

Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



Revisiting *Freedom's Debtors*

Padraic X. Scanlan

Volume 30, numéro 2, 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1074390ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1074390ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Scanlan, P. X. (2019). Revisiting *Freedom's Debtors*. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 30(2), 255–272.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1074390ar>

Résumé de l'article

Ce texte jette un nouveau regard sur Freedom's Debtors dans l'optique des commentaires des trois panélistes du Prix Ferguson. Il situe les arguments du livre par rapport à un ensemble croissant de recherches sur l'histoire de la Sierra Leone, liées aux problèmes plus anciens de l'histoire de l'économie politique impériale britannique. Ce texte réaffirme deux des principaux arguments de Freedom's Debtors : la proximité, parfois non reconnue, entre l'esclavage britannique et l'antiesclavagisme britannique, et la place centrale de l'antiesclavagisme dans l'expansion impériale britannique au XIX^e siècle.

Revisiting *Freedom's Debtors*

PADRAIC X. SCANLAN

Abstract

This essay reconsiders Freedom's Debtors through the lens of the three Ferguson Prize panelists' comments. It frames the arguments of the book in relationship to a growing body of scholarship on the history of Sierra Leone, and in relationship to older problems in the history of British imperial political economy. The essay reasserts two of the core contentions in Freedom's Debtors: the close, and sometimes unacknowledged, proximity between British slavery and British antislavery, and the centrality of antislavery to British imperial expansion in the nineteenth century.

Résumé

Ce texte jette un nouveau regard sur Freedom's Debtors dans l'optique des commentaires des trois panélistes du Prix Ferguson. Il situe les arguments du livre par rapport à un ensemble croissant de recherches sur l'histoire de la Sierra Leone, liées aux problèmes plus anciens de l'histoire de l'économie politique impériale britannique. Ce texte réaffirme deux des principaux arguments de Freedom's Debtors : la proximité, parfois non reconnue, entre l'esclavage britannique et l'antiesclavagisme britannique, et la place centrale de l'antiesclavagisme dans l'expansion impériale britannique au XIX^e siècle.

From the perspective of British metropolitan history, the campaign against slavery and the slave trade followed a rhythm of rising and falling action. The campaign against the British slave trade peaked twice, in 1792 and 1806–7. In 1792, Parliament voted in favour of a motion promising its gradual abolition. After 1792, the wars of the French and Haitian Revolutions made antislavery more suspect in Britain, seen as either a frippery that was superfluous to military mobilisation or as a suspiciously radical movement that threatened the security of Britain's colonies. Napoleon's restoration of French colonial slavery, and his campaign against Haitian rebels in 1802, reopened space in British politics for the campaign and, in 1807, the Slave Trade Act received royal assent. In 1815, more petitions were signed, urging British politicians negotiating the Treaty of Paris to press for the general abolition of the slave trade. When this proved impossible, the

domestic antislavery campaign stalled. The movement revived in 1823 with the founding of the Anti-Slavery Society, and reached a crescendo ten years later, as a widespread and well-coordinated revolt by tens of thousands of enslaved people in Jamaica overlapped with agitation in Britain for the reform of Parliament. Changes in parliamentary representation after the 1832 Reform Act helped to build a majority for the passage of the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. As Seymour Drescher put it, until 1832, British abolitionism was largely “a movement for good seasons, thriving in relative prosperity and waning in periods or areas of deep economic and social crisis.”⁵⁹

In Britain in 1815, antislavery was at low ebb. But in West Africa, British antislavery was thriving. As a graduate student, I started the project that eventually became *Freedom's Debtors* with a few questions. First, if antislavery “peaked” in 1807 and 1833, what happened to the movement in the interim? Second, what happened when antislavery principles became rules for government? Third, what ideological work did enforcement of the ban on the slave trade do for the antislavery movement in Britain? And finally, what role did William Wilberforce and other iconic leaders of the British campaign against the slave trade play in shaping antislavery policy after the abolition of the slave trade?

