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The free world confronted: the problem of slavery and progress in American foreign relations, 1833-1844

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THE FREE WORLD CONFRONTED:
THE PROBLEM OF SLAVERY AND PROGRESS
IN AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS,
1833 - 1844

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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TO MY PARENTS

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PREFACE

The experiment in West India has failed . . . The condition of England at this time calls for the sympathy of the world.

DUFF GREEN
TO Abel P. Upshur, April 28, 1842
Green Papers, UNC

The war of Great Britain with China is a branch of that war against Slavery which she has undertaken and is now waging throughout the globe It is the cause of human freedom—a glorious and blessed cause! Are we to be the antagonist champions?

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS
TO Richard Rush, Dec. 30, 1842
Adams Papers, MHS
(Emphasis in original)

I had a quarter of an hour's conversation with [Caleb] Cushing, and told him there was a war now in parturition between Freedom and Slavery throughout the globe; that it would be a war for the abolition of slavery, at the head of which would be Great Britain; that in this war I could take no part—I was going off the stage . . . and I conjured him, as he cherished his own and his country's honor, not to commit himself, in this great controversy, to the side of slavery and to return to the cause of liberty, from which he had not yet irrevocably strayed.

He heard me without taking offence, but apparently without conviction.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS
Diary, February 15, 1843
Adams Papers, MHS

Few terms stand more in need of introduction to American historiography than the Great Experiment. The free labor system that replaced slavery in the British West Indies after passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 has rarely been recognized as an experiment by scholars of antebellum America. Far from it, British abolition is often presumed to have entailed little or no risk. Not by coincidence, existing scholarship of antebellum America makes little mention of a global war for the abolition of slavery.

Among American scholars, present understanding of British abolition has been shaped largely by Marxism, the argument of slavery's inviability, and free-labor ideology—three of the most prominent historiographical interpretations of the twentieth century. Marxist interpretations, especially Eric Williams' immensely influential *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), rendered slavery superfluous by advancements in Western capitalism, specifically the Industrial Revolution. While Williams stopped short of arguing slavery destined to unprofitability, non-Marxist scholars often took that step. Consistent with a faith prevalent in the middle decades of the twentieth century—that material and moral progress was one and the same—scholars influenced in part by the slavery studies of Ulrich B. Phillips argued that slavery was inviable or economically obsolescent, destined, so to speak, to die a natural economic death at the hands of human progress and the Industrial Revolution. Besides providing the keystone of the Blundering Generation School—an interpretation prevalent in the middle decades of the twentieth century, whose adherents argued that the American Civil War was fought by a blundering generation who failed to recognize slavery was destined to obsolescence—the presumption of inviability implies that slavery was a liability best ended sooner than later. An argument consistent with the Williams thesis that the British found slavery superfluous and therefore abolished it at little or no risk, inviability arguments were further corroborated by scholars who perceived the emergence of a free labor ideology during the nineteenth century. From the strength of the arguments of Eric Foner and the evidence of a thriving free-labor ideology in the antebellum American North, the presumption emerged that the British shared a faith in free (or wage) labor that led them to abolish slavery in the confidence that wage labor was more profitable than slavery. As with the Williams and inviability arguments, the logic of free-labor ideology suggested that the British foresaw and incurred no risk by abolishing West Indian slavery.

A conspicuous pattern in American historiography emerged from these beliefs that the British benefited, or at least incurred little risk, by abolition. If presumed to have redounded to Britain's advantage, abolition would have left British policymakers with little or no economic incentive to promote the abolition of slavery elsewhere. Indeed, they would have perceived disincentive by strict economic logic. However much the British public might wish to promote slavery's abolition for moral reasons, moral suasion absent economic incentive is no recipe for earnestness. Scholars therefore have often concluded that British antislavery objectives were toothless, a conclusion that stood in stark contrast to the perceptions of numerous antebellum Americans, among them Duff Green and John Quincy Adams. Finding the existence of a global war for the abolition of slavery difficult to believe, especially one headed by Great Britain, scholars concluded that antebellum Americans must have been mistaken in their perceptions of earnest British belligerence. Explaining away such claims by southern slaveholders—in particular Green, John C. Calhoun, and Abel P. Upshur—scholars simply neglected those of the northerner Adams. As a result, readers of existing scholarship of antebellum America will encounter explanations that Jacksonian-era Americans suffered from anxiety, paranoia, even Anglophobia. They will read that Jacksonian Americans were duplicitous, quick to fabricate images of foreign threats in order to mobilize domestic interests in self-serving ways. They will learn that honor or political insecurities rendered antebellum Americans hypersensitive, producing exaggerations of threats that may in fact have been genuine but not as genuine as claimed.

In short, readers encounter most every explanation except one: acceptance of antebellum Americans' perceptions of British belligerency as accurate and compelling. Students of the Texas annexation crisis, for example, read little about the Great Experiment or its shortcomings. Little mention is made of British natural-law policies, of Britain's efforts to suppress the transatlantic slave trade, or of British Conservatives'

anxious defense of Britain's system of agricultural protection (the Corn Laws and Sugar Duties) that tied the fate of the free-labor experiment in the West Indies to their own. Not by coincidence, readers will find the reputation of the antebellum southerner who most claimed a relationship between these considerations and British threats to Texas—Duff Green—impugned by existing scholarship.

Yet scholars know now that West Indian slavery was not superfluous to British political economy, that slavery was viable, and that the British committed to abolition despite a rejection of free-labor ideology. The most fundamental and important of these revisions was the discovery of slavery's viability. After breakthroughs by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley Engerman during the 1970s, scholars of slavery and abolition now accept that slavery could (and does) still exist where political institutions permit. Where slavery fell, these scholars now argue, it did so at the behest of political considerations, not economic logic. In fact, abolition not only often contradicted economic logic, it has become increasingly apparent that the contradiction was known by contemporaries. Debunking notions that material and moral progress were one and the same, this re-discovery of slavery's viability has led to widespread acceptance of the problem of slavery and progress and its corollary of inherent conflict between the material and moral ideals of the industrializing West. Acceptance of the problem of slavery and progress has become so widespread, in fact, that emphasis is now directed toward measuring the extent of slavery's viability, efforts that have produced conclusions nearly as remarkable as the initial breakthrough of Fogel and Engerman in the 1970s. In his presentation of the 1997 Walter Lynnwood Fleming Lectures at Louisiana State University, for example, Gavin Wright went so far as to demonstrate that the economy of the antebellum American South outperformed that of the industrializing North. Slave values, Wright emphasized, must be factored into the equation. Reminding his audience that slaves constituted two-thirds of southern equity on the eve of the Civil War, Wright

concluded that the sectional crisis between the slave-labor South and the free-labor North amounted to an economic “cold war” and that—to the audience’s amazement—the South won.

