



# The Abolitionist Movement

Week Eight Lectures



# Select Chronology of Abolitionism

- 1772: Slavery was banned on the British Isles (i.e. England, Scotland, Ireland)
- 1791: French are kicked out of Haiti
- 1803: Denmark Abolishes Slave Trade
- 1804: Haiti Abolishes **Slavery**
- 1807-1808: Britain makes it illegal for British Subjects to participate in Slave Trade
  - They also set up a blockade on the West African coast, deporting captured slaves to their new colony, Sierra Leone.
- 1813: Sweden Outlaws Slave Trade
- 1814: Netherlands Outlaws Slave Trade
- 1818: France Outlaws the Slave Trade
- 1820-1825: Slavery begins to be outlawed within newly independent Latin America
- 1822: The American Colonization Society establishes Liberia
- 1836: Portugal abolishes Slave Trade
- 1865: The United States Abolishes **Slavery**
- 1942: Ethiopia abolishes **Slavery**

# Abolition vs. Emancipation

- One of the most important things to remember about the end of slavery is that the *slave trade* was abolished before *slavery*.
- Abolitionism referred to desires to end the slave trade; only the most radical abolitionists advocated for immediate emancipation of the enslaved.
- In time, these two efforts will become linked, but during the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, when abolitionism was taking force, emancipation received little support.
- A large amount of the Abolitionists in the United States and Britain (two of the leading pioneers in the movement) were Christian reformers, such as William Wilberforce, a Christian British Parliamentarian who advocated for Britain's banning of the slave trade.
  - Wilberforce University, one of the first for African Americans was named after him
- John Newton, composer of the hymn "Amazing Grace", was also an abolitionist.

# "Legitimate Trade", Capitalism, and Abolitionism

- Many abolitionists were also ardent capitalists of the Liberal variety.
  - They held the opinion that "Free Labour" (i.e. wage labour) was key to reducing the horrors of slavery, serfdom, and oppression.
  - They believed that the best way to stop the slave trade (and eventually slavery) was to replace it with something else.
- Enter "Legitimate Trade". Commercial abolitionists encouraged African elites to instead export "legitimate" goods (i.e. not slaves). These goods would receive preferential market status.
  - These goods included: ivory, peanuts, palm oil, gold, rubber, cloves, hides, ostrich feathers, etc.
- According to Lovejoy, The Abolitionists "argued that the abolition of the slave trade and the development of legitimate trade would bring slavery itself to an end" (136).
  - With respect to Africa, these abolitionists couldn't have been more wrong.

# Declining Slave Exports

- By the beginning of the 1800s, Africa started to stop sending slaves to the new world. This was partially because the British Blockade was capturing the slave ships and sending them to Sierra Leone, Cape Town, or Liberia.
  - They did not stop altogether, but slowly it did stop.

TABLE 7.4. *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1801–1866*

	Sene-gambia	Upper Guinea	Wind-ward Coast	Gold Coast	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra	West Central	South East Africa	Total Africa
1801–1810	53,700	42,600	25,200	75,700	95,400	140,400	334,000	50,500	823,600
1811–1820	29,200	22,600	7,200	1,700	74,100	65,900	407,500	77,700	685,800
1821–1830	13,100	45,500	7,900	5,400	58,300	163,500	442,000	121,200	855,700
1831–1840	4,600	43,900	3,200	3,300	73,100	97,800	343,500	116,900	686,300
1841–1850	8,400	21,000	0	0	108,900	27,600	387,000	43,600	596,500
1851–1860	0	4,800	0	0	22,500	2	113,900	30,200	171,400
1861–1866	0	0	0	0	11,300	0	42,900	0	54,200
TOTAL	108,900	178,500	43,500	86,100	444,700	495,200	2,076,700	440,000	3,873,600

Source: Eltis et al., *Slave Voyage Database*.

