectual currents. By including work on each space and ideas that connect them, I will be able to accurately place the Irish and West Indian writers in their respective security and intellectual environments.

The first of these groups is led by scholars like Trevor Burnard, Michael Craton and Claudius Fergus, who take different sides in the debate over slave agency (referring to the role of slave uprisings in the abolition movement).¹¹⁹ Though the works I cite are from a more recent

¹¹⁹ Other scholars cited in this chapter in reference to Caribbean slave revolts include Gelien Mathews, Monica Schuler and Devin Leigh.

wave of scholarship focused on the social dynamics of power and insurrection, the debate over slave agency finds its roots in C.L.R. James' 1963 landmark book, *The Black Jacobins*.¹²⁰ Trevor Burnard, while acknowledging the impact of rebellions like Tacky's War and the Westmoreland revolt on regional race relations, hesitates to emphasize the role of rebellions in the political outcome of abolition. He argues that their impact was notable in the immediate region, where planters reacted with vitriol; yet, across the ocean in Parliament the abolition debates came later and were relatively disconnected from these events.¹²¹ Michael Craton's book, *Testing the chains: resistance to slavery in the British West Indies*, provides another perspective on different aspects of slave resistance in the Caribbean. However, like Burnard, Craton makes few outright claims about their external effect.¹²² Claudius Fergus argues on the other side of the debate, making a compelling case for the role that slave rebellions played in the formation of colonial security policy and the abolition movement.¹²³ His analysis of white insecurity in the Caribbean is extremely useful in contextualizing the planter-focused arguments of advocates like Rev. James Ramsay. Though in this thesis, I make few claims about the impact of slave rebellions on Parliamentary outcomes, one can see their impact in the writings of anti- and pro-slavery advocates on all sides of the Atlantic.

The second group of authors I have chosen to review focus on conflict in Ireland and Europe. By examining the rhetorical connections between the Irish liberation movement and

¹²⁰ C. L. R James, *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.*, 2d ed., rev., Vintage Book; V-242 (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

¹²¹ Trevor Burnard, "Slavery and the Enlightenment in Jamaica and the British Empire, 1760–1772: The Afterlife of Tacky's Rebellion and the Origins of British Abolitionism," in *Enlightened Colonialism: Civilization Narratives and Imperial Politics in the Age of Reason*, ed. Damien Tricoire, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 227–46, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54280-5_11.

¹²² Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, Cornell paperbacks. (Ithaca [N. Y.]: Cornell University Press, 2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.04568.0001.001>.

¹²³ Fergus, "Dread of Insurrection"; Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation*.

West Indian slave uprisings, I aim to show the impact of the latter on the arguments of the former. Kevin Whelan's chapter, "The Green Atlantic: radical reciprocities between Ireland and America in the long eighteenth century", from Kathleen Wilson's *A New Imperial History* (2004), focuses exactly on this topic and has therefore been indispensable to the construction of this chapter.¹²⁴ For background information about the complexities of the forming Irish republican movement, I rely on historians like Carol Baraniuk, Jacquelyn Hill, Peter O'Neill and David Lloyd.¹²⁵ Baraniuk and Hill, who study the major figures and rhetoric surrounding Irish rebellions in the late 18th and early 19th century, focus specifically on relationships between Irish radicals and other social groups in Ireland and the British Isles. O'Neill and Lloyd, alongside scholars like Jenny Shaw and Patrick Griffin, explain how unrest in Ireland influenced relations within settler society in the West Indies, and vice versa.¹²⁶ Though in this thesis, I do not study Irish communities within the West Indies, understanding the transatlantic nature of domestic unrest is necessary to comprehend the major intellectual currents and actual unrest with which anti-slavery advocates in Ireland interacted.

The final group of scholarship that I will rely on in this chapter focuses on the transmission of ideas. The rhetoric of liberty and security was omnipresent, with thinkers like Montesquieu, Locke, and Paine cited (to different ends) in anti-slavery writing on both sides of

¹²⁴ Whelan, "The Green Atlantic: Radical Reciprocities between Ireland and America in the Long Eighteenth Century."

¹²⁵ Carol Baraniuk, "James Orr: Ulster-Scot and Poet of the 1798 Rebellion," *Scottish Studies Review* 6, no. 1 (2005): 22-; Baraniuk, *James Orr, Poet and Irish Radical*; Jacqueline Hill, "The Language and Symbolism of Conquest in Ireland, c. 1790-1850," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 18 (December 2008): 165-86, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440108000698>; Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd, eds., *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas*, 2009th ed. (Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹²⁶ Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (University of Georgia Press, 2013), <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/26930/>; Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots, America's Scots Irish, and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764*.

the Atlantic. Historian Peter Gay's *The Party of Humanity* provides a helpful introduction to the major contributions and complexities of the French philosophes.¹²⁷ Other works by Caroline Warman and Louis Sala-Molins discuss Montesquieu's ideas on slavery, examining his ironic chapter "On the enslavement of the Negroes" from *The Spirit of the Laws*.¹²⁸ Interestingly, the satirical chapter was often cited by Irish advocates, while Montesquieu's argument that masters and slaves were "natural enemies" was emphasized by their West Indian counterparts. A second strain of scholarship in this sphere, led by Jack Greene and Arthur Stinchcombe, considers the fluctuating British Atlantic identity and the tension between the definition of "British-ness" in the metropole and its iteration in the peripheral colonies.¹²⁹ Trevor Burnard again appears in this group. His chapter "Slavery and the Enlightenment in Jamaica and the British Empire, 1760–1772: The Afterlife of Tacky's Rebellion and the Origins of British Abolitionism" speaks specifically to planter repression post-1760.¹³⁰ Reports of the barbarity with which the white population responded to the threat of slave insurrection shocked metropolitan observers and cast doubt on the white West Indians' claim to the label "British". The last subset of literature I will look at is radicalism and power relations. Srividhya Swaminathan and Chine Sonoï cover the

¹²⁷ Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity; Essays in the French Enlightenment*, [1st ed.] (New York: Knopf, 1964).

¹²⁸ Caroline Warman, ed., "Montesquieu, 'On the Enslavement of Negroes', from *The Spirit of the Laws*," in *Tolerance*, 1st ed., vol. 3, *The Beacon of the Enlightenment* (Open Book Publishers, 2016), 27–28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19b9jvh.12>; Louis Sala-Molins, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttttq9>.

¹²⁹ Jack P. Greene, "Liberty, Slavery, and the Transformation of British Identity in the Eighteenth-century West Indies," *Slavery & Abolition* 21, no. 1 (April 2000): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440390008575293>; Jack P. Greene, *Creating the British Atlantic: Essays on Transplantation, Adaptation, and Continuity*, Early American Histories (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Planter Power, Freedom, and Oppression of Slaves in the 18th Century Caribbean," in *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment, The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 125–58.