As Wright’s language suggests, scholarship of slavery and abolition has matured beyond fundamental considerations of labor economics, even past the problem of slavery and progress that first drew scholars’ attention in the 1980s. Slowly but surely, as the conflict between material and moral progress has received wider acceptance, that scholarship has pointed to a need to revise international/Atlantic history, a development with logical implications for the history of antebellum America that has only recently begun to receive attention. Wright’s arguments, which corroborate findings of a global ideological struggle posited by James Oakes (*Slavery and Freedom*, 1990) and Eugene D. Genovese (*The Slaveholders’ Dilemma*, 1992), help point to tangible aspects of that struggle. Even more recently, moreover, a key element of global competition has come to light. Consistent with Wright’s emphasis on slavery’s high profitability, Seymour Drescher (*The Mighty Experiment*, 2002) has demonstrated that Britain embraced abolition despite the widely-held belief that abolition was certain to prove economically disadvantageous. While abolitionists cited Adam Smith’s tenets of liberal political economy and proclaimed free labor more profitable than slavery, Smithian proponents, Drescher demonstrates, were outnumbered by Smithian skeptics. Rejecting free labor ideology, the British committed to abolition even as they were well aware of the risk they shouldered. As a testament of their awareness, they dubbed their embrace of abolition the Great Experiment.

Britain’s commitment set the stage for the global conflict reported by Adams and fellow antebellum Americans. Smithian proponents of abolition, confident the Great Experiment would prove free labor more profitable than slavery, anticipated that the experiment’s success would entice the world’s remaining slaveholders to convert to

abolitionism by the lure of greater profits. Yet, as skeptics recognized, this calculus also worked in reverse. A failed experiment was certain to entrench the world's slaveholders in defense of their institutions of bondage. The result would be to split the world into two blocs, dividing free-holding nations like Britain from slaveholding competitors who were certain to invest further in their advantage.

Had the Great Experiment succeeded, the British would have found themselves on the pleasant end of this zero-sum game. By implication, moreover, they would have found themselves absent economic incentive to promote abolition elsewhere. Indeed, by the very logic of the Great Experiment, its success was supposed to convince the world's slaveholders to embrace abolition with little need of active assistance. Yet the Great Experiment failed. In demonstrating that free labor could not compete with slavery, it saddled Britain with a disadvantage that held every promise of becoming a fixture. The British, holding fast to the evangelical sensibilities that led them to abolition in the first place, found themselves with three options. The first option, accepting the disadvantage and permitting slavery elsewhere to thrive in perpetuity, was unthinkable, as was the second, abandonment of the Great Experiment and a return of the West Indian colonies to slavery. Therefore the British pursued the third option: already committed to free labor, they committed themselves further by undertaking a campaign to make the world safe for free labor. Literally the construction of a free world—a global political order intent on eroding slavery's profitability and by implication its political security—Britain's campaign to make the world safe for free labor held great appeal in early-Victorian Britain. The campaign furthered both economic and evangelical ends, and permitted Britain to exert its diplomatic and military might in the name of Christian humanitarianism and liberal political economy.

Although scholars have only begun to understand Britain's commitment to a free world disadvantaged by slavery's continued existence, the British free-labor campaign

admits of two salient facts. First, insofar as it provoked direct confrontation with slavery interests, the campaign nevertheless remained shrouded in the rhetoric of humanitarianism. Britain's century-long crusade to suppress the Atlantic slave trade, its natural-law policies that threatened slavery's security by giving rise to underground railroads, its economic diplomacy meant to pressure Brazilians to abolish slavery, its hopes of supplanting the slave trade in Africa with "legitimate trade" free of association with slavery or slave trading—all constituted the front lines of a mid-nineteenth century war between slavery and freedom that very much conformed to Adams' reports. Yet while each measure had as its target tangible economic objectives, each measure could also be (and was) claimed by the British as justified by humanitarian ends. Second, Britain's free-labor campaign could never exceed the bounds of humanitarian rhetoric. Otherwise it risked the very purpose it sought to achieve. Should Britain overstep the bounds of humanitarianism, it risked acknowledging the Great Experiment a failure and entrenching slavery worldwide. In this light Britain's crusade against the slave trade provided the most effective means of their campaign. British suppression efforts dated from 1807, before abolition in the West Indies, and, as such, the British could insist that issues of the slave trade and slavery remained mutually exclusive. Yet there was no denying that Britain redoubled its suppression efforts after 1833, or that its principal targets were the two slavery-based export economies—Brazil and Cuba—that most benefited by the Great Experiment's shortcomings, or that these two economies made attractive targets because they were notoriously dependent upon continued imports of captive African slaves. By attacking the Brazilian and Cuban slave trade, the British seized more than just the opportunity to attack the profitability of Britain's two principal slavery-based competitors at their most vulnerable point. They seized the opportunity to couch economic objectives in the rhetoric of humanitarianism.

Britain's free-labor campaign has only recently begun to receive the attention of British and Atlantic historians. Nevertheless there exists a need to understand the American republic's relation to, and role in, that campaign. Indeed, given Britain's need to couch any war against slavery in the rhetoric of humanitarianism, the perceptions of Americans who confronted British policies stand to contribute key elements to this new understanding of international history. Ultimately, however, the principal attraction of the topic for American historians lies in the meaning that this new understanding of international history holds for study of antebellum America.

The story of Americans' confrontation with the free world is the story of Americans' coming to terms with the problem of slavery and progress. Like most twentieth-century scholars, antebellum Americans before August 1843 found it difficult to believe Britain incurred great risk in ending slavery in its Caribbean colonies. Ironically, Americans' penchant for thinking ill of Britain initially served to disarm their fears of British antislavery motivations. Certain that the British would never have abolished slavery unless they thought themselves assured of a profit, Americans presumed British trade did in fact profit by abolition. This presumption, as Americans like John C. Calhoun recognized, carried with it the implication that the British lacked economic incentive to pursue an antislavery agenda in their foreign policy. When their cynicism of British motives received corroboration from British missionaries, in particular the English Quaker Joseph John Gurney, Americans like Calhoun and Abel P. Upshur found initial reports from Jamaica and London of the Great Experiment's failure difficult to believe. Misunderstanding the outcome of Britain's free-labor experiment, Americans therefore never understood the true purpose of the greatest of all British antislavery initiatives, the Convention of London of December 1841. An ambitious five-power treaty headed by Britain that would have revised international law to permit effective suppression of the Atlantic slave trade, the Convention of London carried British hopes of starving Brazil

and Cuba of slave imports and thereby of saving the Great Experiment. By a combination of British blunder and American cunning, however, the convention met defeat with crippling implications for the British free-labor campaign. In August 1843, the British government, in an effort to offset its losses from the failed Convention of London, raised the stakes of its free-labor commitment by acknowledging the Great Experiment's failure to the American government in a desperate attempt to gain American assistance to save the experiment. This initiative amounted to nothing; it was quickly brushed aside by the administration of President John Tyler. The acknowledgment of the Great Experiment's failure, however, struck a lasting chord in antebellum America. It was no coincidence that the American sectional crisis took a turn for the worse after August 1843. Prompted by Britain's acknowledgment to take a closer look at the West Indian experiment, southern slaveholders saw economic ruin. Confronted by the implications—that Britain indeed possessed economic incentive to abolish slavery throughout the world—southern slaveholders also recognized immediately the further implications. Ruin awaited them too if they followed Britain's path to abolition.

