Abolitionism in the Atlantic World: The Organization and Interaction of Anti-Slavery Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries
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The abolitionist movement emerged in the second half of the 18th century as an essentially Anglo-American phenomenon and it was there that social mobilization for the cause proved to be strongest. Originating within transatlantic Quaker networks, it soon spread to non-conformist Protestant groupings and the evangelical movement. In particular, it was British intellectual and financial engagement that carried the cause to Europe, especially France. Interaction between the various national abolitionist movements followed, both in terms of personal contacts and intellectual and cultural transfer (literature, pamphlets, symbolism, and reasoning).

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The Beginning of Critical Reflection on Slavery

Organized protest against the European slave trade and slavery as a labour system in the colonies (Media Link #ac) of the new world emerged in the second half of the 18th century, primarily as an Anglo-American phenomenon. Moral objections of Enlightenment thinkers such as Charles Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) (Media Link #ae) and the natural rights philosophy of freedom and equality (devised by thinkers from the Scottish enlightenment such as Francis Hutcheson (1694–1747) (Media Link #af), Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) (Media Link #ag) and Adam Smith (1723–1790) (Media Link #ah), and also the French enlightenment such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) (Media Link #ai), Guillaume Thomas François Abbé Raynal (1713–1796) (Media Link #aj), and framed as the key idea of the Encyclopédie) were one source of the discourse of protest movements. The other was articulated by non-conformist Protestants, among them the Quakers (the Society of Friends) who argued that the institution of slavery was irreconcilable with Christianity.

Proceeding from the assumption of human equality before God, medieval thinkers had also rejected serfdom, but had not reflected critically on the concept of slavery in detail. This process first began in the 15th century, but was initially restricted to a more partisan condemnation of the enslavement of one's own ethnic and religious group, also within a European framework. The concept of the "freeborn Englishman" who could not be enslaved had emerged by the 17th century, but, remaining non-transferrable, the beneficiaries of this doctrine saw no need to outlaw slave-holding as long as the bonded peoples were extra-European and "heathen" in origin. The cognitive restrictions of the Roman ius gentium, permitting the enslavement of non-citizens (for example prisoners taken in war), maintained its influence, underpinning the profitable transatlantic slave trade in Africans.
By 1770, the economy of the British Caribbean had become almost fully dependent on slave labour; slaves now made up more than 80 per cent of the regional population. High mortality rates meant that the planters retained an interest in the continuation of the slave trade whereas the slave population of the colonies on the North American mainland were maintained by reproduction. British merchants profited from both the transatlantic slave trade and the trade in raw materials produced by slave labour. The same was true for French, Spanish, and Dutch merchants.  

The Legal Status of Slaves in 18th Century Europe

The presence of African slaves in Europe, however, was not considered desirable. A number of isolated cases of slave emancipation occurred as early as the 16th century. The Parlement of Guyenne freed a ship-load of slaves offered for sale in Bordeaux maintaining that “France, the mother of liberty, doesn't permit any slaves.” There was no consensus as to the legality of slaveholding in the metropole. A French royal edict from 1716 ruled that the legal title of a slave-holder was guaranteed as long as his sojourn in France was only temporary and if he had brought his slaves to France for the purpose of religious education or training in a craft. If the slave owner failed to comply with the various formalities concerning the application for and registration of the slaves concerned, they had the right to file for freedom. Nevertheless, not all Parlements accepted the validity of this royal settlement, thus necessitating legal resolution of the status of foreign slaves on French soil and the continuingly open question as to whether entry to France meant automatic emancipation. A number of slaves benefited from this legal ambiguity and achieved emancipation through litigation. Nevertheless, such legal action was always conducted within the context of a highly racist discourse focussing on the (un)desirability of tolerating a free coloured population in France. The situation was finally resolved in 1777 with the declaration Police des Noirs, which forbade the presence of slaves or coloured freemen in France. Nevertheless, this regulation was not uniformly enforced: exceptions were granted and the courts continued to free a number of slaves.