¹³⁰ Burnard, "Slavery and the Enlightenment in Jamaica and the British Empire, 1760–1772."

intellectual roots of these two concepts that defined the anti-slavery debate at either end of the spectrum.¹³¹ By considering analyses of broad intellectual trends, the question of colonial identity, and the tension between liberty and security, I will be able to describe the intellectual space in which both communities of anti-slavery advocates wrote.

This chapter utilizes the three groups of sources to craft an intellectual and social backdrop for the anti-slavery writings of the time. By determining how anti-slavery advocates in both places understood and reproduced “rebellion”, I will show how differences in geography and community impacted the rhetoric of the abolition movement. Several of scholars have looked at the role that slave rebellions and the French Revolution played on the political debates surrounding abolition and emancipation. This chapter will not focus on those debates, but on the social commentary surrounding them. I argue that while those in the West Indies were heavily focused on white security due to their proximity to black rebellion and their interest in maintaining the status quo power hierarchy, Irish anti-slavery advocates were more apt to use the language of liberty and revolt because of their distance from black rebellion and their own interest in undermining existing power structures.

The chapter will be structured as follows. First, I will provide an overview of the major revolts and developments in the security context of the Atlantic world, including the imperial struggles, slave revolts, and major works produced. Second, I will look specifically at the roles Ireland and the West Indies played in forming and maintaining this environment. This will allow

¹³¹ S. Swaminathan, “(Re)Defining Mastery: James Ramsay versus the West Indian Planter,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 34, no. 3 (August 1, 2016): 301–23, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rh.2016.34.3.301>; Srividhya Swaminathan, “Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision,” *Slavery & Abolition* 24, no. 3 (December 2003): 40–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440390308559167>; Chine Sonoi, “Southey’s Radicalism and the Abolitionist Movement,” *Wordsworth Circle* 42 (2011), <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A255038513/LitRC?sid=googlescholar>.

me to place the anti-slavery messaging within its social and political context. After I establish the major events, I will address the role of individual and group security in anti-slavery writing more broadly, including overarching themes and influential contemporary works. Then, I will look at the writing of each space. For the Irish community, it was easy to identify with the cause of the slave because of their distance from the consequences of black revolt and their own struggle for autonomy and liberation. For West Indian advocates, the fears of the white population at-large for their well-being in a demographically imbalanced and perpetually violent space led them to a gradualist, pro-planter anti-slavery message. To conclude, I will look at the role that arguments surrounding instability, liberation, and ‘civilization’ played in the greater movement and speak to the need for further scholarship on the topic.

Security in the British Atlantic world

The early modern period was marked by massive social and political upheaval throughout the Western world and its empires. Wars took place in the British and French Caribbean, France, the United States, and Ireland, immersing the populations of those places in the rhetoric and experience of revolt. In Ireland, the burgeoning republican movement looked upon white- *and* black-led insurrection favorably, and the language of anti-slavery reflected those individuals’ values. Even those not directly involved in Irish liberation efforts adopted messages of nationalism and perceived slaves as ‘harmless victims’, a sharp distinction from their West Indian counterparts. Those who engaged in the anti-slavery movement in Ireland – not the entire society – took on the persona of “liberator” in their work and were comfortable with progressive rhetoric. The West Indian advocates produced a different set of writings, both in tone and argument, because as white men, although they shared a common goal with the Irish, they were the ones being rebelled against. This caused the writers there to adopt a conservative message

that prioritized white interest and safety above black freedom. Many tried to argue that abolition could benefit both parties – if the trade was abolished, no more “dangerous internal enemies” would have to be imported into the sugar islands, therefore leading to an improved security environment for the white population.¹³² Revolutions throughout the 18th century, whether black-led or white-led, required responses from the societies they affected. For those writing in the anti-slavery movement, their proximity to the enslaved population and their community’s history with insurrection shaped their views on the legitimacy of black rebellion and the threat posed by enslaved people.

West Indian Context

In the British West Indies, more years in the 18th century saw conflict than knew peace. Though there was a hiatus from organized violence from 1739-1760 due to peace treaties signed that ended the *eighty-year* war with the Maroons, Tacky’s Revolt once again threw the region into disarray. Alongside the deaths of both white and black individuals, and the massive property damage costs incurred, Tacky’s War also set off a series of rebellions that manifested in 1761, 1765 and 1766.¹³³ The coordination between these uprisings is debated, but their impact in fostering an environment of paranoia and dread was evident. The situation was further exacerbated by a series of poisonings that took place in Saint Domingue between 1757-8. While a Maroon known as Macandal was eventually blamed for these events, some scholars argue that it was in fact expired flour from the colonial trade, not “black magic”, that caused the sickness.¹³⁴ The height of the anti-slavery movement in the 1790s also coincided with a renewed

¹³² Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, “Dangerous Internal Enemies,” in *The Plantation Machine*, Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 101–36.

¹³³ Fergus, “Dread of Insurrection,” 757–58.

¹³⁴ Burnard and Garrigus, “Dangerous Internal Enemies,” 1–4. The argument that it was spoiled flour, not poison, is supported by the fact that as many blacks perished from this wave of ‘poisonings’ as whites.

wave of insurrection in the Caribbean. The death tolls of British troops sent to quell the Haitian Revolution – 12,700 by 1797 (by a conservative estimate) – and the brutal revival of the Jamaican Maroon War in 1795 ushered in another era of fear and repression.¹³⁵ Anti-slavery advocates entered this space with an appreciation for the fears of the white population and tailored their arguments to those fears. The arguments surrounding abolition (addressing the threat of slaves as a group) and Christianization (the idea that individuals could be ‘civilized’ into a peaceful nature) were presented in a way that promised more secure conditions for the white West Indian audience.

Irish Context

The vast majority of Irish anti-slavery advocates and the Irish reading public did not have firsthand experience with slave rebellion. While they benefitted from slave produce and many served on slave ships and in trading companies, the Irish state never formally engaged with the trade, offering a veneer of innocence and a sense of righteousness capitalized upon by anti-slavery advocates there. Furthermore, many of the authors, particularly those writing in the 1780s and 1790s, were participants in a rising nationalist movement against the Protestant Ascendancy and the British military, which resulted in an anti-slavery message more sympathetic to slave interests than planter outcomes. Ireland’s troubled history as an internal British colony had established a revolutionary tradition on the island that was revived in the 18th century. Like the West Indies, the 1760s were also a destabilizing time for Ireland, which experienced rapid economic development, major population growth, increased political participation, the emergence of an identifiable public opinion, and the “...explosion of social

¹³⁵ Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation*, 12.

protest” along political-confessional lines.¹³⁶ Between 1704 and 1780, the Test Act excluded all those who rejected Anglican beliefs from holding public office, forcibly moved their places of worship to the outskirts of towns, and “inflicted second-class status upon dissenters.”¹³⁷ The burgeoning Irish patriot movement responded to this repression, bringing together ideas of commercial grievance (the “free trade” movement mentioned in the previous section), Irish sovereignty, and the limits of imperial rights to create a “...sense of a shared grievance and a shared destiny.”¹³⁸ The American Revolution also had a massive impact on Irish society; the crisis allowed Ireland to renegotiate her own constitutional status, gaining more legislative autonomy in 1782, and eased the transition from republican rhetoric to efforts toward its implementation. The culmination of this unrest made space for a new republican sect, the United Irishmen, to form in 1791. The United Irishmen, many of whom became ardent abolitionists, attempted to transcend confessional difference by uniting Dissenters and Catholics against what they viewed as their shared Anglican oppressor. However, even those who did not engage directly with the republican movement, such as Mary Birkett, expressed nationalist sentiment and viewed slaves as neutral victims, not mortal threats. The Irish anti-slavery message demonstrated a distance between the narrative and reality of insurrection. When considering slave rebellions, advocates were sympathetic; when addressing the slave as an individual, they were benevolent.