In short, by their positions of prominence in the American government southern slaveholders after August 1843 confronted the problem of slavery and progress. Learning from the failures in the British West Indies, they turned to their own institutions and beheld a bright economic future. Always committed to defense of slavery, southern slaveholders afterward found their commitment deepened. If previously they had stopped short of risking civil war, afterward they were emboldened by the realization that slavery's economic future was sound. Slaveholders need only fear for its political security, a concern that prompted their becoming the antagonists of freedom Adams feared, first in opposition to Britain's free-world campaign, then to northerners' free-soil agenda, but always with an eye to the future.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- LC Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- MHS Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.
- UNC Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.
- WL Special Collections, James G. Leyburn Library, Washington & Lee University, Lexington, Va.
- WM Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.
-
- DW Daniel Webster Papers Project, Dartmouth College Library (*Microfilm Edition of the Papers of Daniel Webster*), ed. Charles Wiltse (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1971).
- PDW *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, eds. Charles M. Wiltse, et al, 14 vols. (Hanover, N.H., 1974-1989).
- PHC *The Papers of Henry Clay*, eds. James F. Hopkins, et al, 11 vols. (Lexington, Ky., 1959-1992).
- PJC *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, eds. Clyde N. Wilson, et al, 28 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1959-2003).
- PJD *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, eds. Linda L. Crist, et al, 11 vols. (Baton Rouge, 1971-).
- TIAUS *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, comp. Hunter Miller, 8 vols. (1931-48).
- TST *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom*, eds. David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, Herbert S. Klein, and David Richardson. (Cambridge, U.K., 1999).
-
- DM Washington, D.C. *Daily Madisionian*.
- DNI Washington, D.C. *Daily National Intelligencer*.
- Globe Washington, D.C. *The Globe*.
- Niles Baltimore *Niles' National Register*.
-
- Hansard Great Britain, Parliament, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Third Series* (London, 1830-1891).
- PPST Great Britain, Parliament, Irish University Press, *British Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade*, 95 vols. (Shannon, Ire.: 1968-71).
-
- BDAC U.S. Congress, *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*.
- CG U.S. Congress, *Congressional Globe* (1833-1873).
- HCFA U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs.
- HD U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Documents* (1817-1847).
- HED U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Executive Documents* (1847-).
- HJ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Journal*.
- HMD U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Miscellaneous Documents*.
- HR U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Reports*.
- SCFR U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations.
- SD U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senate Documents* (1817-1847).
- SED U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senate Executive Documents* (1847-).
- SED(U) U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Executive Documents, Unpublished.
- SEJ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senate Executive Journal*.
- SJ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senate Journal*.
- SR U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senate Reports*.

- M30 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm 30; Despatches From U.S. Ministers to Great Britain, 1791-1906.
- M37 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm 37; Communications from Special Agents, 1794-1906.
- M50 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm 50; Notes From the British Legation in the United States to the Department of State, 1791-1906.
- M77 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm 77; Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1906.
- M99 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm 99; Notes to Foreign Legations in the United States From the Department of State, 1834-1906.
- M121 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm 121; Despatches From U.S. Ministers to Brazil, 1809-1906.
- RG46 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 46, Records of the U.S. Senate.
- RG48 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 48, General Records of the Department of the Interior.
- RG59 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State.
- RG84 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State.
- RG233 U.S. National Archives, Record Group 233, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- T31 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm T31; Despatches From U.S. Consuls in Kingston, Jamaica, British West Indies, 1796-1906.
- T262 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm T262; Despatches From U.S. Consuls in Bermuda, British West Indies, 1818-1906.
- T172 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm T172; Despatches From U.S. Consuls in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1811-1906.
- T475 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm T475; Despatches From U.S. Consuls in Nassau, British West Indies, 1854-1906.
- T728 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm T728; Despatches From U.S. Ministers to Texas, 1836-45.
- T809 U.S. National Archives, RG59, Microfilm T809; Notes from the Texan Legation in the United States to the Department of State, 1836-45.
- FRUS* U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

ABSTRACT

Enacted in 1833, Great Britain's abolition of West Indian slavery confronted the United States with the complex interrelationship between slavery and progress. Dubbed the Great Experiment, British abolition held the possibility of demonstrating free labor more profitable than slavery. Besides elating the world's abolitionists, always hopeful of equating material with moral progress, the experiment's success would benefit Britain economically. Presented evidence of the greater profits of free labor, slaveholders worldwide would find themselves with compelling reason to abandon slavery. Likewise, London policymakers would proceed with little need—and no economic incentive—to promote abolition in British foreign policy.

British hopes foundered on almost every count. Even in 1840, after Joseph John Gurney reported the experiment a resounding success, slaveholders in Washington remained unswayed by the prospect of greater profits. Buoyed by their republican ideals, and convinced abolition would bring racial warfare, John C. Calhoun and fellow slaveholders took comfort in the British abolitionists' evidence of West Indian prosperity. As success implied Britain profited by abolition, British policies could be assumed to lack economic incentive and therefore earnestness. If London moralizers demanded a crusade against the Atlantic slave trade, as well as natural-right policies that lured fugitive slaves and harassed the South with the Underground Railroad, London realists could be expected to frustrate their larger purpose.

Southerners' assurance in the security of slavery diminished after 1843. Approached by the British government with an overture for an immigration agreement that would bring laborers to Britain's island possessions, Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur perceived an official, if indirect, acknowledgment of the Great Experiment's failure. Alarmed by the implications of the admission, Upshur ordered an inquiry into the experiment's results

from the American consul in Jamaica, Robert Monroe Harrison. Upon receiving the findings, Upshur expedited measures to annex Texas, catalyzing the sectional crisis that ended in eventual civil war. In part those hostilities resulted from southerners' newfound understanding of the problem of slavery and progress. Ever more confident of slavery's economic viability in the modern world, southerners after 1843 looked to Britain and the American North and perceived newfound earnestness in slavery's enemies.