Freedom's Debtors, I hope, answers some of these questions, and shows that an important problem in the history of slavery and emancipation in the British Empire hides in plain sight. The campaign against the slave trade was a triumph of patriotism, humanitarianism, and Evangelicalism in Britain. But in West Africa, antislavery was the impetus for a sustained campaign of commercial speculation and military conquest. Formerly enslaved people — “freedom’s debtors” — did ideological and manual labour for British antislavery. The people released from the slave trade and repatriated in Sierra Leone symbolised the “sacrifice” Britain had made of a part of its economy. Antislavery activists argued that British leadership in the transatlantic slave trade had put Britain in debt to Africa. The end of the slave trade, they argued, had reversed the relationship. Now people freed from slave ships owed something to Britain, a debt that could be repaid in obedience and labour. Resistance to coerced labour and “civilisation” was taken as ingratitude. Ingratitude, in turn, seemed to prove the necessity of coerced labour and the civilising mission.

Beginning in 1808, enslaved captives from slave ships captured by British forces off the coast of West Africa were emancipated and repatriated in Sierra Leone. At first, former captives were known as

"captured Negroes." In the Vice-Admiralty Court of Sierra Leone, which thrived during the Napoleonic Wars, "captured Negroes" were released from slavery when the Court declared them to be property without an owner and by default the property of the Crown.⁶⁰ Since Britain had abolished the slave trade, the Crown formally declined to hold an enslaved person as property. Former captives were no longer enslaved, but neither were they free to do as they liked. They remained at the disposal of the Crown and its officials in Freetown. After the wars, new Courts of Mixed Commission used a similar legal procedure to declare enslaved people to be "Liberated Africans," a term which came into common use in the early 1820s. The ambiguities inherent in the status of a "captured Negro" remained for a "Liberated African." The idea that enslaved people had been "liberated" from slave ships evoked emancipation, but also reaffirmed the status of former captives as a kind of un-owned property, "liberated" from the hold of a slave ship, like a shipment of rum. Later in the nineteenth century, Liberated Africans were sometimes referred to as "recaptives," another term that reaffirmed the idea that although liberation from a slave ship ended enslavement, it did not end Britain's claim on former captives.

Richard Anderson, in his authoritative new history of identity-formation among the Liberated Africans, estimates that at least 99,752 enslaved people disembarked from captured slave ships in Freetown Harbour between 1808 and 1863, among whom some 72,284 were resettled in Sierra Leone.⁶¹ *Freedom's Debtors* ends with the death, in 1824, of Governor Charles MacCarthy in battle during the First Anglo-Asante War. MacCarthy's death marked the end of the era of colonial government in Sierra Leone when the colony was nearest to the centre of antislavery politics in Britain. When MacCarthy was killed, antislavery leaders were already beginning to shift their attention from West Africa to the Caribbean. The project of ending the slave trade and replacing it with trade in commodities like ivory and palm oil, what abolitionists called "legitimate commerce," became secondary to plans for emancipating the hundreds of thousands of enslaved people claimed as property in the colonies. From 1808 until 1824, more than 10,000 Liberated Africans disembarked in Freetown. British antislavery leaders considered them to be indebted to Britain for their freedom. Consequently, in the colony and in Britain, former captives were reimagined as an endlessly plastic source of labour for military, missionary, and commercial projects.

In the age of revolution, the antislavery project in Sierra Leone assumed that Liberated Africans were a blank slate, ready to receive British instruction and ready to obey British commands. And yet, British officials in Sierra Leone governed in a state of cognitive dissonance. In Britain, Sierra Leone was represented as the bridgehead for a civilising mission. In the era of the campaign against the slave trade, antislavery leaders in Britain had insisted that “Africa” was an undifferentiated, violent, and chaotic place. The idea that the slave trade had erased African civilisations helped to persuade reluctant parliamentarians that the end of the British slave trade could be an opportunity for Britons to be first in line to exploit new commercial opportunities in West Africa. And yet, in West Africa, the colony was part of a complex political economy, shaped by local kingdoms and caliphates.⁶²

Under the Sierra Leone Company, Freetown’s first settlers were drawn from among the “Black Loyalists,” the community of self-emancipated African Americans repatriated in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia after the American Revolution. These “Nova Scotians,” as they were often known in the colony, arrived in 1792. In 1800, some 500 exiled Maroons from Jamaica settled in the colony.⁶³ The early history of the colony, and particularly a revolt in 1800 led by some of the Nova Scotian settlers that was suppressed partly by Maroon trackers, has fascinated historians of the American Revolution. From their perspective, the history of Sierra Leone can seem like a coda to the Revolution. For some early post-colonial historians of Sierra Leone, the Liberated Africans were considered to have adopted the values of this “old settler” community — an English-speaking, mostly Christian community of missionaries and entrepreneurs.⁶⁴