¹³⁶ Whelan, “The Green Atlantic: Radical Reciprocities between Ireland and America in the Long Eighteenth Century,” 218.

¹³⁷ Whelan, 221.

¹³⁸ Whelan, 218–19.

Understanding “security” in the anti-slavery movement

In Ireland and the West Indies, anti-slavery messaging took on very different tones and themes. This was largely based on their proximity to slave rebellion and their community’s identity as “liberator” or “victim”. This perspective shaped each space’s conception of the relative threat of slaves to the white population, both as a group and on the individual level. In the West Indies, the demographic imbalance, the experience of slave-led insurrection, and racist notions of ‘inherent violence’ caused the white population – anti-slavery advocates included – to conceptualize the presence of people of color, particularly imported Africans, as a threat. This resulted in arguments against slavery which focused on ending the importation of Africans (abolition of the trade) and ‘civilizing’ the population already in the sugar islands (proselytization). In Ireland, distance from this conflict and a positive opinion of their own rebellions led the anti-slavery community to place less emphasis on the outcome of white security. Though not every advocate addressed slave insurrection, those that did projected their own experience over that of the slave. For the writers who did not address conflict, slaves were still not perceived as threatening, but as hapless victims or “noble savages”. Though there was variation within both communities, West Indian anti-slavery advocates wrote to a white community concerned with self-defense, while Irish advocates wrote to a rising, outspoken community concerned with their own liberation and advancement.

The Enlightenment and the anti-slavery movement

Though anti-slavery writers in Ireland and the West Indies often diverged in tone and argument, the communities relied on a few commonly-cited sources. Advocates in both regions, often quoted passages from the leading French and English philosophers of the day in their writing. Locke’s ideas on an individual’s freedoms from the government and Montesquieu’s

delineation of personal and political slavery, for example, were invoked when the piece addressed Parliament in order to emphasize the role of the state in ending the trade. When focusing on slaves' labor and living conditions, advocates often cited Abbé Raynal's and Diderot's more radical ideas, such as the rise of a "Black Spartacus".¹³⁹ Out of all of the intellectual influencers, the Baron de Montesquieu was the most cited. His satirical chapter from *The Spirit of the Laws*, "On the Enslavement of Negroes," was often paraphrased by Irish advocates, whose strident tone matched the ironic passage.¹⁴⁰ West Indians also employed Montesquieu, albeit in a more serious manner. The Rev. James Ramsay, who helped to construct the security framework for West Indian anti-slavery arguments by popularizing the belief that slaves and masters were "natural enemies", borrowed the phrase from Montesquieu. The latter author had argued that in a society under a tyrannical government, a great number of slaves posed no threat because almost all people existed in a similar oppressed state. However, under conditions of "civil liberty", the oppressed person would see the "...happiness of a society, of which he is not so a member." According to Montesquieu, "[n]othing more assimilates a man to a beast, than living among freemen; himself a slave. Such people as these are the *natural enemies* of the society, and their number must be dangerous."¹⁴¹ The Enlightenment was not friendly to all those seeking liberation; many ideas, particularly around labor and efficiency, were inhumane, and many people who were not white or male were excluded from its promises. In

¹³⁹ William Dickson and William Lloyd Garrison, *Letters on Slavery* (London : printed and sold by J. Phillips ... and sold by J. Johnson ... and Elliot and Kay ..., 1789), 43, 99; Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, *Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. A New Edition with Considerable Additions*, A new ed. with considerable additions. (London, 1788), 13; James White, *Hints for a Specific Plan for an Abolition of the Slave Trade, and for Relief of the Negroes in the British West Indies* (London, 1788), 30; Unknown, *An Essay on the Slave Trade; Enumerating Its Horrors, and Shewing the Vice of Encouraging It by the Consumption of West-India Productions: And Also Shewing the Certainty of Its Abolition by the Disuse of Them*. (Cork, 1792), 8; Theobald Wolfe Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* (Belfast: Re-printed by order of the Society of United Irishmen of Belfast, 1791), 28.

¹⁴⁰ Mullalla, *A Compilation on the Slave Trade, Respectfully Addressed to the People of Ireland.*, 17.

¹⁴¹ Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *De l'esprit Des Loix.*, Nouvelle éd. (Londres, 1769), 348. My italics.

this context, arguments made by its leading thinkers were employed in the service of liberation, albeit in different ways.

West Indian Writers

In the West Indies, anti-slavery writers wrote in a piecemeal white community forged together by their fear of demographic imbalance and instability. Though white people in the West Indies came from all parts of the British Isles – English, Scottish, Native Irish, Anglo-Irish and Dissenters all found communities there – when it came to security, the unifying identity of whiteness was more powerful than class or religious divides. Fear of people of color was particularly virulent in Jamaica, the island with the largest and fastest-growing enslaved population. According to research by B.W. Higman, the slave population in Jamaica grew from 173,000 to 276,000 between 1760 and 1790, and in the second half of the 18th century, over 605,000 slaves disembarked on the island (though several were relocated).¹⁴² Because of the demographic imbalance and the reality of slave insurrection, both pro- and anti-slavery advocates agreed that capping the further importation of Africans was desirable.

Edward Long's "The History of Jamaica" (1774)

Tacky's War left a mark on the discourse of security in the West Indies more than any other rebellion until the Haitian Revolution because it shaped the views of the influential planter-historian Edward Long. Long, a pro-slavery advocate and virulent racist who had experienced the conflict firsthand, wrote in his landmark study *The History of Jamaica* (1774) that the violence was attributable to the character of imported African slaves.¹⁴³ Anticipating the

¹⁴² B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 61.