The English legal system also saw itself confronted by the challenge of resolving the legal status of imported and escaped slaves. Despite the existence of a number of slave markets, the courts tended to view enslaved persons not as chattel slaves, i.e. slaves subject to the full disposal of their “masters,” but rather located them in the status of servitude (which existed in England). Courts used the expressions slavish servitude or near slavery and objected to the arbitrary and often brutal penal disposal of the slave holders over slaves. Others, such as William Blackstone (1723–1780), writing in the first edition of the Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765), even advanced the view that their very arrival on English soil automatically transformed slaves into freemen. The most spectacular test of the legal conditions was the so-called Somerset case of 1772 involving the slave James Somerset who, re-captured after a successful escape, was to be sold in Jamaica. London abolitionists, above all Granville Sharp (1735–1813), took up the slave’s case. In his ruling of 22 June 1772, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield (1705–1793), maintained the illegality of a forcible return to the British colonies (and thus bondage). Given considerable publicity in the press (the Anglo-American world enjoyed an extensive and little-censored communication network), the ruling emphasized that in England and its colonies, slavery could only be authorized by positive law, i.e. an Act of Parliament, and could not be derived from existing Common Law. The absence of a corresponding law meant that Somerset was to be released.

The Somerset case acted as the catalyst for co-operation between abolitionists in the metropole and their North-American counterparts. The emancipation a year later of the descendants of slaves in Portugal, on the other hand, passed almost unnoticed in the Atlantic world.

The Genesis of the Abolition Movement in North America and Great Britain up to the Prohibition of the Slave Trade in 1807

Opposition to the practice of slavery and statements to this effect from groups in both North America and Britain pre-dated the judgement handed down in the Somerset case. Quakers from Germantown (Pennsylvania) passed the first prominent anti-slavery resolution in 1688 and the Philadelphian Quaker John Woolman (1720–1772)
&aw) campaigned against slavery and the slave trade amongst Quakers throughout the 1750s.\(^\text{19}\) \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #ax) This culminated in a ban, passed by the Philadelphia Quakers in 1758, forbidding any of their brethren to participate in the slave trade. Similar rulings, increasingly including prohibitions on slave holding by Quakers, were passed in a number of Quaker gatherings in New England and London (1761). Having emigrated from France to Philadelphia via London, the Huguenot teacher Anthony Benezet (1713–1784) \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #ay) was influential in organizing a more comprehensive mobilization against slavery, aiming at a ban on the trade in and holding of slaves throughout the British Empire. Corresponding with the Briton Granville Sharp in 1772 at the height of the Somerset case, he proposed an anti-slave trade petition which was to be handed in by the inhabitants of Maryland and Virginia. Sharp counselled that the petition be addressed not to Parliament but the King, so as to avoid giving popular recognition to any Parliamentary authority over the colonies. Quakers were also to aim for an increase in the import taxes on slaves so as to render the trade in slaves increasingly uneconomical. Sharp himself addressed the British government directly, which flatly ignored him.\(^\text{20}\) \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #az) 1775 saw the foundation of the first anti-slavery associations in Philadelphia, New York, and other American cities.

\[^7\] The measures intended by Sharp to restrict the import of slaves were, however, not a matter of intense controversy. Opinion in the Northern colonies of mainland America held that the slave population was sufficiently large; correspondingly, their prohibitions on slave trade were included in the federal constitution of 1787 which followed the independence of the United States of America \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #b0). Nevertheless, that this ban was to come into force only after 1807 reflected the general compromise nature of the constitution regarding slavery.\(^\text{21}\)

\[^8\] In his recently published overview of the abolitionist movement and the political measures taken to abolish slavery, Seymour Drescher portrayed American independence in 1776 as an (albeit temporary) set-back for the anti-slavery movement. He argued that with the dawn of American independence, the English abolitionists had lost political support for achieving a ban of the slave trade within the empire, whereas their American counterparts had lost the political authority of a slave-free European state, itself necessary to effect an international solution to the slave question.\(^\text{22}\) Moreover he reasoned that the American War of Independence had displaced abolitionism from the political agenda on both sides of the Atlantic. In opposition to this view, Christopher Leslie Brown has maintained that it was the American revolution itself that drew attention to "the moral character of colonial institutions and imperial practices", thus providing an impetus to the abolitionist campaign in Britain.\(^\text{23}\) \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #b1)

\[^9\] The Quakers, with their extensive transatlantic network,\(^\text{24}\) remained at the vanguard of the anti-slavery movement. Benezet sought to establish contacts with his British counterparts at the beginning of the 1770s, and John Woolman participated in the 1772 Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends (the Quaker annual convention) in London shortly before his death.\(^\text{25}\) \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #b2) Following the peace between Britain and America and encouraged by their American brethren, British Quakers were now ready to send an anti-slavery petition to the House of Commons and an address to the King, both of which followed in 1783.