GURNEY'S MISSION

In a steady and unseasonably cold rain on the morning of May 9, 1840, South Carolina Representative Isaac E. Holmes made his way through the mud of Washington, D.C. to the corner of East Capitol and First Streets and an awaiting audience at H.V. Hill's Mess. Joined by two unlikely companions, abolitionists Joseph John Gurney and Mahlon Day, Holmes asked the audience to lend their attention to the two men he had met only a few days before. On his way to the capital from Charleston, the freshman congressman had encountered the two missionaries while aboard the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad. Sharing their recent experiences, Gurney and Day explained that they had just returned from a winter's tour of the West Indies. The purpose of their tour, they emphasized, had been to visit the British colonies of Antigua and Jamaica in particular, as it was these islands where the most useful assessments of the working of the free-labor system recently implemented by Britain's Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 were to be gained. Having recorded their observations and returned to South Carolina, they now intended, Gurney explained, to travel to Washington and share "our story of West Indian freedom to the great thinkers and leaders of the land." Impressed, Holmes obliged his new companions by helping to arrange the extraordinary meeting at Hills' Mess. Consisting entirely of southern slaveholders, each a politician of considerable influence, Holmes' colleagues assembled for the sole reason of meeting Gurney, an Englishman and a Quaker minister who made no mistake about the purpose of his visit. He wished nothing less than to convert them—and slaveholders worldwide—into abolitionists.¹

Without question Gurney could command such a meeting. Although little remembered by later generations, the Englishman was widely known in Jacksonian America. During the three years prior to his West Indian tour, he had sought to heal

schisms among the Society of Friends by undertaking an extended gospel mission in North America. Between 1837 and his departure for Antigua in December 1839, Gurney had traveled widely along the eastern seaboard and Ohio valley, adding to his well-established fame. Throughout his travels Gurney had been preceded by his family's reputation as preeminent British reformers. Together with his sister, Elizabeth Fry, and his brother-in-law, Thomas Fowell Buxton, Gurney was a celebrated humanitarian, best remembered for exposés of British prisons and the effort to lobby Parliament for passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. During his mission to America, Gurney had frequented Washington. Acquainting himself with numerous lawmakers and garnering their respect, he even received the opportunity to address an audience at the Capitol. On January 21, 1838, officeholders and other dignitaries had crowded the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives to hear the Quaker minister conduct a service of public worship. Gurney, in short, enjoyed access in the capital denied most American abolitionists.²

In an effort to take advantage of any influence he might have in Washington, Gurney had collected observations of the free-labor system in West Indies for the purpose of sharing them with American lawmakers. It was an effort few abolitionists would undertake, and not just because most abolitionists lacked influence in Washington. Most abolitionists were social radicals who thought little of slaveholders and saw little point in reasoning with them. Unlike the contentious William Lloyd Garrison, for example, Gurney was a social conservative who had undertaken an extended mission to America to combat liberal schisms among the evangelical Society of Friends. Also unlike that of Garrison, Gurney's abolitionist message emphasized an economic rationale no less than moral suasion. The timing of his West Indian tour reflected as much. Touring the islands from January through March 1840, Gurney timed his visit to coincide with the most important harvest since passage of the Abolition Act.

Although enacted in August 1833, more than six years before, the act had not taken full effect all at once. A system of Apprenticeship had regulated the transition from slavery to freedom by controlling wages. Not until August 1, 1838, had Apprenticeship been disbanded and the new free-labor system turned over entirely to market forces. Visiting exactly one growing season after full implementation of the Abolition Act, the winter of 1839-40, therefore, offered the first opportunity to assess the economic results of slavery's abolition, an opportunity Gurney dared not miss. Traveling with Day, a New York City publisher and fellow Quaker abolitionist, Gurney visited numerous islands, including Jamaica, by far the largest and most important of Britain's West Indian colonies, where the Apprenticeship had lasted longest. Having collected evidence over a period of several weeks, Gurney and Day had just returned to the mainland, meeting Holmes on their way to Washington, where they arrived on Wednesday, May 6, 1840.³

They arrived at an auspicious moment. Entering the city amid shouts of "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," the Quaker minister found Congress recessed for the political conventions held in Baltimore earlier in the week. As Democratic and Whig partisans returned to the capital just as the abolitionists arrived, Gurney sought out Robert M.T. Hunter, Speaker of the House and a Virginia slaveholder, in hopes of addressing Congress as it reconvened. Having addressed Congress two years before, Gurney wished to do so again. Yet having led a religious service two years before, Gurney now wished to stump for abolitionism, a distinction not lost on the speaker. Refusing to lend abolitionism any semblance of official sanction, and hoping to discourage public speaking on the subject altogether, Hunter instead urged Gurney to pursue private interviews. Given the subject, Hunter doubtless expected the abolitionists' message would make little headway. But whether it was because of the election season, the recent interruption of government business, or influence gained from his previous visits, Gurney proved remarkably successful in arranging meetings.

Over a period of ten days he conducted dozens of interviews with the senior members of the U.S. Government, including President Martin Van Buren, recently re-nominated to head the 1840 Democratic ticket, and Secretary of State John Forsyth. In Congress Gurney secured audiences with Whig Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, Massachusetts Representative John Quincy Adams, and numerous others.

For Gurney, however, one interview stood out above all others. Arranged in cooperation with his recent acquaintance from Charleston, and scheduled for the morning of Saturday, May 9, the meeting was to take place at Hill's Mess, the boardinghouse of South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun. Accompanied by Holmes and Day, Gurney approached Calhoun, aware of his great influence throughout the American South. For his part, Calhoun politely welcomed his guests and, along with "several other southerners," including Alabama Senator Clement Comer Clay, "listened with the greatest attention."⁴

To Calhoun and his colleagues, including probably South Carolina Representative Robert Barnwell Rhett (another boarder at Hill's Mess), Gurney presented "five grand points" meant to demonstrate the superiority of freedom over slavery. Supported by observations and other empirical evidence taken from his recent tour in the West Indies, the points revealed unmistakable concern for practical matters certain to interest slaveholders who had long grown fearful of the prospect of abolition:

1. The liberated negroes are working well on the estates of their old masters.
2. The staple articles, with proper management, are produced at less expense under freedom than they had formerly been under slavery.
3. Landed and other real property has risen, and continues to rise, in value.
4. There is a corresponding improvement in the comforts of the labouring people, which is plainly evinced, among other circumstances, by the vast increase of imports.
5. There is an equal progress in the morals of the community, both black and white.