¹⁴³ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island with Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government: In Three Volumes, Illustrated with Copper Plates*. (London: Printed for TLowndes, 1774), 411. Many of the imported African slaves that engaged in these rebellions had, in fact, gained military experience in

arguments of 19th-century scientific racism, Long concluded that the Creole population of the sugar islands were more desirable than imported Africans, whom he described as "criminals", "insolent", and "bestial".¹⁴⁴ In his view, because of their mixed bloodline, "...Creole Blacks... with very moderate instruction in the Christian rules, [could] be kept in good order without the whip," and lacked the Africans' inherent tendency to rebel.¹⁴⁵

Ironically enough, historian Claudius Fergus notes that "[a]bolitionists, beginning with [Rev. James] Ramsay, consistently made Long their principal authority for internal security and the virtues of creolization..."¹⁴⁶ Because of the security environment in which the anti-slavery advocates operated and the common assumptions of that society regarding black character, Long's arguments remained relevant. His ideas on the inherent violence of imported Africans and his support for abolition of the trade (though not the practice of slavery) allowed anti-slavery advocates to base their own arguments off of his work, and he was often cited in pamphlets and Parliamentary debates.¹⁴⁷ Though writers in the West Indies generally vouched for the equal capability (if not development) of all men's mental faculties, the idea of Creole superiority in terms of labor output and moral character often remained central to their writing. For those who did not address the ostensible differences between Creole and Black laborers, the concern over black violence still loomed. For example, the notion that slaves and their owners were "natural enemies" – an idea that was espoused by Long and had been legitimized in the anti-slavery

wars back in Africa or through forced conscription into the royal navy. For more on the transatlantic nature of slave rebellions and Gold Coast wars, see Vincent Brown, "Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War", forthcoming (Harvard University Press, 2020).

¹⁴⁴ Long, 411; 414.

¹⁴⁵ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island with Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government: In Three Volumes, Illustrated with Copper Plates*. (London: Printed for TLowndes, 1774), 411.

¹⁴⁶ Fergus, "Dread of Insurrection," 762–63.

¹⁴⁷ Fergus, 762.

movement by Rev. James Ramsay – was axiomatic in the region. Even those who did not agree with Long’s conclusions were forced to address *The History of Jamaica*; for example, the published letters of William Dickson, a former colonial administrator, argue that Long was incorrect, and that the white population (particularly the poor whites) of Jamaica had demonstrated more consistent violence than their slaves; therefore, the cause of insurrection was treatment, not character.¹⁴⁸ The omnipresence of Long’s work in the West Indian anti-slavery debate meant that, generally speaking, even those opposed to the practice of slavery accepted the premise that people of color posed a mortal threat to the white population.

Slave insurrection

The culmination of the massive demographic imbalance, the recent history of unrest, and the basic understanding that slaves’ and masters’ interests were at odds resulted in a conservative, white-security focused discourse from West Indian anti-slavery writers. Though advocates in the West Indies were less socially cohesive than their Irish counterparts – some were religious leaders, others were lawyers, colonial administrators, or elected officials – their race and place in the security framework of the region led them to promote similar messages. The amalgamation of interests and background and the transient nature of settlement in the British West Indies made the consistency of anti-slavery arguments all the more remarkable. Overall, the message from West Indian anti-slavery advocates regarding slave insurrection was that amelioration and abolition would reduce the chance of another uprising, therefore ensuring the safety of whites, particularly the planter class.

¹⁴⁸ Dickson and Garrison, *Letters on Slavery*.

James Stephen, a lawyer and resident of Barbados, presented this argument in his 1802 pamphlet *The crisis of the sugar colonies*.¹⁴⁹ Stephen believed that ameliorating slaves' labor conditions and *gradually* converting them into militiamen once freed would enhance the security of the British Caribbean holdings in the long run. The pamphlet, a collection of letters published in the last decade of the 18th century and the early years of the next, was written at the height of the Haitian Revolution, and the majority of arguments revolved around the external threat. In the final section of his piece, Stephen states his argument clearly: "[t]he foundation, then...on which alone I deem it practicable to build the future security of the Sugar colonies, is that of meliorating the condition of the great mass of the people, and converting them from dangerous enemies to defenders."¹⁵⁰ Stephen does not argue that the slave population of the British West Indies is harmless – he calls them “dangerous enemies” – but he posits that over time, with reforms, the overwhelming number of black laborers in the sugar islands could be converted to soldiers in order to heighten the security of white people. While the threat from outside the British holdings was significant, Stephen does not ignore the possibility of internal violence. On page 121, he argues the “extreme and unnatural bondage in which the great majority of the inhabitants [of the French Caribbean] are held presents some view of danger” for the British planter. In short, the violence in St. Domingue served as a preview for what may come should the British not institute substantial reforms. He goes on to argue that amelioration and abolition, or “internal reformation”, would be the “most effectual way” to strengthen the colonies.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ James Stephen, *The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies, or, An Enquiry into the Objects and Probable Effects of the French Expedition to the West Indies, and Their Connection with the Colonial Interests of the British Empire : To Which Are Subjoined, Sketches of a Plan for Settling the Vacant Lands of Trinidad, in Four Letters to the Right Hon. Henry Addington, Chancellor of the Exchequer, &c.* (London, 1802).

¹⁵⁰ Stephen, 150.

¹⁵¹ Stephen, 121.

Another interesting part of Stephen's rhetoric is his distinction between the European understanding of political tyranny and personal slavery. In responding to the common pro-slavery argument that liberating the slaves would lead to their radicalization, the author instead argues that his opponents unjustly associate the term "freeman", particularly in the Haitian context, with their European understandings of Jacobinism, accusing his opponent of projecting the "foolish quarrels in his own corner of the globe" onto the intentions of West Indian slaves. He rejects the notion that ending the practice of slavery had any political meaning for people of color, instead choosing to focus on the individual freedom gained by each slave.¹⁵² By diminishing the possibility of any political movement and separating the Haitian slave revolt from the French Revolution, Stephen tries to assuage planters' fears of reprisal by negating the possibility of collective black agency. Stephen's message is clear throughout – as long as the current conditions under which slaves labored and lived persisted, people of color would remain "dangerous enemies". At any time, the slaves in the British colonies could rebel in a manner similar to the Haitians. To curtail this threat, he argues that "...the state of the negroes must be gradually, but fundamentally, changed." If amelioration, abolition, and emancipation did eventually occur, Stephen shows that white West Indians could still rest easy; the newly-liberated slaves would have no interest in enacting broader political designs.

William Dickson, the former private secretary to Edward Hay, governor of Jamaica, shared the view that the treatment of slaves was what led to their insurrection and that in time, the mass of slave laborers could be converted into an effective militia.¹⁵³ Dickson, aware of Long's thesis,

¹⁵² Stephen, 23–25.