\[^10\] The anti-slavery movement in the newly independent United States now began to rally its forces especially in the Northern states, which had few slave holdings and no plantation system. A number of new associations were established such as the Philadelphia Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery under Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) \(\rightarrow\) Media Link #b3), formed in 1787. These new groups petitioned the individual states and Federal Congress for the abolition of the slave trade and a ban on the participation of American citizens in this practice. A number of Manumission Societies also campaigned to encourage individual slave-holders in both North and South to release their charges voluntarily.\(^\text{26}\) 1794 saw the first meeting of various North-American anti-slavery associations in Philadelphia designed to co-ordinate their efforts. The first successes were registered, with a number of Northern states embarking on the step-wise abolition of slavery; some even demanded an early end to the slave trade.\(^\text{27}\)

\[^11\] These American developments influenced the British abolitionists. 1787 saw the emergence of the first English anti-slavery organization, the London Abolition Committee, chaired by Granville Sharp.\(^\text{28}\) A further leader of this movement was
the English politician William Wilberforce (1759–1833) (Media Link #b4), who repeatedly submitted a number of parliamentary bills aimed at abolishing slavery. These efforts were matched by the work of Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846) (Media Link #b5), the organizer of the **London Abolition Committee**. Won for the abolitionist cause after reading Anthony Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771), Clarkson soon embarked on his own campaign, investigating the treatment of slaves on their transatlantic voyage, the Middle Passage. A number of local associations were soon established and their activities co-ordinated by the national **Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade**, active between 1787 and 1807. The **London Abolition Committee** specialized in canvassing politicians; whereas the **Manchester Abolition Committee** organized petitions to parliament calling for the abolition of the slave trade. (Media Link #b6) The abolitionists also conducted a number of legal actions and from 1791 a boycott of slave-grown sugar.  

The 1790s, however, were frustrating years for British abolitionists. The outbreak of war with France following the French Revolution (Media Link #b7) and the support of English Jacobins for the anti-slavery campaign led to a fall in support for the cause. Ill health also robbed the movement of the industry and influence of Thomas Clarkson.  

In 1804 however, the movement regained momentum and succeeded in establishing the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself as a matter of national and thus patriotic interest. The campaign and resulting mobilisation of the masses was of a scope never before seen either in Europe or the United States: with the publication of tracts, pamphlets, and journals as well as the organization of lectures, mass meetings, and mass petitions.  

As in America, the anti-slavery movement was carried by a remarkable alliance of non-conformist Protestants. Quakers, Unitarians, and Methodists, above all the Methodist leader John Wesley (1703–1791) (Media Link #b8), used a number of pre-existing networks to further the abolitionist cause. The evangelical movement, which preached salvation of all men, irrespective of their origin and culture, also played an important role in the abolitionist cause. Nevertheless, historians remain divided over the significance — in addition to the religious and humanitarian motives of the abolitionists — of the social background of the activists drawn from the middle class. There is no consensus as to whether their decision to support abolitionism was entirely a matter of conviction or whether their middle class and mercantile origins paired with free market concerns and financial patriotism was also significant in their decision. Whatever their motivation, the movement celebrated its first success in 1807: the British ban of the transatlantic slave trade.  