Recently, new work on Sierra Leone has transformed our understanding of the Liberated African community by exploring both the internal dynamics of the Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone and the wider diaspora of people released from slave ships in Cuba, Brazil, South Africa, and elsewhere.⁶⁵ Works by Joseph Bangura and Gibril Cole have opened new debates about the complex cultural and political history of the colony and have challenged historians to recognise the importance of Islam in a colony that colonial officials tended to imagine as a bridgehead for Christianity in West Africa.⁶⁶ Liberated Africans came from across West and Central Africa, and brought with them a wide range of traditions, languages, and religious practices. But for the governors of Sierra Leone, who were mostly drawn from

among the officers of the Royal Navy vessels that called in Freetown and from the Royal African Corps, a British Army regiment, the Liberated Africans seemed like a ready source of interchangeable labourers, sailors, soldiers, and converts to Christianity.

I am grateful to my colleagues for their generous criticism of *Freedom's Debtors*. In reading their comments, I recognise how much of the argument of the book hangs on the distinction between "abolition" and "antislavery," and I regret not spending more time clarifying the ways these terms clash and overlap. The transition from antislavery to imperialism in Sierra Leone did not reflect the entirety of the British antislavery movement. The working people who signed petitions against the slave trade and the elite women who led concurrent, generally more radical campaigns against slavery and the slave trade, for example, had little say in how Sierra Leone was managed.⁶⁷ Moreover, with the exception of Zachary Macaulay, none of the leaders of the Sierra Leone Company or its successor, the African Institution, ever visited the colony. *Freedom's Debtors* shows that elite antislavery leaders — Macaulay of course, but also William Wilberforce, James Stephen, Thomas Clarkson, and Henry Thornton — were consistently interested in Sierra Leone and maintained as much control over affairs in the colony as possible. This control was limited by the distance between London and Freetown and by the differences between informal commercial and professional influence exerted in Britain and the executive power of the governors of the colony. That said, the careers of the colonial governors and leading military officers show clearly how profitable it was to align local policy in Sierra Leone with the desires of the antislavery lobby in London, and how eager most colonial officials were to solicit advice and support from leading abolitionists.

In 1854, George Stephen reflected on his experiences in the campaign against colonial slavery. "Actual emancipation," he wrote, "was a grand concession to humanity which I firmly believe that the most sanguine abolitionist never contemplated in 1813."⁶⁸ Stephen was referring to emancipation in the sugar colonies of the West Indies and Indian Ocean, which loomed larger for British antislavery campaigners than imperial affairs in West Africa. This is a point I wish I had clarified in *Freedom's Debtors*. Sierra Leone was founded to prove that plantation agriculture could flourish with free labour. After the abolition of the slave trade, the "civilization" of the Liberated Africans was invoked in the British press mostly as evidence that enslaved people could be emancipated in large numbers without insurrection. More-

over, West Africa and the West Indies acquired a kind of sameness in the abolitionist imagination with a long history rooted in plantation slavery as well as a long tail in later colonial and imperial history.⁶⁹

In writing *Freedom's Debtors*, I wanted not only to insist on what was unique about Sierra Leone, but also to use colonial records to try to evoke some of the sounds and sights and smells of the colony in the era of Atlantic revolutions. In one scene in *Freedom's Debtors*, I describe a child, recently disembarked from a slave ship, as he stands stunned within the walled compound where newly-emancipated Liberated Africans waited for the colonial government to “dispose” of them. Some were conscripted into the military — usually to the Royal African Corps that served in and around Sierra Leone, but sometimes to the West India Regiments that served in the Caribbean. Others were sent to one of the villages, superintended by the Church Missionary Society, that were founded as centres for Christian conversion and commercial agriculture. In the scene, I imagined cockroaches fleeing from between the beams of colonial buildings during the wet season, as the humidity caused the wood to expand. I do not know if this happened that day — although I do know that it does happen; cockroaches do shelter in small gaps within wood structures, and they do scuttle off to new hiding places when the weather gets hot and wet, whether in Florida or Freetown. I don’t know whether the boy that the records referred to as “Tattoo” — a weak joke from officials who noticed that most of the other enslaved people released with the boy wore ink, while he wore ritual scars — was bored and anxious when he was in the custody of the colonial department known at the time as the Captured Negro Department. But I know his recorded height and where and when he was disembarked, and who was responsible for recording his name in colonial records.