¹⁵³ Dickson and Garrison, *Letters on Slavery*, v–vi.

was intentional about arguing that enslaved people were *not* inherently violent, but the oppression they had experienced by the hands of their owners had driven them to desperate acts:

“...[slaves’] passions are often kept in an unceasing ferment by unrewarded toil and ill usage, and sometimes roused, even to desperation, by acts of injustice and cruelty. If such be frequently their treatment, is it surprising that slaves should be indocile, stubborn, averse from labour, and regardless of their owner’s interest? ... Hence a frequent conflict between the angry passions of the owner and those of the slave, a conflict in which the former often loses sight of his *interest*, and the latter of his safety.”¹⁵⁴

To emphasize that it was not the slaves’ nature, but their condition that led them to resistance, Dickson recounted his own experience living on the island of Barbados, where for several years, he had travelled unarmed and at night, but was never bothered by any person of color. He goes on to mention the experience of another unnamed white man in the Leeward Islands, who claims to not remember “...a single instance of any white person having been robbed, murdered, or even materially hurt by a negro.”¹⁵⁵ Dickson goes on to describe the disproportionate punishments doled out by planters for offenses against whites, calling them “...dreadful and excruciating, to a degree far beyond any idea I could have formed of the duration and poignancy of human suffering...”¹⁵⁶ The anecdote he chooses to relay is that of punishment for slaves who had killed their master, though “...driven to that act of violence by oppression and hunger.” The punishment for the two men was to be gibbeted alive, and for the woman, “whose guilt was not wholly proved”, the sentence was enchainment to the gallows “...to be a spectator of their prolonged tortures.”¹⁵⁷ The desperate tone of this story is carried throughout the piece; Dickson’s goal is to describe non-insurgent slaves as victims and to justify the actions of those who had committed acts of violence.

¹⁵⁴ Dickson and Garrison, 55.

¹⁵⁵ Dickson and Garrison, 20–21.

¹⁵⁶ Dickson and Garrison, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Dickson and Garrison, 18–19.

Dickson also makes an effort to legitimize his own voice to his audience. In the introduction to *Letters*, he states the following:

"Still I shall not be at all surprised if *certain readers*, unable to explain away facts (not to mention arguments) should affect to represent these letters as the mere effusions of a heated imagination, and the writer as an intemperate zealot, perhaps as a rank republican - just as if an abhorrence of slavery implied a love of anarchy."¹⁵⁸

Later, after he has devoted considerable space to contextualizing slave violence and full chapters to exposing white violence, the author again returns to his own defense. On page 89, Dickson states that he is "...an enemy to all sudden and violent measures, an enemy to *anarchy*, though a friend to rational *liberty*" and that when the slaves were eventually freed, "protection may be immediately extended" to their former owners.¹⁵⁹ Even with these few caveats, Dickson's piece is a direct response to the arguments of Edward Long. His chapters devoted to barbarities committed by the white population mirror chapters devoted to descriptions of black violence in *The History of Jamaica*. Though Dickson argues that it is not the nature of the slave, but his condition, that leads him to rebellion, he still writes within a security framework focused on advancing white security.

Proselytization

Two of the most influential West Indian anti-slavery advocates were the Anglican ministers Rev. James Ramsay and Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, whose works were analyzed in the previous chapter through the lens of economic security. While both men devoted space to the economics of the slave system, their works are broad enough that issues of physical security also take precedence. James Ramsay, unlike Stephen and Dickson, subscribed to the arguments of

¹⁵⁸ Dickson and Garrison, ix.

¹⁵⁹ Dickson and Garrison, 89–90.

Edward Long regarding the inherent threat of black violence, and used that fact to argue for the abolition of the trade. Ramsay himself was a proponent of Creolization, subscribing to the belief that imported Africans posed a particular threat; furthermore, Ramsay was agreeable to the Creole population because a good number of them had already been converted to Christianity.¹⁶⁰ To Ramsay, the Creole identity was closer to the white identity in religion and behavior and therefore their presence was more desirable. The same notion of inherent violence and barbarity is the foundation for his proselytization efforts. In fact, his famous “natural enemies” passage does not come in a section addressing slave rebellion, but in the middle of the Reverend’s recollection of his own challenges in converting his slaves.¹⁶¹ The goal of Christianizing his slaves is to quell their ‘savage’ nature, therefore eliminating the necessity for use of the whip and advancing his own security.¹⁶² Ramsay does express a genuine desire to save the souls of his slaves, stating that

“...the instruction of our negroe slaves is an act of goodness of the highest and most extensive nature: and the circumstances of our having originally inlaved [sic] them, of their living intirely [sic] for, and depending on us, and too frequently oppressed and cruelly treated by individuals among us, gives them the strongest claim for receiving it at our hands.”¹⁶³

However, most of the discussion surrounding proselytization in *An essay on the treatment and conversion of African slaves* relates to economic and behavioral outcomes, ridding the slaves of their “...spirit of carelessness and opposition.”¹⁶⁴ After converting the slaves, Ramsay also intends to complete their ‘civilization’, teaching them to practice “...neatness in their persons and clothing, a sobriety in their carriage, a sensibility in their manner... [and] an [sic] universal

¹⁶⁰ Fergus, “Dread of Insurrection,” 761; Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent.*, 236.

¹⁶¹ Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. By the Reverend James Ramsay, M.A. Vicar of Teston, in Kent.*, 148.

¹⁶² Ramsay, 148–54.

¹⁶³ Ramsay, 120.

¹⁶⁴ Ramsay, 151.

unimpeached honesty in their conduct.”¹⁶⁵ Ramsay believed that under a system of slavery, it was necessary to assume that the slave had intentions of “treachery and cunning”, just as the master practiced a degree of “tyranny”.¹⁶⁶ By Christianizing and ‘civilizing’ the enslaved population, the ‘inherent violence and dishonesty’ that plagued people of color would be eliminated, they would be of “greater importance” to their masters (referring to production potential), and the white population would become more secure.

The Reverend Robert Boucher Nickolls had a similar approach to Ramsay in that he placed his arguments for evangelism alongside demography-based security concerns. Following a brief section where he accused planters of a “force of prejudice” making them “...invincibly unwilling...to admit slaves into the privileges of Christianity”, he immediately turns to a discussion of recent import rates of African slaves.¹⁶⁷ Expressing concern that “...the number of whites has apparently diminished in a greater proportion than that of blacks” on his home island of Barbados, leaving about four times as many blacks as whites.¹⁶⁸ For Rev. Boucher Nickolls, proselytization and the gradual extension of liberty were self-reinforcing:

“At length, by mild and uniform operation of Christian principles, slavery itself might be abolished. For though Christianity at its first promulgation, for obvious reasons, did not affect to introduce any alteration in the civil rights of men, yet its genuine tendency is friendly to civil liberty, as Montesquieu has observed in its favour...”¹⁶⁹

According to the Reverend, the introduction of Christianity to slaves would slowly improve their character to the point where they could be trusted to operate in the service of their master without the use of force. Once again, though Boucher Nickolls does hold genuine

¹⁶⁵ Ramsay, 141.

¹⁶⁶ Ramsay, 149.