**Abolitionism in France**  

Continental Europe had some individual voices raised against the institution of slavery, but developed nothing comparable to the widely-organized abolitionist association movement found in Britain and the United States. Only in France, which experienced an eventful history of abolition in its Caribbean colonies, did British influence take effect, culminating in an anti-slavery movement, albeit much smaller in scope and size. Moved to do so by the **Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade**, the journalist Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville (1754–1793) (Media Link #b9) founded the **Société des Amis des Noirs** in 1788. Also active in this society were Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794) (Media Link #ba), author of *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres* (1781), the future revolutionary Abbé Grégoire (1750–1831) (Media Link #bb), Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791) (Media Link #bc), and Marie Joseph Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), who had initiated a project of emancipation in South American Guyana. Initially, the Société was subjected to considerable restriction by the royal censor and its journal *Analyse des papiers Anglais* could only be published under the condition that it printed translations of the activities of the British abolitionists. In contrast to the English parent association, with which close contact was maintained via Thomas Clarkson, the Société des Amis des Noirs was considerably more radical in its demands relating not only to the abolition of the slave trade, but slave-holding in general, and calling for its gradual abolition. Also campaigning for the rights of free blacks, it never achieved a mass following as its membership was restricted to a social elite. Moreover, the heavy English influence ran against the current and popular Anglophobia. Thus, the association in general and Mirabeau in particular were unsuccessful in raising the question of slave trade at the National Assembly (1789/1790). The association was finally banned in 1793 at the height of the *Terreur* and Brissot and
others were delivered to the guillotine.

With only a low priority on the revolutionary agenda, slavery had not received explicit mention in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. Nevertheless, the rallying cries of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were taken up by the international abolitionist movement and enjoyed considerable influence in the colonies. However, the majority of slave revolts in the colonies were unsuccessful. Only in Saint Domingue, later known as Haiti, did slaves force the French government to initiate reforms in 1791 after a bloody uprising, and the government granted full citizenship rights to all free blacks resident in the colonies in 1792. War with Great Britain brought the danger of losing these colonies and in 1794, France saw itself forced to declare slave emancipation. However, emancipation was restricted to France’s Caribbean possessions and not implemented in those in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, slavery in the Caribbean was replaced by a system of forced labour to maintain the plantation economy, a labour form which was extended to Haiti following its independence (1804) and which continued into the 1830s.

Regrouping in 1796 under the leadership of Grégoire, the surviving members of the Société des Amis des Noirs formed a new association, the Société des Amis des Noirs et des Colonies, to protest against this system of forced labour. The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) in 1799 saw the final repression of the association. Reintroducing slavery in the colonies in 1802, Napoleon nevertheless did abolish the slave trade in 1815 after his return from exile in Elba. Bowing to British pressure, the restored Bourbons did not repeal this regulation but neither did they promote its active enforcement.

The Abolitionist Movement in Great Britain and North America from the Congress of Vienna to the American Civil War

Following the ban on slave trading, the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was superseded in 1807 by a successor organization, the African Institution, itself active until 1827. This body concentrated its efforts on securing the international implementation of existing legislation prohibiting the trade in slaves. Negotiating at the Congress of Vienna, the British government secured the commitment of the participants to abolish the slave trade. Pressure from the abolitionist movement in the following decades moved the government to conduct an international campaign against the slave trade, involving a number of bilateral treaties establishing the right of the Royal Navy to board and search ships for slave cargo. Control of the transatlantic shipping traffic and the Mediterranean slave trade entailed a high cost in terms of life and resources; for example, those caused by the British-Dutch bombardment of the Algerian Barbary Coast as part of an attempt to free Christian slaves.

The news that the number of slaves had actually increased since the prohibition of the Anglo-American slave trade gave added impetus to a new wave of abolitionist sentiment in Britain in the 1820s, now aimed at banning slavery within the British colonies. Inspired by the pamphlet Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition (1824), by the Quaker Elizabeth Heyrick (1769–1831), a number of associations began a campaign for the complete abrogation of slavery (immediatists). Others, such as Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786–1845), who replaced Wilberforce as the leading abolitionist in Parliament, advocated gradual abolition. The Society for Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of British Colonial Slavery, founded in 1823, adopted the call for the immediate abolition of slavery only at the end of the 1820s. The approach to organization and strategy achieved a higher degree of system, e.g. regarding the foundation of branch associations. Petitions remained the main instrument of campaigning and 1833 saw the peak of the movement with over 5,000 petitions and almost 1.5 million signatures. While the locally fluctuating active membership of abolitionist associations was drawn primarily from the middle class, they also succeeded in recruiting a number of working class petitioners.