Openly conceded as proselytization, Gurney's points sought to convert slaveholders into abolitionists. They did so, moreover, by projecting free labor superior to slave labor, and not just on moral grounds. Predicated on the social and economic superiority of freedom to slavery, it was a message with which Gurney and his family had long been familiar.⁵

* * *

The promise of demonstrating free labor's superiority to slavery had proven central in the campaign for the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 in ways that even the act's staunchest proponents had not foreseen. Abolitionists like Thomas Fowell Buxton, Gurney's relative by marriage, had drawn inspiration from the liberal political economy of Adam Smith. The Scottish political economist, outspoken in his opposition to institutions of mercantilism and monopoly, had counted slavery as a principal target. In his *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, the opus of classical liberalism, Smith observed that "the experience of all ages and nations . . . demonstrates that the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any. A person who can acquire no property can have no interest but to eat as much, and to labour as little, as possible." Appearing in 1776, the *Wealth of Nations* coalesced eighteenth-century enlightened thought in ways that soon gave rise to an abolitionist movement in the northern Atlantic world based on liberal ideals of natural right. But mostly the marriage of abolitionism and liberalism produced a Smithian free-labor rationale that afterward animated British abolitionism for more than half a century.⁶

The Smithian free-labor rationale, premised on the idea that free labor was more efficient than slavery, immediately drew the attention of humanitarians. Wishing to convert the world's slaveholders into abolitionists but finding that economic incentive impeded their objectives, early leaders of British abolitionism saw the appeal of Smith's

anti-mercantilist message. By arguing that mercantilism undermined productivity and ultimately profitability, Smith offered the possibility also that market forces might redound to the humanitarians' advantage in an economic system unencumbered by mercantilist relationships. In short, Smithian free-labor rationale held the prospect of proving abolition economically logical. If abolitionists could prove free labor superior to slavery—by which they meant free labor would prove more profitable than slavery—slaveholders worldwide were sure to notice and abandon their institutions of bondage for the promise of greater profits. If slavery could be proven economically backward, moreover, humanitarians would have taken a crucial step toward proving moral and material progress one and the same. As postmillennialist Christians, by which they sought to begin the Millennium through the perfection of human society, British abolitionists of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries saw in Smithian logic the keystone for fulfilling that imperative. Earnest in their opposition to slavery, as their tenets of natural right held slavery a sin and therefore a glaring imperfection of humankind, they perceived economic incentive as the surest means of perfecting humankind.

It was no coincidence, therefore, that British abolitionists set about to prove free labor superior to slavery and that they sought to do so at the earliest possible date. When their efforts in Sierra Leone in the 1790s proved wanting, they maintained hope that better circumstances would prevail, targeting all along Britain's West Indian possessions. It was no coincidence, moreover, that British abolitionists and Smithian free traders in Parliament, mostly radical Whigs, saw common cause and acted accordingly. Unfortunately for the abolitionists' Smithian ideals, however, the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century witnessed a prolonged period of Tory government. Relegated to opposition for most of the four decades after the French Revolution, Britain's Whigs rarely secured positions of influence. As a result, British

abolitionists and the premillennialist hopes for the Smithian free-labor rationale were held at bay until 1830, even as the problems brought by the emergent Industrial Revolution mounted and produced an era of political revolution in Britain.⁷

Nor was the timing of Britain's Slavery Abolition Act a coincidence. Gaining power in 1830 on the occasion of a crisis over Catholic emancipation, Britain's Whigs in fact came to power because Britain's emergent middle class demanded reform. The problems brought by the Industrial Revolution and resulting urbanization had strained Britain's traditional institutions and left the newly emergent urban middle class largely disfranchised as a result of longstanding practices of parliamentary representation. The Great Reform Act of 1832, after a struggle to overcome Tory obstruction in the Lords, went far toward enfranchising the middle class. Consequently its interests—and sensibilities—could no longer be overlooked, and certainly were not to be ignored by the Whig Melbourne Ministry, which benefited by post-reform elections to an advantage of 479 to 179 in the House of Commons.

With a mandate for further reform, the Whigs next took aim at a realistic objective, one certain to appeal to the evangelical sentiments of Britain's middle class, if not its pocketbooks. Despite mounting pleas to reform Britain's system of agricultural protection—the Corn Laws—that injured working and middle class interests by artificially inflating foodstuffs prices in the British market, the Whigs doubted their ability to overcome Tory obstruction in the Lords on an issue so central to the interests of Britain's traditional landed elite. Consequently the next target of Whig reform was West Indian slavery, not the Corn Laws. Eager to rid themselves of the stain of slavery, Britain's evangelical middle class was sure to appreciate a move against slavery, especially given the results of a slave rebellion in Jamaica in 1831. Shocked by the slaveowners' ruthlessness in suppressing the revolt, British taxpayers even agreed to shoulder an expensive indemnity as Parliament convened in late winter 1833.

When the British resolved to abolish West Indian slavery in August 1833 therefore, they did so principally out of convictions of moral earnestness. Smithian ideals were more a liability than an asset. Few in Britain shared their Smithian free-labor rationale. British Tories, who after losing the struggle for the Reform Act began to call themselves Conservatives in an effort to attract greater popular support, certainly rejected Smithian free-labor claims, as did conservative and moderate Whigs. Had British acceptance of Smithian sentiments proven more widespread than it in fact did, Britain's commitment to abolition might easily be dismissed as well-intended leap into the dark. Yet Britain made no leap into the dark. The British were committed to slavery's abolition for reasons of moral earnestness despite knowing the economic risk their commitment entailed. It meant above all that West Indian abolition would be judged in its economic performance relative to the world's remaining slavery-based export economies. It would, in short, constitute a Smithian experiment despite the desires of Britain's Smithian skeptics. While most British observers doubted free labor could compete with slavery, most recognized as well that they were placing themselves, their nation, even the world in the most awkward of positions if their doubts proved true. For this reason Britain soon abounded in Smithian sympathizers, if not believers, who began to refer to abolition as an experiment that somehow, some way, might disprove prevailing doubts. Presenting the abolition bill to the Commons, Lord Stanley, Colonial Secretary in the Grey Ministry, acknowledged as much: "I cannot . . . conceal from myself, or from this House, the immense influence on the population of foreign countries which must arise from the result of this mighty experiment which we now propose to make."

Dubbing their commitment the Great Experiment, a name especially embraced by Smithian doubters, the British people therefore undertook a great risk when they authorized the abolition of West Indian slavery on August 29, 1833. The risk of course was partly their own. Incurring an indemnity of £20 million to compensate West Indian

slaveowners, British taxpayers knew that failure would burden them with a commitment to an uncompetitive system. Failure, moreover, held little prospect of a remedy, as the acknowledgment of the free-labor system's shortcomings was certain to send a message to the world's slaveholders the opposite of that abolitionists desired. Understanding as much even as he introduced the abolition bill, Stanley urged Parliament to take care in drafting the terms of the Great Experiment, for "on that may depend the welfare of millions of men in a state of slavery in colonies not belonging to Great Britain." From the moment of the act's passage, therefore, British officials in Parliament and even private citizens traveling to faraway capitals understood the need to project a successful image of West Indian free labor to the world's remaining slaveholders. Gurney's mission to Washington, by touting the experiment a success and seeking to convert southern slaveholders into abolitionists, simply carried the rationale of the experiment's image to its logical end.⁸