Partly, the narrative of *Freedom's Debtors* relies on filling in gaps in colonial records with educated guesses and details from other primary sources. These acts of imagination are based on immersion in the sources, and I hope that I have not blurred the line too much between what the records preserve and what I have tried to piece together. The archives of the first thirty years of formal British imperial rule in Sierra Leone are rich, but they reflect — as bureaucratic records do — the ideology and the practical ambitions of the men who kept them. The Sierra Leone National Archives, held at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, holds a remarkable cache of documents, including a copy of the Registers of Liberated Africans, a ledger with tables of names, origins,

and distinguishing features of many thousands of former captives. The Church Missionary Society's archives contain remarkable diaries and letters from leading Liberated African converts to Christianity that offer striking details of colonial life. But most Liberated Africans, and especially in the first decades of the project of repatriating former captives, do not speak in the archives.

Freedom's Debtors is a study of the version of British colonialism that put antislavery in the van. The sources for the period covered in the book are overwhelmingly written by and for colonial elites, including white merchants, a small cadre of local kings and imams, the wealthiest among the Black Loyalist and Jamaican Maroon "old settlers" and the most trusted Liberated African converts. That is a small circle, and so throughout the book I tried to use records that were intended for surveillance and actuarial control — like the Register of Liberated Africans or the court-martial rolls of the Royal African Corps — to recreate scenes of colonial life. The majority of Liberated Africans had no voice in the archive, and neither did the rank-and-file of the colonial government, the mostly illiterate white British and Irish soldiers for whom service in West Africa was a punishment for desertion. I hope readers understand that these moments are imagined, but I hope they will be generous enough to recognise why I made these imaginative leaps, and how immersion in the archives fuelled my imagination.

The distinction between "abolitionism" and "antislavery" is more slippery. In the book, I tend to use the two terms interchangeably. That said, "antislavery" is a much wider term than "abolitionism." General opposition to slavery in principle, as Christopher Brown shows, did not always entail a formal campaign against slavery.⁷⁰ Antislavery was more mutable and promiscuous than "abolitionism." All kinds of reformist causes drew power from antislavery without having anything to do with the actual institution of enslaved labour. Manisha Sinha, in *The Slave's Cause*, has emphasised this distinction in order to absolve British abolitionism of any association with colonialism or imperialism. "Only by conflating the state with the social movement," she writes, "can historians view abolition as the progenitor of European imperialism."⁷¹ I am not convinced. Even admitting the distinction between "antislavery" and "abolitionism," I would argue that abolitionism itself, at least in a British context, was closely allied with affairs of state, both domestic and imperial. The campaign against the slave trade and colonial slavery was led by powerful statesmen and

bankers, noblemen and military officers. Can we really filter out, for example, William Wilberforce or James Stephen's abolitionist ideology from the work they did shaping (and in Stephen's case, writing) the law that ended the slave trade?

And should we? What do we lose if we recognise that abolitionism changed, appearing in different forms at different times and in different places? What do we lose if we admit that abolitionism did not always align with present-day progressive policies and priorities? Eric Williams — whose influence on *Freedom's Debtors* is enormous — spins in his grave. What happened in Sierra Leone wasn't always precisely what the leaders of the social movement against the British slave trade wanted. And yet, Sierra Leone was broadly represented in abolitionist newspapers and magazines, and eventually in Parliamentary select committee hearing and debates as a modest success that showed a proof of concept for the preservation of white power after the formal emancipation of a black majority in a British colony. As Wilberforce wrote in 1823, reflecting on Sierra Leone, "the poor African barbarians, [are capable] not merely of being civilized, but of soon enjoying, with advantage, the rights and institutions of British freemen."⁷² That distinction, between *being* British freemen and having access to the *rights* of British freemen, is subtle but crucial. Freedpeople needed to be taught those rights and could use them on sufferance. In Wilberforce's view, all human beings were spiritually equal — but a radical vision of natural rights in the hereafter was very different from the natural right to civil and economic equality on earth.