Especially noteworthy was the high level of female support for the cause, in both Britain and America. Although the legitimacy of women's signatures on petitions was initially subject to wide-spread doubt, female participation in the petition movement was particularly high: over 400,000 women were estimated to have added their signatures in 1833.
Women also led their own meetings and founded female anti-slavery associations in England (1825 in Birmingham) and the United States (1832 in Salem, Massachusetts). They organized boycotts of slave-grown products such as sugar, rum and cotton (the *free produce movement*). In the United States, they provided assistance to escaped slaves, especially in organizing passage to Canada. Abolitionists also maintained extensive and close transatlantic contacts; thus Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896) visited Britain on a publicity tour for her successful abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852.

The female commitment to abolitionism and women's concomitant entrance in the public sphere contradicted the dominant gender discourse of public and private which assigned women to the home. The anti-slavery movement thus also provided a constitutive impulse for the women's movement. Gender inequality was translated to the setting of slavery and an analogy was drawn between the position of women within marriage and the institution of slavery. This concept appeared as early as the beginning of the 18th century in the work of the English feminist writer Mary Astell (1666–1731). A great number of female abolitionists such as the Quakers Anne Knight (1781–1862) and Lucretia Mott (1793–1880) advocated women's rights by the middle of the 19th century.

A further social group prominent in the anti-slavery movement were freed slaves. African-Americans had been active in the North American abolitionist movement since the 1770s and had collected signatures for own petitions in New England around 1772. Ottobah Cugoano (ca. 1757–ca. 1803), the author of *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787), and Olaudah Equiano (ca. 1745–1797), author of *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African written by himself* (1789), advanced to some celebrity in Britain. Having purchased his freedom, Equiano went to England to find legal protection from the danger of renewed enslavement. He also conducted a very successful lecture tour through Britain.

In contrast to England, the abolitionist campaign in America was accompanied by the struggle to alter a society characterized by segregation and discrimination. Transferring freed slaves to Africa had long been considered as a solution and 1787 had seen the settlement of a number of slaves in Sierra Leone. Implemented on the initiative of the British abolitionist Granville Sharp, the project experienced considerable difficulties. In 1816, the *American Colonization Society* was founded to implement resettlement in the area which was later to become Liberia. Nevertheless, these plans met with considerable opposition from a number of African-American abolitionists.

The first African-American abolitionists found themselves subservient to "white" abolitionist associations, who did not wish to grant membership to any blacks. Originally supporting calls for gradual emancipation and plans for emigration, they revised this attitude by the 1820s. The *African-American Freedom's Journal* was published between 1827–1829, and in 1829, David Walker (1785–1830) from Massachusetts published *Walker's Appeal*, calling for resistance to slavery and denouncing discrimination against the African-American population.

A Popular instrument of the abolitionist campaign of the 1830s were slave narratives, i.e. published autobiographies of escaped slaves. These texts were addressed to a "white" readership with the aim of winning them to the abolitionist cause. Frederick Augustus Douglass (ca. 1817–1895) achieved a certain degree of celebrity with his impressive work *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* which he presented on a successful publicity tour of Britain and republished in two reworked versions. Only a small proportion of these texts were written by women. One of the most widely-read slave narratives written by a woman was *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself* (1831). As most slaves, the author, Mary Prince (ca. 1788–after 1833) was illiterate and had to dictate the account.

As in Great Britain, the American abolitionist movement experienced a split into two factions, the immediatists, advocates of the complete and immediate abolition of slavery, and the gradualists, who sought its extinction step-by-step.
One leading immediatist, William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879) (Media Link #bq), published the journal *The Liberator* in Boston from 1831 onwards and founded the *New England* (later *Massachusetts*) *Anti-Slavery Society* in 1832. In 1833, Garrison travelled to London both to gather support for his strategy and to prevent the *American Colonization Society* from obtaining financial support. Enthused by what he found in Britain, he sent reports charting the progress of British abolitionism, which by then had developed into a mass movement. George Thompson (1804–1878) (Media Link #br) accompanied Garrison on his return to the United States, where he worked as a speaker and organizer for the abolitionist movement, founding a great number of local branch associations. Connections with Britain reached their peak in the 1830s, with British abolitionists supporting their American counterparts in their efforts to prevent the introduction of slave-holding in Texas, which was an independent state at the time (1836–1845).