* * *

Taking pains to be in the West Indies at the critical moment of 1840, Gurney now brought the message of the Great Experiment's loftiest objectives to Calhoun and his colleagues. Expecting resistance in his individual effort to convert them to the abolitionist cause, the Quaker minister was by no means dismayed by the prospect of failure. As he might with a sermon, he focused instead on the logic of his message, leaving doubters something to think about. Significantly too, his logic, Smithian in principle, addressed practical matters of concern to southern slaveholders—at least as he understood them. Upon arriving in the United States in 1837 at the height of the Gag Rule controversy, Gurney as a guest on the floor of Congress had listened to slaveholders defend their refusal to receive abolitionist petitions. In fact, when Henry Clay harangued abolitionists for their natural-rights philosophy, Gurney answered with *Free and Friendly Remarks, on a Speech Lately Delivered to the Senate of the United States, by Henry Clay of Kentucky, on*

the Subject of the Abolition of North American Slavery. The effort earned Clay's respect, yet at the same time Gurney earned an appreciation for the concerns of slaveholders. Having built their world upon the pillar of slaves, they were, he thought, understandably concerned by the uncertainties posed by the pillar's removal, especially in light of prominent precedents. He knew white southerners were familiar with the history of St. Domingue, beset by ruinous decline, recurrent anarchy, and a shocking abandonment of western—in particular Christian—values since slavery had been abolished nearly a half century before. Neither could they forget Nat Turner's rebellion and the possibility of recurrent racial warfare. But the crux of white southerners' fears, he believed, was their doubts as to the worthiness of African descendants for freedom, doubts that had appeared most tellingly during the Virginia slavery debates of 1831-32. Mindful that the end of slavery would end taxes on slaves, leaving only land values as the basis of the state's revenue, slavery's defenders argued that abolition would in fact cripple the state's revenue, as the onetime slaveholdings, reliant on unreliable freed blacks for labor, would certainly depreciate as productivity declined. These racist doubts, Gurney knew too, were only reinforced by the examples of St. Domingue and Nat Turner's rebellion. Gurney, in short, striving to understand white southerners' proslavery ideology that held slavery a positive good, located the basis of that ideology in white southerners' practical fears. Practical himself, and differing greatly from socially radical abolitionists of the American North, Gurney even sympathized with these fears. Slaveholders could never be expected to embrace abolition so long as practical fears counseled against it. What was needed, he believed, was empirical evidence to convince white southerners that their fears of a world without slavery were unfounded.⁹

Gurney intended his five grand points to supply that evidence. Arranging the points in an inductive argument, with each point providing the foundation for the next, Gurney meant to challenge southerners' proslavery ideology by demonstrating free labor

superior to slave labor. His argument pivoted on its first point that the liberated slaves were working well on the estates of their former masters. Gurney knew that he had to refute the “old notion that the negro is, by constitution, a lazy creature, who will do no work at all except by compulsion,” a belief shared widely, as even many abolitionists doubted freed slaves would work estates they had worked as bondsmen. Yet in Antigua, he reported, the freed persons were doing just that. In fact, they volunteered longer hours than they had worked as slaves, with the result, he emphasized, that wages had fallen by the “increased quantity of work thrown upon the market.” This second point embodied the Smithian rationale of free labor’s superior efficiency to slavery, as reduced wages diminished the expense of production, thereby increasing profit margins and resulting in greater profits so long as production (and prices) remained constant. Like Adam Smith, Gurney made no claim that free labor was more productive than slavery, just more efficient. (The pivotal test of Smithian rationale was whether increased efficiency could offset the falloff in production anticipated by the conversion from a coercive to a volunteer labor system.) Yet Gurney’s third point implied that production remained more promising than most skeptics would have anticipated. Borrowing from the rationale of the Virginia slavery debates, during which it had been emphasized that diminished production would depreciate land values, Gurney implied that production in the British West Indies had remained promising by emphasizing that land values in the islands were rising. A fourth point, reporting increased material comforts in all sectors of West Indian society, pointed to the implications of greater efficiency, promising production, and resulting higher profits. This fourth point was in fact the key to Smithian free-labor logic. Production in a volunteer labor system would remain high, Smithians knew, only if the freed slaves believed that they had a stake in the prosperity of the post-emancipation order. Besides providing that stake, pervasive prosperity also pointed to intangible gains of abolition, implications that Gurney believed refuted the

racist notions of southern slaveholders, as he reported in his fifth point that there was witnessed an equal progress in the morals of the community, both black and white. Citing reduced crime rates, increased marriages, and a “rapid increase and vast extent of elementary and Christian education,” Gurney reported that everyone—former slaves and masters alike—exhibited a “moral and religious improvement . . . more than equal to the increase of their comforts.” In contrast to the ruin, anarchy, and heathenism of St. Domingue, British colonies manifest prosperity, order, and Christian revival.¹⁰

For Gurney, then, the lessons of his West Indian tour were clear: by every measure—economic, social, moral—free labor on the British model was superior to slavery. Implementing freedom had proven safe and wise, first of all, because British lawmakers had implemented freedom purposely and with diligence. Whereas in St. Domingue freedom had been attained by revolution, leaving the freed people little reason to embrace the society and values of their former owners, the freed population of the British West Indies embraced those of theirs. They did so, he emphasized, because slave emancipation on the British model promised the freed people an appreciable stake in post-emancipation society, thereby heightening their sense of social consciousness as well as their prosperity, morality, and civility. In the West Indies, Gurney discerned a thriving free-labor ideology affirming Smithian rationale, thereby proving the Great Experiment a shining success, although Gurney took care to avoid the term, thought pejorative. Jubilant, Gurney nevertheless shared the message of the Great Experiment’s loftiest objectives with everyone who would listen, including of course Calhoun and his colleagues: “who can doubt that the American statesman is bound, by every principle of philosophy as well as philanthropy, of policy as well as justice, to desist from the support of slavery, and henceforth to labor in the good old cause of emancipation?” Seeking further converts, Gurney soon put his message to print, as Day, his companion and publisher, quickly obliged. Published within weeks of returning to the mainland,

Gurney's memoir of his tour also received assistance in promotion from Henry Clay, who Gurney had previously addressed in print, although this time the senator happily lent his name. Marketed in the United States as *Familiar Letters to Henry Clay of Kentucky, Describing a Winter in the West Indies*, and published later with a variant title in Britain, Gurney's memoir stood as the first book-length account published in America of the Great Experiment since its full implementation. It also proved the last before the Civil War.¹¹