What *Freedom's Debtors* shows, I hope, is the gulf between an empire where emancipated were free to do as they chose, and to make their own lives after slavery, and an empire where emancipated people lived under the "rights and institutions" of British freedom. Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone were expected to learn and to value the restrictions of their autonomy because that was what "freedom" meant. There *was* a gulf between "antislavery" and "abolitionism." And there *was* a difference between the social movement for the end of slavery and the making of laws and policies to put the abolition of the slave trade and emancipation into effect. And yet, activists arguing for emancipation argued overwhelmingly for gradual approaches to unwinding slavery; they cast the end of the slave trade and of slavery as patriotic achievements that would bolster the prestige and power of Britain; they organised campaigns that promoted missionary work to "civilise" enslaved people to prepare them for freedom; they believed

that the expansion of the British imperial economy and antislavery were compatible, and that diligent work by emancipated people was evidence of their fitness for freedom. How different were those features of the domestic campaign against slavery from the imperial implementation of the antislavery laws?

There is another moment in *Freedom's Debtors* that I have since thought about often. Joseph Reffell was one of the longest-serving officials in the colonial administration in Sierra Leone. He explained to two visiting commissioners charged with surveying the colony how Liberated Africans were "apprenticed" to colonists and visiting merchants. The contracts for the indentures that bound Liberated Africans as apprentices did not specify any tasks the apprentices would be expected to complete — they were to do what their masters told them. In turn, masters were obligated to teach apprentices English, encourage their conversion to Christianity, and provide food and lodging. Only one copy of the contract was made, and only the master signed it. The point of "apprenticeship" was to teach the Liberated Africans to work according to the rhythms of the colony, to internalise what freedom meant in Sierra Leone. The apprentices didn't sign the apprenticeship agreements because, in theory, they needed to have been apprenticed before they could understand and assent to what it would mean to have been apprenticed in the first place.⁷³

In 1834, the abolition of colonial slavery made hundreds of thousands of enslaved people into "apprentices" according to the very same logic, that a period of education and supervision was necessary to make freedom useful, or even comprehensible, to the formerly enslaved. The Anti-Slavery Society officially opposed apprenticeship. However, it advocated for immediate emancipation coupled with rigid and dispassionate enforcement of laws against idleness and vagrancy.⁷⁴ The idea that people who had been enslaved needed to learn what freedom meant before they could be free was nearly universal in British discussions of how and why to abolish slavery. *Freedom's Debtors* shows, I hope, how that core belief in the incapacity of formerly enslaved Africans to govern their own lives and labour after emancipation was central to the abolition of the British slave trade. Thomas Clarkson called the 1807 Slave Trade Act "Magna Carta for Africa in Britain."⁷⁵ In Britain, the Slave Trade Act summoned up a tradition of patriotism and the rights of subjects that received near-universal acclaim. In West Africa, it was the founding document of nineteenth-century British colonialism.

PADRAIC X. SCANLAN is Assistant Professor in the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources and the Centre for Diaspora & Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto.

PADRAIC X. SCANLAN est professeur adjoint au Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources et au Centre for Diaspora & Transnational Studies de l'Université de Toronto.

Endnotes

- 1 Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 3.
- 2 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 1–4, 219–21. On Captain Cook, see Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- 3 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 81–6; Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 281–5, 289–90.
- 4 For example, Sarah Kinkel, *Disciplining the Empire: Politics, Governance, and the Rise of the British Navy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).
- 5 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 36.
- 6 Schama, *Rough Crossings*, part 2.
- 7 More is also said on this in John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787–1870* (London: Faber, 1969), part 1.
- 8 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 4.
- 9 David Northup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).
- 10 Seymour Drescher, “History’s Engines: British Mobilization in the Age of Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (October 2009): 737–56.
- 11 Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedom and Indentured Labour in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 12 For one of the early attempts to track the spectrum of unfree labour, see Paul Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers, eds., *Unfree Labour in the Development*