¹⁶⁷ Nickolls, *A Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of Slave Trade from the Rev. Robert Boucher Nickolls, Dean of Middleham.*, 19–20.

¹⁶⁸ Nickolls, 20. The actual figures he cites are 25,000 whites to 90,000 black inhabitants of Barbados.

¹⁶⁹ Nickolls, 27.

concern for the spiritual outcomes of slaves in Barbados, the majority of the piece is meant to persuade the West Indian planter that abolition would benefit him. The final sections of the book show this clearly: continuing his arguments in a procedural manner, Boucher Nickolls discusses how the abolition of the slave trade would benefit the “planter”, the “British merchant”, the “British nation”, “the American States”, the “moralist and philanthropist”, “all the world”, “government”, “nations yet unborn”, and “the reign of George the Third”.¹⁷⁰ Conspicuously missing from this list, of course, is the slave.

Though their positions and background often differed, West Indian anti-slavery advocates’ messages were very similar regarding abolition. Whether they were administrators, planters, or religious leaders, each of these men’s views were shaped by the massive demographic inequality of the sugar islands and the firsthand experience of slave rebellion that manifested in a near-paranoia among the white population. In their writing, amelioration and abolition become the surest way to eliminate the collective threat of the slave population as well as the individual threat of “inherently violent” slaves.

Irish Writers

Irish anti-slavery advocates did not share the fears of their West Indian counterparts. Nevertheless, for both the radical and religious strains of writing in Ireland, proximity to slave revolt and their relation to the British shaped their views on white security in the West Indies. For the United Irishmen, a group that united disaffected Catholics and Dissenters against their Anglican ‘oppressors’, the plight of the West Indian slave seemed analogous to their own. Black agency was acceptable to the radical Irish community – when Olaudah Equiano visited Ireland in

¹⁷⁰ Nickolls, 29–30.

1791 to promote his book, *An interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, he found a remarkably warm reception in Belfast, the epicenter of United Irishmen activity.¹⁷¹ This acceptance, even celebration, of black anti-slavery leadership differentiated the Irish radical community from the smaller British radical strain. In the metropole, anti-slavery advocates presented an uncomfortable but coexistent state between "outraged sympathy and identification with African slaves" and "uneasy notions of African otherness".¹⁷² The radical Irish anti-slavery community did not share this queasiness; for them, the identity of "liberator" was shared between the geographies and the character of the African slave was interchangeable with that of the Irish citizen. Thomas McCabe, the United Irishman best known for declaring "...[m]ay God eternally damn the soul of the man who subscribes the first guinea" at the prospect of a Belfast-based slave trading company, proudly referred to himself as "the Irish slave".¹⁷³ This substitution allowed anti-slavery writers to gloss over issues of race, instead projecting their own experience onto that of enslaved people. In doing this, the latter's cause became right and just, and their own base of support expanded to include some anti-slavery advocates.

While the contributions from the radical northern communities were significant, their content did not comprise the entirety of Ireland's anti-slavery message. A second strain of literature, led by the Quaker community in Dublin, Cork, and at Ballitore, communicated religious and moral arguments against the trade. This community, which often included women's voices, was less engaged with revolutionary ideas but still espoused nationalist

¹⁷¹ Bill Rolston, "'Ireland of the Welcomes'? Racism and Anti-Racism in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322042000298437>.

¹⁷² Coleman, "Conspicuous Consumption."

¹⁷³ Rolston, "'Ireland of the Welcomes'?", 361.

sentiment, particularly in the 1790s.¹⁷⁴ In the second edition of Mary Birkett's *A poem on the African slave trade*, she includes a new section that condemns "Albion" for her actions and explicitly calls upon British politicians to "...bid [their] brethren live."¹⁷⁵ Though the Quaker community was less strident, the arguments for proselytization demonstrated the same superficial understanding of white security in the West Indies as their radical neighbors. These writers employed soaring rhetoric and imaginative, moving narratives but avoided practicalities of rebellion and profit. Their support of religious instruction for slaves had little to do with the racist cause of changing their "nature" to the benefit of whites and more to do with the slaves' own salvation and intellectual improvement. This sect of the Irish anti-slavery community, tied closely to their religious cohorts in London and Bristol, described slaves in "noble savage"-like terms and celebrated the potential of what they pictured as minds, *tabula rasa*. The transatlantic nature of the religious message demonstrated how their civilizing mission was did not account for security concerns. For these authors, proselytization and general 'improvement' should take place in both the sugar islands *and* Africa; the outcomes of Christianization, therefore, were detached from the surrounding white population. Rather than quelling 'inherent violence', the Irish Quaker and broader religious community desired to spread the gospel to people of color for what they saw as their own benefit.

Slave Insurrection

James Mullalla, the Trinity scholar, patriot historian, and notable opponent of the abstention campaign, forcefully expressed the radical's anti-slavery message in his 1792

¹⁷⁴ Ireland's close ties to the French revolutionary tradition and their networks of ideas, trade, and people made the French Revolution particularly influential among Ireland's non-dominant communities. Therefore, the height of anti-British sentiment expressed in the context of anti-slavery coincided with the height of the French Revolution, around 1792.

¹⁷⁵ Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her Own Sex*, 29.

pamphlet *A compilation on the slave trade, respectfully addressed to the People of Ireland*.¹⁷⁶

While the piece begins with standard components of anti-slavery language – describing the slaves as “...injured and oppressed part of the human species” and discussing slavery and servitude in classical times – it escalates quickly into a manifesto against oppression.¹⁷⁷ After a short section reviewing Montesquieu’s satirical chapter, “On the Enslavement of Negroes”, Mullalla concludes that anyone who justifies the system of slavery deserves “...the philosopher’s utmost contempt and the negroe’s dagger.”¹⁷⁸ The author’s justification of violence against planters is remarkable; in a section of informal dialogue, Mullalla continues, colorfully describing enslavement as violence and rebellion as self-defense:

“If you think yourself authorised to oppress me, because you are stronger and more ingenious than I am, do not complain if my vigorous arm shall plunge a dagger into your heart; do not complain when in your tortured entrails you shall feel the pangs of death from poison which has been conveyed into your food. I am stronger and more ingenious than you; fall a victim therefore, in your turn, and expiate the crime of having been an oppressor.”¹⁷⁹

Mullalla, writing in 1792, is evidently familiar with the poisoning scares that had taken place in St. Domingue a few decades earlier, yet consciously argues in their favor. While some may have condemned the graphic language, this message was well-suited to a disgruntled Irish audience that could place themselves in the place of the protagonist. Mullalla continues, re-inserting the slave in the narrative and calling for the rise of a “great man,” a “new Spartacus” who would defeat the West Indian Crassus to free his people.¹⁸⁰ In the last two pages of his

¹⁷⁶ Rodgers, “Ireland and the Black Atlantic in the Eighteenth Century,” 2000, 191; Mullalla, *A Compilation on the Slave Trade, Respectfully Addressed to the People of Ireland*.