# Contradictions of "Legitimate" Trade.

- Now, we have already established in previous readings and lectures that over the course of the 1500s-1800s, many African elites and even societies were dependent on the revenue of the export of slaves. How did these societies adjust?
  - Answer: They started using them to produce "legitimate" goods.
- According to Lovejoy: "Many of the "legitimate" goods destined for world markets were grown or transported by slaves, for slavery had become an integral part of African economies. The end of the external slave trade did not mean the collapse of the internal slave trade. Despite the aims of the abolitionists, the transition from exporting slaves to exporting other commodities resulted in the increased use of slaves in Africa" (136).
  - The internal slave trade continued (albeit in a policed form), but it is crucial to understand that many African societies had transformed from elites engaging in the export of slaves to elites engaging in the export of slave-produced commodities.
- According to Stilwell, abolitionism expanded "high density" slavery in Africa

# Contradictions of "Legitimate" Trade.

- Gradually, more and more of the agricultural labour force in African territories in the early-to-mid-1800s became slave based. Furthermore, the flexibility of some kinds of African slavery began to decline during this period.
  - Fewer manumissions occurred, and an erosion of slave rights (even under Islam) became common.
  - In a lot of ways, slavery in West (and East) Africa during this time was becoming more and more similar to the Caribbean and the United States. Slaves were more and more put under intense supervision and segregated more than ever.
- Many abolitionists and capitalists (even of the reformist variety) turned a blind eye to this at first, as they had a faith that "legitimate" trade would erode slavery as an institution. This was only partially true.

# The American Colonization Society & Liberia

- I have noted dozens of times that one of the most crucial aspects of this period is that the *slave trade* was ended before *slavery*. In this United States, this posed a problem for whites, because there was no longer a means of re-enslaving Free Blacks.
  - Free Blacks in the United States (just like in Haiti) posed a threat to White Supremacy. Many of these Free Blacks were highly educated and Christian, possessing more skills than many whites.
- In 1816, some prominent white philanthropists and businessmen founded the American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization designed to send free, literate, Christian blacks from the United States back to the African continent to spread "Civilization", "Legitimate Trade", and to curtail the illegal slave trade.
- With US-Government Funding, the society captured the modern day nation of Liberia from the Dei ethnic group, and they started plans to send Free Blacks to this country. The Colony of Liberia was founded in 1821 (independent in 1847)

# Contradictions of the ACS & Liberia

- While there were some African-American Elites who supported colonizing Africa, most free blacks (especially in the North) did not:
  - "Whereas our ancestors (not of choice) were the first successful cultivators of the wilds of America, we their descendants feel ourselves entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat manured" (Seeley 2016: 94).
  - Many of these free blacks saw the ACS as a white supremacist tool to deport free black people from the USA to Africa to prop up the institution of slavery in the USA. Remember, just because the slave trade had ended does not mean that slavery had.
- Nevertheless, by the start of the 1860s, over 11,000 African Americans had emigrated to Liberia, mostly from Virginia and Southern States
  - Sometimes, emigration was a condition of their attaining emancipation (i.e. the slave is freed if he returns to Africa)
- In some ways, the ACS was advocating for a "conservative end to slavery" that also curtailed black citizenship in the USA.

# Contradictions of the ACS & Liberia

- While there was Christian missionary work by black settlers and pastors in the interior, nearly all of the "Americo-Liberians" settled along the coast and rivers.
  - They only controlled part of the country.
- What the history of the ACS and Liberia tells us is that just because the slave trade, and eventually slavery, was ending, it did not end racism or oppression.
  - White Slave owners in the United States did not want free blacks, especially if there were politically motivated and would encourage disobedience among slaves.
- Just like Sierra Leone (Liberia's neighbour), Liberia was also a location where captured slave ships were dropped off creating what Gonzalez (in an earlier supplementary reading) called "Liberated Africans" or "Prize Negroes". These individuals were given varied levels of "freedom", and they sometimes became the owners of slaves (As occurred often in Sierra Leone).