- of the Atlantic World* (London: Frank Cass, 1994). On the importance of master and servant law in the regulation of British and colonial labour, see Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, eds., *Masters, Servants and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). On impressment, Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007).
- 13 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 50.
- 14 Nicholas Rogers, *Murder on the Middle Passage: The Trial of Captain Kimber* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020).
- 15 Thomas Clarkson, *The True State of the Case Respecting the Insurrection at St. Domingo* (Ipswich: 1792), 3.
- 16 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 20.
- 17 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Watchman* (1796), 100–109.
- 18 Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America* (London: 1794), 77–8.
- 19 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 23.
- 20 On this episode see Nicholas Rogers, *Mayhem: Post-War Crime and Violence in Britain 1748–1753* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 198–208.
- 21 Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapters 4 & 7; Lauren Benton, “Colonial Law and Cultural Difference: Jurisdictional Politics and the Formation of the Colonial State,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 3 (2000): 563–588; Lauren Benton, “Abolition and Imperial Law, 1790–1820,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 3 (September 2011): 355–74.
- 22 Padraic X. Scanlan, “The Rewards of Their Exertions: Prize Money and British Abolitionism in Sierra Leone, 1808–1823,” *Past and Present* 225, no. 1 (2014): 113–42, and “The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1823,” *American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (2016): 1085–1113.
- 23 Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015), 15.
- 24 Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 4.
- 25 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 5.
- 26 Legacies of British Slave-Ownership, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>; see publications linked to the project, notably Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington, and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

- 27 Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Sons* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 20012), 22.
- 28 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 153.
- 29 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 168.
- 30 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 189; Domingues da Silva, et al., "The Diaspora of Africans Liberated From Slave Ships in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (2014): 347–369.
- 31 Mitra Sharafi, "South Asian Legal History," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 11, no. 1 (2015): 309–36.
- 32 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 183, 189. On the challenges of partial archival sources, see also Joseph J. Bangura, *The Temne of Sierra Leone: African Agency in the Making of a British Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 7–8.
- 33 Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 18. See G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: an African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lovejoy and Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone*.
- 34 Tehila Sasson, James Vernon, Miles Ogborn, Priya Satia, and Catherine Hall, "Britain and the World: A New Field?" *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 4 (2018): 677–708. See Ruma Chopra, *Almost Home: Maroons between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
- 35 Hall, *Macaulay and Sons*, 70; Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 136.
- 36 Christopher Leslie Brown, "Empire without America: British Plans for Africa in the Era of the American Revolution," in *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa and the Atlantic*, ed. Derek Peterson (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), 84–100; Christopher Leslie Brown, "From Slaves to Subjects: Envisaging an Empire without Slavery, 1772–1834," in *Black Experience and the Empire*, eds. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 112–140; Matthew Wyman-McCarthy, "Rethinking empire in India and the Atlantic: William Cowper, John Newton and the Imperial Origins of Antislavery," *Slavery and Abolition* 35, no. 2 (2014): 306–327. See also other essays in Peterson (ed.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism*.
- 37 See also Suzanne Schwarz, "'A Just and Honourable Commerce': Abolitionist Experimentation in Sierra Leone in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *African Economic History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 1–45.
- 38 On violence and empire among a multiplicity of possibilities, Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2019); Elizabeth Koslky, *Colonial Justice in India: White Violence and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of*

Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

- 39 For example, Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2013); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London and New York: Verso, 2011). A foundational text is Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994; first published 1944), which argues that the commercial capitalism of the eighteenth century depended on slavery, although slavery was overturned by the different needs of mature industrial capitalism.
- 40 For example, Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012); Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Paul Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers (eds.), *Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World* (Abingdon, Oxford: Frank Cass & Co, 1994).
- 41 On the Gurneys and related Quaker families, Verily Anderson, *Friends and Relations: Three Centuries of Quaker Families* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980). Eventually the Hanburys, Gurneys, and others would come together to form Barclays Bank.
- 42 Gibril Raschid Cole, *The Krio of West Africa: Islam, Culture, Creolization and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014). The “African names” data base project, part of the larger multi-partner “Slave Voyages” data base, underscores the diversity of groups who eventually forged a Krio identity: <https://www.slavevoyages.org/resources/about#african-names-database/0/en/>.
- 43 Robert Jamieson, *An Appeal to the Government and People of Great Britain against the proposed Niger Expedition: A Letter, addressed to the Right Hon. Lord John Russell* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1840); Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London: J. Murray, 1840). Liverpool-based trader Robert Jamieson specialized in purchasing palm oil from West Africa.
- 44 Brown, “Empire Without America.”
- 45 Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, “Introduction: ‘Liberated Africans’ and Early International Courts of Humanitarian Effort,” in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, eds. Lovejoy and Anderson (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 2–3. This critique is echoed in Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 117–147. On abolition