¹⁷⁷ Mullalla, *A Compilation on the Slave Trade, Respectfully Addressed to the People of Ireland*., iii; 8–9.

¹⁷⁸ Mullalla, 17.

¹⁷⁹ Mullalla, 18.

¹⁸⁰ Mullalla, 25. I am aware that Spartacus died and Crassus ultimately defeated the slave army; Mullalla does not seem to take this into account in his analogy.

pamphlet, Mullalla turns his analysis to Catholic Ireland, calling for their liberation and equality, again quitting the slave from the narrative of oppression.¹⁸¹ *A compilation on the slave trade* is notable for its use of graphic descriptions and explicit approval of violence – not even all radical pamphlets went this far. However, it remains a useful representation of the field because of its content – in its most jarring arguments, Mullalla substitutes himself, a white man, for the slave, and in its conclusion, the attention is diverted to a better-known cause (Catholic oppression) to his readers. The call for a black Spartacus is notable and clear, but it is not the point of emphasis in the piece – Mullalla’s right to self-defense in situations of oppression (ostensibly describing slavery, but easily translatable to the Anglo-Irish conflict) is.

Thomas Russell, a United Irishman writing in 1796, takes a similar approach to Mullalla in his work *A Letter to the People of Ireland, on the Present Situation of the Country*.¹⁸² He begins by describing the current disparities between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, using the opportunity to promote the United Irishmen as an equalizing national force. He describes the British as introducing “oppressive and sanguinary laws... enforced for the purpose of extinguishing any spark of freedom that might yet exist.”¹⁸³ Russell then transitions toward the topic of the slave trade by discussing the complicity of the British Navy in its functioning.

Because many Irishmen had been conscripted into service, Russell asks:

“Are the Irish nation [sic] aware that this contest involves the question of the slave trade, the one now of the greatest consequence on the face of the earth? Are they willing to employ their treasure and their blood in support of that system, because England has 70 or 7000 millions [sic] engaged in it, the only argument that can be adduced in its favour, *monstrous* as it may appear?”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Mullalla, 26–27.

¹⁸² Thomas Russell, *A Letter to the People of Ireland, on the Present Situation of the Country*, by Thomas Russell, - *an United Irishman* (Belfast: printed at the Northern Star Office, 1796).

¹⁸³ Russell, 14.

¹⁸⁴ Russell, 22.

In this passage, Russell not only condemns the slave trade but gives his countrymen a righteous reason to resist British influence and control. By combining the efforts of the two movements, Russell easily transitions between the plight of Catholics and slaves and provides the audience with an actionable message. Russell goes on to explicitly address slavery, calling West Indian planters “wicked demons” and stating that Irishmen who support the British military or continue to pay taxes were to blame for upholding the slave system.¹⁸⁵ The conclusion of Russell’s letter is notably ambiguous, reminding the Irish people that they were accountable for their actions “...to God *alone*,” and therefore should seek liberty by “...breaking and destroying those prejudices and institutions which made man bow down before man...”¹⁸⁶ Instead of referring to either specific cause, Russell remains engaged in surface-level liberation rhetoric and allows his audience to fill in the blanks. Russell’s pamphlet equates accusations against the West Indian planter and the British administrator, allowing his audience to maintain their personal grievances while identifying with the slaves’ oppression.

Proselytization

Mary Birkett, an eighteen-year-old Quaker woman from Dublin, was one of the leading voices of the religious anti-slavery movement in Ireland. Her 1792 piece, *A poem on the African slave trade addressed to her own sex* utilized rhetoric and imaginative scenes to stir the sympathies of her readers.¹⁸⁷ In the second edition, Birkett added explicitly patriotic language to her anti-slavery message and criticized the British government for its inaction. Though Ireland provided a significant number of sailors to slaving companies and her towns profited

¹⁸⁵ Russell, 23–24.

¹⁸⁶ Russell, 24.

¹⁸⁷ Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her Own Sex*.

massively from the import and export trade, the official abstention of the Irish state from the slave trade is celebrated by Birkett:

"Then firm in Innocence - supremely good / In Virtue's awful dignity - she stood / Stood as a rock, which boisterous waves assail, / Unmov'd by every loud and threatening gale / The seducing lure of gold - she dar'd, / And when she weigh'd the crime, she spurn'd the base reward"

This form of nationalist pride was unique to the early 1790s, when the apparent success of the French Revolution and the formation of the United Irishmen defined the exultant tone of the era. As such, Birkett's new edition also dared to include direct criticism of Ireland's "sister kingdoms" (referring to the British Isles) for having "...heap'd on Afric [sic] Misery's piercing woes."¹⁸⁸ Birkett calls upon Parliament to act – "When every vote decisive fate shall give, / Sanction the trade – or bid your brethren live."¹⁸⁹ Similar in tone to Mary Leadbeater's *The Negro (Addressed to Edmund Burke)*, Birkett glorifies the MPs as "God-like" in their power and implores them to "...shine as stars on earth."¹⁹⁰ In *The Negro*, Leadbeater also accuses Britain of inaction, writing "...shall these laws, to foster freedom made, - / shall these defend oppression's guilty trade?"¹⁹¹ Her poem is addressed to the MP Edmund Burke, who had been a family friend from his time studying at the Quaker school at Ballitore.

Birkett's work also serves as the hallmark of religious anti-slavery activism in Ireland. In both editions of *A poem on the African slave trade*, Birkett celebrates the opportunity to convert people of color to Christianity and bring them into the fold of "civilization". She takes particular issue with the fact that other empires, namely the Turks, who convert their slaves to "Mah'met" and the Spaniards, who baptize theirs into the Catholic Church, make efforts to 'instill religion'

¹⁸⁸ Birkett, 27.

¹⁸⁹ Birkett, 29.

¹⁹⁰ Birkett, 29.

¹⁹¹ Mary Leadbeater, *Poems* (Dublin, 1808), 88, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b157860](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b157860).

while Britons sit idly by.¹⁹² Different from West Indian religious writers, who tied Christianity to planter security, Birkett is focused on evangelism for the outcome of the slave – “[t]hey not the joys of mild Religion know, / The ransom’d soul they to a Saviour owe”.¹⁹³ The purely religious approach is emphasized by the transatlantic nature of the proselytization mission. In the works of Revs. Ramsay and Boucher Nickolls, the ‘civilizing’ mission was confined to the Caribbean. In the works of Birkett, Mullalla and others, this mission is directed at people of color in the West Indies and in Africa.¹⁹⁴ The call for a ‘civilization mission’ is echoed in other pamphlets published around the same time; for example, in an anonymous piece published in Cork in 1792, the author laments the lack of European engagement in the African continent. He goes on, describing the African mind not as inferior, but as *tabula rasa*: if the more advanced European were to make an effort, the whole of the African continent would advance in the “arts and sciences”. For Birkett and this author alike, the potential African mission mirrored the historical ‘civilization’ of the British Isles and Ireland by the Romans. Neither piece mentions the West Indian other than to protest their apathy towards slave proselytization and ‘improvement’. The outcomes of Christianization according to the Irish anti-slavery movement were confined to the individual and did not address the security outcomes of their white neighbors.