# Abolition & Colonialism

- Slavery would eventually end everywhere, but it died, in Lovejoy's words "A Slow Death". Furthermore, depending on the person and the institution, it was worthwhile to allow slavery to die this slow death.
- It is not a coincidence that the banning of the slave trade in 1807 and the eventual emancipation of slaves over the course of the following 8 decades corresponded with the gradual expansion of European colonial occupation of the African continent.
- Technically and Legally, the European empires which began carving up Africa were against the trans-Atlantic and the intra-African slave trade, but the picture is a bit more nuanced.
  - According to Stillwell, "Colonial governments usually wanted to end the slave trade within Africa, but hoped to perpetuate unfree labour in their colonies whenever possible" (179).
  - According to Clarence-Smith, colonial powers played a "double game" by creating a "facade of abolition" without actually ending slavery.

# Abolition & Colonialism

- With that being said, anti-slavery *was* one of the central justifications for Euro colonialism in Africa. The 1890 Brussels Act, signed between the colonial powers, committed them to ending the slave trade within Africa.
- They didn't necessarily end slavery though. Many colonial powers even used slaves in their colonial armies, such as England's Lugard.
- Now why did the colonial powers not choose to end slavery right away?
  - Initially, these colonial states were weak. They didn't have the sort of resources they would eventually have. They needed to win the support of powerful local leaders and elites, many of whom used slaves.
  - Lovejoy: "At the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War, there were probably more slaves in the Muslim states of West Africa than in the Confederacy, or indeed in Cuba and Brazil. The Sokoto Caliphate alone probably had as many slaves as the United States and continued as a major slave-owning economy and society until the crisis at the time of European occupation after 1897" (xxiv).
  - In short, Europeans in the early years of colonialism were dependent on African Intermediaries (Stilwell, 183), and many of these intermediaries were slave holders.

# Abolition & Colonialism

- We have already established that the abolishment of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade led to increased use of slaves in Africa performing labour to produce goods for "legitimate trade."
- Colonialists wanted to maintain profits in these industries, as these profits were what kept their local elites content. If the local elites and intermediaries became unhappy, they could revolt against the Europeans.
  - Both local elites and colonialists recognized that slavery at that time was the most effective way to get labour for commodity production.
- Gradually, however, as the strength of the colonial administrations increased, they sought to transfer the production of goods for legitimate trade from slave labour to other forms of "coerced labour". They also wanted to transfer the ownership of the goods from Black to White hands.
  - We will read more about this in W.G. Clarence Smith re: Sao Tome.

# Abolition & Colonialism

- While colonial powers did not immediately end slavery, they did often restrict its expansion. They wanted slavery to die a "slow death", and this did eventually happen, by restricting the ability of slavery *as an institution* to expand.
- In a lot of ways, allowing elites to maintain slavery in the short term allowed colonialists to entrench themselves on the African continent in the long term. Gradually, they would eventually be powerful enough to enforce the end of slavery and give preferential market treatment to those elites who grew their crops with other kinds of (forced) labour.
  - In short, colonial powers wanted cash crops and loyal elites, they did not care how this was obtained (Stilwell, 203).
  - Expansion of the cash crop and agricultural sector did allow for new kinds of non-slave labour, such as dock workers, sailors, transport drivers, etc. These were not necessarily great jobs, but they were free jobs.

# Abolition & Colonialism

- It can be argued that the specific way that slavery ended in Africa (a "Slow Death") enabled colonialism to take off in the way that it did. The biggest losers in this history are not the local elites or the Europeans, but the poor and the (ex-)slaves.
  - In Lovejoy's words: "The aim of slaves was freedom, not the modification of the conditions of slavery, and this often placed Europeans in the position of reforming the institution so that its demise would occur gradually and not in one, single revolutionary action. The colonial regimes became the defenders of slavery, albeit reformed in many respects, and as a result, the greatest single impediment to full emancipation was colonialism" (245-6)
- Abolishment of slavery and emancipation of slaves was also one of the drivers of missionary activities in Africa, which went hand-in-hand with colonialism.
  - In practice, employment with missionaries (and belief in Christianity) and support colonial governments was now an option for runaway and/or freed slaves. This formed each's first support base.