* * *

Although he had spent the previous three years in America, Gurney found himself unprepared for the response he received from southern slaveholders. Hopeful of winning converts to his cause but hardly expecting to, he looked mostly to reduce slaveholders to an irrational defense of their institutions. His message, so damaging to the racist presumptions of white southerners' proslavery ideology, appeared to him to leave little grounds for any defense otherwise. Instead, however, slaveholders like Calhoun accepted Gurney's argument entirely only to reject its missionary call on grounds of their republican ideology. As Calhoun happily clarified, southern slaveholders were republicans no less than the reactionary racists Gurney thought them. "After our statement was concluded," the Quaker minister later recalled, "we had the satisfaction of hearing [Calhoun] admit the whole truth of our case; and confess, without reserve, the superiority of freedom to slavery, even in a pecuniary point of view." Then, however, Calhoun "opened his fire upon us, as it regards the political aspects of the question, and entered on a rapid declaratory argument, vivid, acute, and to all appearance closely reasoned." In fact, Gurney found himself "cross-questioned" by Calhoun "as to probable political ascendancy of the blacks in the West Indies." Calhoun's explication of the importance of this point can only be surmised; unfortunately he left no record of the meeting and Gurney provided only bare detail. Those details, however, reveal that Calhoun turned the Quaker minister's own logic against him. Gurney had emphasized

the uniqueness of the British model of freedom and the care with which Britain had taken in implementing it. Calhoun agreed wholeheartedly with the importance of these points. Accepting Gurney's argument that the Great Experiment had succeeded, Calhoun located the source of that success in the "controlling power of Great Britain, considered as a third party," which could impose its centralized authority, coerce cooperation between the former slaves and masters, and guide the free-labor experiment with the diligence Gurney emphasized was so crucial. Calhoun then "dwelt on the absence of such a controlling power in America." Lacking such power—and with no desire to create it—white southerners had a moral responsibility, he concluded, to maintain their institution of slavery for the sake of the social good. At this point Calhoun's argument ventured to racist grounds. "Whites and blacks were so distinct as races—so incapable in the nature of things of being amicably mixed—that no peace could be maintained between them on any terms other than those which already subsisted . . . that the whites should hold the blacks in slavery." But Calhoun's racist ideology was symbiotic with his republicanism, as his commitment to the present political order within the American republic precluded amassing the centralized authority for a workable free-labor experiment in the United States. Both a republican racist and a racist republican, Calhoun could identify with neither the ends nor the means of Gurney's abolitionist message.¹²

To Gurney's dismay, moreover, Calhoun's arguments drew from, and garnered, extensive support. "Clay of Alabama and several other southerners," noted Gurney, "seemed much delighted with the eloquent argument of their leader." Indeed, Calhoun's arguments were widely understood, and not just among the southern Democrats present for the meeting with Gurney. Sometimes they were even clarified for European visitors. "Slavery has altered the whole state of society in the South," Alexis de Tocqueville had learned from an astute northerner a decade before. "There the whites form a class to

themselves which has all the ideas, all the passions, all the prejudices of an aristocracy, but do not be mistaken,” cautioned John Quincy Adams: “nowhere is equality between the whites so complete as in the South.” Southerners were rarely so forthcoming about the foundations of political equality in the South, even in the 1839 article “Domestic Slavery, As it exists in our Southern States, considered with reference to its influence upon free government.” “Domestic slavery,” wrote Abel P. Upshur for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, “is the great distinguishing characteristic of the southern states,” entering “into all their constitutions of government,” and “is, in truth, the basis of their political systems.” Unfortunately for Gurney, likely unfamiliar with the article, Upshur, a leading states’ rights jurist soon to become Secretary of State, published his celebrated treatise *A Brief Enquiry into the True Nature and Character of our Federal Government* only after Gurney departed for the West Indies. Significantly, Upshur’s *Brief Enquiry* countered Joseph Story’s *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States*, a centralist interpretation of national powers with which Gurney was undoubtedly familiar. Doubtless he also thought it promising for abolitionist objectives, yet to his dismay southern slaveholders overwhelmingly favored Upshur’s states’ rights view. Henry Clay, Gurney’s frequently renewed acquaintance, had also clarified on previous occasions the foundations of white southerners’ political liberty. He did so, however, for northern abolitionists, not the British visitor: “I most conscientiously believe that the Northern agitation of the question of Abolition is productive of no good. I believe it injurious to the unfortunate black race and hazardous to the harmony, peace and union of the white.” More than merely the racist fears that Gurney presumed, this latter point—the harmony, peace, and union of white southerners, the foundation of southern republican thought—also served as the bedrock of southern proslavery ideology.¹³

Gurney’s failure to account for the strength of American slaveholder’s commitment to their republican ideology held stark implications, immediately apparent to all

involved, especially his American audience. Whether an oversight or a matter of misplaced emphasis, Gurney simply misjudged the anticipated response. Nevertheless, Gurney, upon leaving the meeting and speaking of Calhoun, “felt well satisfied with his admissions; and notwithstanding his strong views on the politics of the case, continued to feel quite sure that the continuance of the present system involved an indefinitely greater danger of confusion, bloodshed, and ruin than would likely arise from its immediate extinction.” Whatever they were in actuality, Gurney wished southern slaveholders were paternalists. Otherwise his message—indeed British abolitionists’ loftiest hopes of proving economic and moral progress one and the same—held no meaning for them. A troubling thought for the Quaker minister, Calhoun’s dual response to his five grand points—accepting Gurney’s Smithian argument while rejecting its missionary message—pointed to a yawning abyss between British abolitionists’ hopes and American reality. American slaveholders had long ago inculcated the enlightened eighteenth-century liberal philosophy that underlie Smithian rationale and had adapted their institutions accordingly. Free traders, they had discarded mercantilism. They also prized principles of natural right, basing their understanding of them on, and finding them reaffirmed by, racial slavery. Their dual response to Gurney’s message, moreover, based upon their republican sensibilities, reaffirmed them as well. Significantly, Gurney and fellow British abolitionists had presumed, and certainly hoped, slaveholders would be lured by the promise of increased profits. Yet Americans’ republican sensibilities, with their emphasis on personal virtue and forsaking individual gain for the sake of the public good, proved inhospitable to such enticement. Indeed, Calhoun’s response to Gurney’s argument gave him and his slaveholding colleagues the satisfaction that the British, not they, put profits above all else, while satisfying themselves too that they, not the British, were virtuous republicans who sacrificed profits for the social good. In recent years, in response to the emergent abolitionist movement in the American North,

southern slaveholders had moved to deflate northern arguments of moral suasion by pointing to economic motives that explained slavery's abolition in the North. "If you look over the world, you will find that in all those countries where slavery has been found unprofitable, it has been abolished," James Henry Hammond apprised Congress in 1836. "In northern latitudes, where no great agricultural staple is produced, and where care, skill, and a close economy enter largely into the elements of production, free labor has been found more valuable than that of slaves." Yet Hammond's critique, if effective in pointing to profit motives of northerners, nevertheless left slaveholders open to the same charge: "in southern latitudes, where not only a large combination of labor under the direction of one head is required . . . domestic slavery is indispensable." Gurney's message, suggesting that southern slaveholders could increase their prosperity by embracing free labor, solved this dilemma. Far from claiming that southern slavery was unprofitable, Calhoun and his colleagues, particularly Hammond, a fellow South Carolinian, could hardly deny it was lucrative. Endorsing Gurney's message permitted southern slaveholders the welcome luxury of enjoying their profits and denying them too.¹⁴