Though the communities in Ireland that engaged in the anti-slavery movement had different priorities, similar sentiments were present among their authors. Particularly in the 1790s, growing nationalist sentiment allowed Irish patriots to identify their liberation cause with that of the West Indian slave. Distance from slave insurrection and the compelling nature of

¹⁹² Birkett, *A Poem on the African Slave Trade. Addressed to Her Own Sex*, 13.

¹⁹³ Birkett, 13.

¹⁹⁴ Birkett, 15.

their self-interest allowed advocates to substitute their own experience for that of the West Indian slave, resulting in a rhetoric more sympathetic to rebellion and less concerned with white outcomes. Even in the religious strain of Irish anti-slavery work, the era's sense of patriotism led advocates like Mary Birkett and her contemporaries to celebrate the state's innocence and call Parliament to action. Their proselytization message and support for a civilization mission was directed at all people of color, not just those who posed a threat to their white West Indian neighbors. In the Irish anti-slavery movement, liberation and 'improvement' were celebrated without regard for the security environment in which these actions would take place.

Security of Self and Anti-Slavery

The eighteenth century was marked by intense intellectual, social, and political change. White and black individuals on both sides of the Atlantic contributed and reacted to this upheaval. From the latter half of the century until its abolition, slavery was the most consequential and polemic challenge facing the British Empire. The well-known humanitarian narrative of the metropole, led by men like Wilberforce, and to a point, Burke, did not represent the breadth of considerations or the full range of motivations of anti-slavery advocates in the greater British Atlantic world. By including voices from the colonial periphery, we can see how two components – geography and community history – shaped the ideas of writers in both places related to white security. The dichotomy of a vocal and nationalistic sect of the anti-slavery community in Ireland identified with enslaved people in their rebellion against the British 'oppressor'. At the same time, several of the West Indian anti-slavery advocates were those who had been on the receiving end of rebellion. This difference was reflected clearly in the communities' ideas about the relative threat of people of color. Proximity to slave rebellion compounded these views – in Ireland, the distance between the United Irishmen and black

insurgents allowed them to approach the subject with a rhetorical and narrative structure, projecting their own experience, while in the West Indies, ideas were based on demographic analyses, a developing scientific racism, and personal interactions with people of color.

Conclusion

The topic of anti-slavery was one of the most consequential of the early modern period, encompassing questions of economy, security, identity, and power in the British Atlantic world. While recent scholarship has contributed greatly to the expansion of the abolition narrative to include peripheral spaces and marginalized voices, connections across these spaces and individuals have not yet been fully studied. This thesis has aimed to pose topics for further conversation – how does geography shape perspective? What defines a community? How does that community’s history impact individual experience and expression? Nevertheless, this work is not comprehensive. The lens of security through which I approach the topic could easily be replaced by one of gender, religion, or class. In particular, the idea of the protection and preservation of white women in primarily black spaces is one left unexplored in this thesis that scholars would do well to incorporate into the study of anti-slavery in the Atlantic world. Looking at the responses of different religious sects to the problem of slavery is also a rich subtopic. Though Presbyterian, Quaker, and Anglican writers were studied in this thesis, their texts were not analyzed according to beliefs held by their sect that may interconnect or further distinguish them. Lastly, understanding the role of class in anti-slavery – who was writing, who was not, and how representative these writers were of public sentiment – is one left unstudied that merits attention.¹⁹⁵ With all that said, due to the scope of this work and the way that insurrection shaped the history and present of Ireland and the West Indies, the rhetoric of security and liberty was one of the most consistent across both spaces. Other aspects that could

¹⁹⁵ Specifically, a theme common in West Indian, British and Irish anti-slavery writing was a comparison of the living and work conditions of slaves to the developing industrial working class. This was a topic of contention – some (mostly those less-acquainted with the realities of the practice) agreed that slaves were better off, while others disagreed, and others argued it did not matter their conditions when they had been forcibly placed into those conditions (see *An essay on the slave trade*, Cork (1792)).

use further study include the role of American abolitionists in shaping the Atlantic conversation and the diversity of voices within the West Indies and Ireland. American voices like Anthony Benezet were often a part of anti-slavery conversations throughout the Atlantic world, and the complexities of American slavery and slave insurrection would lend useful perspective to this topic. The 1807 cutoff date was another limitation; the anti-slavery movement was still building at this point and there is rich content for study in the following decades, particularly in Ireland, as its republican movement co-opted anti-slavery sentiment to their own ends. Regarding the diversity of voices within each space, the limits of this thesis led me to choose written works that had been cited by their contemporaries and in others' scholarly work. The selection of primary sources naturally led to the exclusion of works that may have lent complexity to the message or challenged my own understanding of the forces that influenced advocates in either space. In this thesis, I have aimed to combine the quantitative historical work of scholars like Sheridan, Dunn, and Truxes with the newer, socially-focused literature of historians like Nini Rodgers and Claudius Fergus to accurately trace how the conversation of anti-slavery developed in each space. The work is unique, to my knowledge, in that it places the literature of two British Atlantic colonies side by side. While recent scholarship has commented on one space or another, none has yet placed the Atlantic colonies in the same conversation. The fact that the two spaces were able to approach the same movement in such different ways shows the necessity of a broader transatlantic focus in understanding the full narrative of anti-slavery.

I chose to study Ireland and the West Indies – two colonies on the British colonial periphery – because their histories, communities, and location on either side of the Atlantic allowed them to engage in a dialogue different than that of the metropole. Both operated, with varying degrees of autonomy, within an imperial system controlled by London, and both spaces

were essential to the Atlantic economy. Nevertheless, when it came to the anti-slavery movement, the two communities approached the issue in starkly different ways. Anti-slavery advocates in Ireland, assuming the dual identity of “consumer” and “liberator”, were apt to push back against the economic and sociopolitical systems that upheld the practice of slavery and held back their own advancement. West Indian anti-slavery advocates, writing in a space wholly dependent on the slave economy and threatened (under certain conditions) by the presence of black insurgency, attempted to walk a line that ended a practice they saw as immoral but protected the structures that maintained white security and primacy. In Ireland and the West Indies, communities projected their own experiences onto the anti-slavery debate. This point is of particular importance because it allows us to reassess a narrative of abolition that has emphasized the humanitarian impulse of British Parliamentary heroes. The anti-slavery movement becomes more powerful and more accessible when we acknowledge that at times, if not most of the time, it was flawed, self-advantageous, and remarkably human.

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