The close of 1833 saw the foundation of the *American Antislavery Society* (financed among others by the British Quaker Joseph Sturge (1793–1859) (Media Link #bs)) as an umbrella organization for local associations. Besides Garrison, a number of leading activists such as Frederick Douglass, Angelina Grimké (1805–1879) (Media Link #bt), Lucretia Mott, Wendell Phillips (1811–1884) (Media Link #bu), and Theodore Dwight Weld (1803–1895) (Media Link #bv) were active in the Society. Nevertheless, the movement was not free of quarrels and Lewis Tappan (1788–1873) (Media Link #bw) left the organization at the beginning of the 1840s in opposition to Garrison's increasing radicalism that included his acceptance of a woman in the society's executive council. Founding the *American and Foreign Antislavery Society*, Tappan concentrated on improving international co-operation in the abolitionist movement. 1839 saw a further secession from the *American Antislavery Society* with the *Liberty Party* which even nominated abolitionist candidates for the American presidency in the 1840s.

In contrast to the situation in Britain, American abolitionists did not meet with an entirely positive reception. The repeated number of political crises surrounding the question of the introduction of slavery to states newly accepted to the Union added to the increasingly raw tone of the debate. Abolitionist speakers were met by hostile mobs and disturbances, such as that in Boston in 1835 when Garrison almost fell victim to a lynch mob. The opposition of a number of States (not confined to the South) to the distribution of abolitionist literature by mail resulted in regulations permitting states to deny the distribution of material that could be taken as incitement to civil strife. In reaction to the flood of abolitionist petitions Federal Congress passed what became known as the "gag rule" (in force between 1840 and 1844), forbidding the acceptance of any further motions of the kind. The conflict between North and South eventually culminated in the outbreak of the American Civil War (1861) during the course of which the Union established the abolition of slavery as one of its key war aims. Following the victory of the North in 1865, emancipation was enshrined in the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution. British abolitionists had supported the North during the war.

An Act of Parliament had outlawed slavery in all British colonies as early as 1833. In contrast to slave emancipation in the United States, planters in the Empire had been granted financial compensation. Nevertheless, a variety of practices of servitude persisted; the transition to free wage labour was to be made via a system of forced labour known as apprenticeship. All restrictions on free labour were finally removed in 1838.

Continental Abolitionism from the 1820s

The 1820s also witnessed a new wave of abolitionist activity in France. In 1822, the *Société de la morale chrétienne*, to which a number of Protestants belonged, including the later French foreign and Prime Minister Victor Duc de Broglie
(1785–1870) founded the Comité pour l'abolition de la traite des Nègres on the prompting of the English Quaker Joseph Price. 1834 saw the foundation of the Société française pour l'abolition de l'esclavage, which counted the politicians Broglie, Victor Schoelcher (1804–1893) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) as members.\(^\text{70}\) Both organizations were strongly dependent on British support. Moreover, the Société de la morale chrétienne was forced to work in a politically repressive climate, including strong censorship, and did not achieve widespread support. The Société française pour l'abolition de l'esclavage remained an elitist organization made up of a number of notables and parliamentary deputies with various political orientations. The free Afro-Caribbean merchant from Martinique Cyrille Bissette (1795–1858) maintained informal contacts with the Société française; he was one of a number of proponents of immediate abolition. As in Britain and the United States, French abolitionists were split along the lines of gradualism and immediacy. Influenced by the text Eman- cipation immédiate (1846), published by the Swiss Protestant theologian Guillaume de Félice (1803–1871), the Société française gradually adopted the line of immediate abolition after 1847. The growing number of petitions (including those from Parisian workers and women) collected in the mid-1840s demonstrated an increasing level of approval of the cause of abolitionism in France, but compared to Britain, this acceptance was still not widespread.\(^\text{72}\) Slavery was eventually forbidden within the context of the Revolution of 1848, but forced labour remained as a transitional form of labour also in the French colonies.