- as a humanitarian origin story, compare Michael Burnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 57–75.
- 46 Schwarz, “‘A Just and Honourable Commerce,’” 27, and *passim*.
- 47 For example, Cassandra Pybus, “‘A Less Favourable Specimen’: The Abolitionist Response to Emancipated Slaves in Sierra Leone, 1793–1808,” *Parliamentary History* 26, supplement (2007): 97–112.
- 48 Cole, *The Krio of West Africa*, argues that historians of the Krio tend to downplay Islam.
- 49 For example, Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 33–54 and *passim*.
- 50 J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
- 51 Anon [Samuel Crowther], “Narrative of Events in the Life of a Liberated Negro, now a Church Missionary Catechist in Sierra Leone,” *The Missionary Register* (October 1837): 433–440. Cf also Suzanne Schwarz on the responses of Africans to their forced relocation to Sierra Leone: Schwarz, “The Impact of Liberated African ‘Disposal’ Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone,” in Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy (eds.), *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 45–65.
- 52 Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 5–39. On the wilder shores of abolition, Marcus Rediker, *Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017).
- 53 Compare, for example, the emotional appeal of William Fox, *An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the utility of abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum* (London: M. Gurney, 1791).
- 54 E.g. Claire McLisky, Daniel Midena, and Karen Vallgarda (eds.), *Emotions and Christian Missions: Historical Perspectives* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Cf also Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006).
- 55 Cassandra Pybus, “‘A Less Favourable Specimen’: The Abolitionist Response to Self-Emancipated Slaves in Sierra Leone, 1793–1808,” *Parliamentary History* 26 (June 2007): 97–112.
- 56 Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the Niger, 1841–42* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); J.F. Schön and Samuel Crowther (ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi), *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther who, with the sanction of Her Majesty’s Government accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841 on behalf of the Church Missionary Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass &

- Co, 1970); David Lambert, *Mastering the Niger: James MacQueen's African Geography and the Struggle over Atlantic Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Everill, *Abolition and Empire*.
- 57 Joseph Bangura, "Understanding Sierra Leone in Colonial West Africa: A Synoptic Socio-Political History," *History Compass* 7, no. 3 (2009): 583–603.
 - 58 Wayne E. Lee (ed.), *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Elbourne, "Christian soldiers, Christian Allies: Coercion and Conversion in Southern Africa and Northeastern America at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," in *Beyond Syncretism and Conversion: Indigenous Encounters with Mission Christianity, 1800–2000*, eds. David Lindenfeld and Miles Richardson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 79–109.
 - 59 Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986), 142.
 - 60 Padraic X. Scanlan, "The Rewards of Their Exertions: Prize Money and British Abolitionism in Sierra Leone, 1808–1823," *Past & Present* 225, no. 1 (November 2014): 113–42.
 - 61 Richard Peter Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1. See also Adam Jones, "New Light on the Liberated Africans and Their Origins: A List of Children Named after Benefactors," in *Sierra Leone Studies at Birmingham 1988*, ed. Adam Jones, Peter K. Mitchell, and Margaret Peil (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1990), 32–42; Henry B. Lovejoy, "The Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission: Transcription Methodology and Statistical Analysis," *African Economic History* 38 (2010): 107–35; Suzanne Schwarz, "Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa* 39, no. 1 (2012): 175–207; Richard Anderson, "The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and 'Liberation' at Freetown, 1808–1863," *African Economic History* 41, no. 1 (2013): 101–38; Richard Anderson et al., "Using African Names to Identify the Origins of Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Crowd-Sourcing and the Registers of Liberated Africans, 1808–1862," *History in Africa* 40, no. 1 (October, 2013): 165–91; Katrina H.B. Keefer, "Scarification and Identity in the Liberated Africans Department Register, 1814–1815," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 47, no. 3 (December, 2013): 537–53; Maeve Ryan, "'A Most Promising Field for Future Usefulness': The Church Missionary Society and the Liberated Africans of Sierra Leone," in *A Global History*