Abolitionism and Africa

By 1870 the transatlantic slave trade had largely ceased and abolitionists refocused their activities on Africa itself. Missionaries now conducted the various campaigns against practices of forced labour and the transfer of so-called coolie labourers, for example from India to South Africa, a practice that had already begun at the end of the 1830s.\(^\text{77}\) Nevertheless, missionary interest focussed primarily on converting the "culturally inferior" Africans. The efforts of British governments to stamp out slavery in Africa, as pursued, for example, at the Berlin Congo Conference in 1884/1885, were also supported by the abolitionist associations.

In 1888, the Archbishop of Algiers, Charles Martial Allemand Lavérière (1825–1892), began his campaign against the Muslim slave trade in Africa for which he received support from a number of European associations drawn predominantly from Catholic Europe. This work was located firmly within a broader campaign to Christianize Africa and culminated in an international conference held in Brussels in 1889/1890. The Brussels convention committed its signatories to put an end to the slave trade within their colonial spheres of influence and to work for a complete abolition of slavery.\(^\text{76}\) (Media Link #c6)

After the First World War, the British government still perceived itself as shouldering the main responsibility for combating slavery within the framework of a more comprehensive system of imperial trusteeship. The "white man's burden" of colonial rule was thus (according to the justification) underpinned by a concern for the well-being of the "natives".
Although clearly motivated by a measure of imperial-self interest, it was this ideology which informed British policy exercised within the scope of its League of Nations mandate. The British government drafted an anti-slavery convention which was ratified in 1926. Slavery was to be eradicated once and for all; forced labour was only acceptable if utilized for public ends, all workers were henceforth to receive adequate remuneration. Workers were also not to be forcibly relocated through the colonies.

Conclusion: International Networks and Cultural Transfer

The complex interactions of the various international abolitionist movements took place via the transfer of ideas as well in the form of personal contacts. Emerging initially from the transatlantic network of Quakerism, its European (especially in France) and international manifestations were maintained in a large part by British financial and moral support. The beginning of the 1840s saw an attempt to institutionalize these informal relations. On the suggestion of the Americans, international abolitionists met at two conventions held in London in 1840 and 1843. Hoping to build on the recent success of the end of slavery in the British Caribbean, they now focussed their attention to achieving the worldwide abolition of slavery.

One of the most successful literary transfers was certainly Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Published for the first time in 1851, it followed the *Fugitive Slave Act* that established the legal mechanism for the return of slaves who had escaped from Southern states into the non-slaveholding North. The novel was serialized in the abolitionist journal *The National Era* and then published in book form (1852). With a first print run of 300,000 in America and 200,000 in Britain, it was a far greater success than the slave narratives. A number of translations also ensured its international diffusion. Its dramatization as a stage play brought the novel’s indictment of the brutality of slavery – interwoven with a Christian message – to an even wider audience.

In terms of symbolism, the image of a kneeling, chained, and supplicatory slave with the caption *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* gained international currency. Designed in 1787 by Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795), it was produced in Wedgwood’s own factory. The symbol was adopted immediately by the *Société des Amis des Noirs* (1788) and it was also used by a number of other organizations including the Spanish anti-slavery organization in the 1860s. The motif was circulated in a number of forms such as medallions and pamphlets as well as on a number of fashion items such as bracelets, barrettes, and even snuff boxes. The image was complemented in 1828 by a female counterpart: *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?* The picture of the slave ship *Brookes* produced by British abolitionists in 1789 enjoyed a similar level of circulation and was designed to bring attention to the inhumane and cramped conditions (known as tightpacking) existing on such ships.

The anti-slavery protest was established primarily on moral-humanitarian arguments making repeated reference to the particular brutality of slavery. The appeal to the natural rights of liberty and equality was of special importance in the campaign in the United States, which made overt reference to the Declaration of Independence. Countering arguments focussing on the economic necessity of slavery for the plantation system, the abolitionist movement made recourse to Adam Smith’s theory outlined in his work *Wealth of Nations* (1776), that free labour was far more productive than slave labour. A lack of incentives rendered slave labour inefficient and the need to provide for the slaves generated extra costs. References to slave revolts, especially to the successful rising in Sainte Domingue (Haiti), on the other hand, were mostly avoided by the abolitionists due to the bloody consequences for the "white" population. As a rule, the abolitionist movement did not aspire to a radical overthrow of the existing social and moral order, even if a number of the immediatists held markedly progressive views in terms of an egalitarian society, especially regarding the position of women.
Appendix

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Notes

1. The term “abolitionism” was also applied to the movement opposing the state regulation of prostitution which had been started by the Englishwoman Josephine Butler (1828–1906) at the end of the 1860s. Today it is used in a variety of contexts including the campaign to abolish capital punishment.