- of *Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Mulligan and Maurice Bric (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 37–58; Richard Peter Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, eds., *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020).
- 62 See Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Philip Misevich, “The Sierra Leone Hinterland and the Provisioning of Early Freetown, 1792–1803,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 9, no. 3 (2008); Bruce L. Mouser, “Trade, Coasters, and Conflict in the Rio Pongo from 1790 to 1808,” *Journal of African History* 14, no. 1 (January, 1973): 45–64; Bruce L. Mouser, “Landlords-Strangers: A Process of Accommodation and Assimilation,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 3 (January, 1975): 425–40; Bruce L. Mouser, “Continuing British Interest in Coastal Guinea-Conakry and Fuuta Jalloo Highlands (1750 to 1850),” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 43, no. 172 (January, 2003): 761–90; Paul Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz, eds., *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonisation in Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015); Suzanne Schwarz, “Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company,” in *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, eds. David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz, and Anthony Tibbles (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 252–76.
- 63 See Ellen Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976); James W. St. George Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783–1870* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1976); Mavis Christine Campbell, ed., *Back to Africa: George Ross and the Maroons, From Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993); John W. Pulis, “Bridging Troubled Waters: Moses Baker, George Liele, and the African American Diaspora to Jamaica,” in *Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World*, ed. John W. Pulis (New York: Garland, 1999), 183–222; Kenneth Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Maya Jasanoff, “The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 65, no. 2 (April, 2008): 205–32; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); Ruma Chopra, *Almost Home: Maroons between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).
- 64 On the emergence of Krio identity within this analytic framework, see Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford: Oxford Uni-

- versity Press, 1962); Christopher Fyfe, "The Foundation of Freetown," in *Freetown: A Symposium*, ed. Christopher Fyfe (Freetown: Sierra Leone University Press, 1968), 1–8; Christopher Fyfe, "Four Sierra Leone Recaptives," *Journal of African History* 2, no. 1 (January, 1961): 77–85; Arthur T. Porter, *Creoledom: A Study of the Development of Freetown Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); Akintola Wyse, "The Sierra Leone Krios: A Reappraisal from the Perspective of the African Diaspora," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph Harris (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), 309–37; Akintola Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone: An Interpretive History* (London: Hurst; The International African Institute, 1989).
- 65 Lovejoy, "The Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission"; Rosanne Marion Adderley, "A Most Useful and Valuable People? Cultural, Moral and Practical Dilemmas in the Use of Liberated African Labour in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition* 20, no. 1 (April, 1999): 59–80; Rosanne Marion Adderley, *"New Negroes from Africa": Slave Trade Abolition and Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Howard Johnson, "The Liberated Africans in the Bahamas, 1811–60," *Immigrants & Minorities* 7, no. 1 (March, 1988): 16–40; Jake Christopher Richards, "Anti-Slave-Trade Law, 'Liberated Africans' and the State in the South Atlantic World, c.1839–1852," *Past & Present* 241, no. 1 (November, 2018): 179–219; Christopher Saunders, "Liberated Africans in Cape Colony in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18, no. 2 (January, 1985): 223–39.
- 66 See Gibril R. Cole, "Embracing Islam and African Traditions in a British Colony: The Muslim Krio of Sierra Leone, 1787–1910" (Los Angeles: University of California, 2000); Gibril R. Cole, *The Krio of West Africa: Islam, Culture, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century*, 1st ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013); Joseph Bangura, "Understanding Sierra Leone in Colonial West Africa: A Synoptic Socio-Political History," *History Compass* 7, no. 3 (2009): 583–603; Joseph Bangura, *The Temne of Sierra Leone: African Agency in the Making of a British Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 67 Clare Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-slavery Culture," *Slavery & Abolition* 17, no. 3 (December, 1996): 137–62.
- 68 Sir George Stephen, *Anti-Slavery Recollections: In a Series of Letters Addressed to Mrs. Beecher-Stowe* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1854), 22.
- 69 See Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

- 70 Christopher L. Brown, "Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 56, no. 2 (April, 1999): 273–306.
- 71 Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2016), 3. See also Padraic X. Scanlan, "The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1824," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (October, 2016): 1085–1113.
- 72 William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London: Hatchard, 1823), 47.
- 73 Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 71–72.
- 74 Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 75 Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade, by the British Parliament*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (London: 1808), 580.