5. Stipulations in Roman law which regulated the relationship between Roman citizens and foreigners.


8. The Parlements in pre-revolutionary France were regional high courts.


11. Cleve, Somerset's Case 2006, p. 604. It is possible that near slavery did not include the hereditary nature of the slave status, ibidem, p. 609.


19. For the activities of Quakers, see Anstey, Atlantic Slave Trade 1975, pp. 200–235; Soderlund, Quakers 1985.


21. The constitution avoids any use of the word slave, preferring to speak of "other persons" or "persons held to service or labor". There were some provisions, however, which implied the recognition of slavery, such as the right of slave owners to require the return of escaped slaves or setting the value of slaves as three fifths of a freeman for the purpose of the representation of the states in Congress, a factor that strengthened the political power of the Southern states. For further information, see Feihrenbacher, Republic 2001, pp. 15–47.


26. Blackburn, Overthrow 1988, pp. 120f. The effects of such initiatives were curbed in the Southern states through an increasing number of bans on the individual manumission of slaves.

27. See e.g. Wieck, Sources 1977; Gellman, New York 2006.


37. With a certain level of regulation regarding for example the question of child labour.

38. Davis, Problem 1975; Bender, Antislavery Debate 1992; Brown, Moral Capital 2006. The question as to the contribution of the abolitionist movement to the end of slavery has been subject to intensive debate for the British case. While some authors stress the impact of religious and humanitarian motives, these alone cannot explain the contradiction between a government pursuing an abolitionist agenda and the clear economic interest in the maintenance of slavery. Since the publication in 1944 of the highly influential book Capitalism and Slavery by Eric Williams (1944), which emphasized the initial economic significance of slavery for British industrialization and its subsequent unprofitability in the sugar plantations (after which it was ended), the question has been discussed within the economic, social, and political context of 18th and 19th century Britain. Since then, a consensus has emerged to the effect that slavery did indeed remain profitable, right up to the point of its abolition. Hence, Seymour Drescher argued that the British abolitionist movement did not unfold in a moment of economic or political crisis, rather he traces its emergence to a period in which slave labour was entirely profitable as a form of labour. As such, slave emancipation ran against British economic interests, leading Drescher to depict abolition as "ecocide". Subsequent studies have also stressed the importance of slave resistance in contributing to abolition. See Williams, Capitalism 1966; Anstey, Atlantic Slave Trade 1975; Davis, Problem 1975; Drescher, Econocide 1977; Davis, Problem 1988; Drescher, Capitalism 1986; Blackburn, Overthrow 1988; Bender, Antislavery Debate 1992; Brown, Moral Capital 2006; Drescher, Abolition 2009.


44. ibidem, pp. 124–129.


51. ibidem, p. 455.


56. ibidem, pp. 154–177; Sklar/Stewart, Women's Rights 2007 (especially the chapter on France by Karen Offen).


61. The complete title is: Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America. The text is available online on the homepage of the North Carolina University Library: http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/menu.html [21/09/2011].

62. My Bondage and my Freedom (1855), Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1881). The text is available online on the homepage of the North Carolina University Library under: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html [21/09/2011]. An increasing number of African-American speakers were invited to England. An example of a female speaker is Sarah Parker Remond (died 1887) who toured Britain at the end of the 1850s. Coleman, Lead 2007.

63. The text is available online on the homepage of "Documenting the American South" by the university library of the
1843 saw the abolition of slavery in India, in the form that courts were instructed no longer to accept slavery as a legal status. It was left to the initiative of individual slaves to secure their freedom at court. Drescher, Abolition 2009, pp. 268f.; Grant, Savagery 2005, pp. 22f.

Grant, Savagery 2005, pp. 25, 33 and passim.

Drescher, Abolition 2009, pp. 278f.


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ibidem, pp. 220f.

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