Southern slaveholders' acceptance of Gurney's five grand points also held a further, crucial implication. They accepted Gurney's argument without seeing the need to question his evidence. Smithians themselves, they readily grasped the rationale of his argument. Yet their acceptance was based, too, on Hammond's logic of the economic incentives of abolition and their knowledge of the problems that had beset British West Indian slavery during its last decades. Although the West Indies were by no means located in northern latitudes, British lawmakers abolished the slave trade to their colonies early in the nineteenth century, denying British slaveholders continued imports of African captives enjoyed by competitors. "The British West India colonies are in a most depressed state," Louisiana Senator Josiah S. Johnston observed in 1827. Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Johnston had ordered an

investigation of the problems afflicting Americans' West Indian trade. The problem, he discovered, was the British West Indian economy. "Their productions are reduced to the minimum; they meet with a powerful competition from the other Islands in every market except England, and even there must be protected from the sugars of the Island of Mauritius and the East Indies." Johnston, moreover, found "the slave trade, by furnishing a unlimited amount of labor is the real cause of the distress of the British colonies." Hence to Calhoun and his colleagues, Gurney's argument made sense with little need to peruse the evidence. They already presumed Britain had abolished slavery because its citizens had come to find slavery unprofitable. It was therefore easy to accept that the resulting free-labor experiment had succeeded.¹⁵

This presumption, as well as Gurney's evidence, would come into question in coming years. In the meantime, however, Calhoun in particular could take comfort that the Great Experiment, a reported success, had redounded to Britain's economic advantage. As a result, Calhoun could hardly claim that Britain possessed economic motivation to pursue an antislavery foreign policy. To be sure, British lawmakers proclaimed many antislavery policies, largely the result of lobbyist pressure from abolitionists like Gurney. But these policies, as Calhoun well knew, meant nothing in themselves. What mattered in the end was their underlying motivation. If pursued merely to placate lobbyists, such policies, absent economic incentive, were sure to be toothless. Indeed, Calhoun quickly perceived a further implication: by the result of the Great Experiment's success, Britain possessed economic *disincentive* to undermine slavery where it remained, as fostering abolition would negate the economic advantage Britain gained by their own conversion. In this light, London's economic realists could be expected to counterbalance London's moralizing lobbyists. These implications—by no means Gurney's intention—came as great comfort to Calhoun, recently concerned about the grave direction of British policies.

NOTES

1. “our story of West Indian freedom . . .,” Joseph J. Gurney, *A Journey in North America, Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie* (Norwich, U. K.: Josiah Fletcher, 1841), 386; meeting with Holmes of May 9, 1840, 387-88; first meeting, 381-82. I wish to thank Mr. Ryan Shepard of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. for his assistance in determining the location of Hill’s Mess, the present-day location of the U.S. Supreme Court building on Capitol Hill. The weather for May 9 was reported in *DNI*, May 11, 1840.
2. Gurney’s several memoirs, cited in notes above and below, and James A. Rawley, “Joseph John Gurney’s Mission to America, 1837-1840,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (March 1963): 653-74, detail his life and extended stay in America.
3. Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies, Described in Familiar Letters to Henry Clay, of Kentucky*, London: John Murray, 1840), the edition cited in this study, recounts the tour in detail. An American edition, published earlier and with a variant title, omits several appendices included in the British edition; Gurney, *Familiar Letters to Henry Clay of Kentucky, Describing a Winter in the West Indies*. (New York: Press of Mahlon Day, 1840).
4. “several other southerners,” “listened with the greatest attention,” and the meeting’s context, Gurney, *A Journey in North America*, 389, 389, 387-90. Gurney, *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney; with Selections from His Journal and Correspondence, edited by Joseph Bevan Braithwaite*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862), 2: 221-29; and Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies*, 195-96, recount the numerous interviews. Calhoun appears to have left no record of the meeting. He identifies his place of boarding for the session in a letter to his son; Dec. 4, 1839, *PJC*, 15: 6.
5. “five grand points” and the points themselves, Gurney, *Journey in North America*, 389 and 388-89. Also Gurney, *Memoirs*, 2: 223. Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies*, 177-95, elaborates on the points in greatest detail. In the letter to his son cited in note 4 above, Calhoun identifies Rhett and South Carolina Representative Francis W. Pickens as boarders at Hill’s mess that spring. Calhoun to Anna Maria Clemson, May 30, 1840, *PJC*, 15: 237, confirms Pickens absent for the meeting with Gurney.
6. “The experience of all ages . . .,” Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. with an introduction, notes, marginal summary, and enlarged text by Edwin Canaan (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 418. This paragraph draws largely upon David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); and Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).
7. This paragraph draws largely upon David B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989).
8. “I cannot . . .” and “on that may depend . . .,” Stanley remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 14, 1833, *Hansard*, 17: 1194. Important for assessing Americans’ perceptions of the Great Experiment, British motivations for enacting the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 have been subject to numerous, far-ranging interpretations. Few prove useful for understanding the problem of slavery and progress, much less its role in American foreign relations. By far the most influential of these interpretations to existing historical literature, Eric Williams, *Slavery and Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

1944; reprint, New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), 107-208, posits a classic Marxist view, finding the decision for abolition limited to Britain's ruling and merchant elite. In stark contrast to Williams, who dismissed all rhetoric of the Great Experiment and instead concluded abolition a design of London merchants to destroy the productive capacity of the British West Indies for the purpose of bolstering the world market price of sugar, Howard Temperley, "Capitalism, Slavery, and Ideology," *Past and Present* 75 (May 1977): 94-118, as well as Temperley, "Abolition and the National Interest," in *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*, ed. Jack Hayward (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 86-109, conclude the Great Experiment a popular measure thought likely to succeed, the result of a Smithian ideology widely embraced in Britain, especially the emergent and capitalistic middle class. While Temperley does emphasize shortcomings of Smithian ideology, as does William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 99-228, Green finds far less acceptance of Smithian ideology, a crucial point. More useful still, Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor vs. Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-120, demonstrates Smithian ideals limited to a tiny bloc of abolitionists and radical Whigs, who wielded limited influence even after parliamentary reform, as the British polity set upon on a course with no assurance of success. I wish to thank Prof. Drescher for sharing prepublication drafts of his book.

9. Gurney, *Free and Friendly Remarks, on a Speech Lately Delivered to the Senate of the United States, by Henry Clay of Kentucky, on the Subject of the Abolition of North American Slavery* (New York: Mahlon Day and Co., 1839). Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) details southern slaveholder's concerns of Haitian precedents.

10. "old notion . . .," "increased quantity of work . . .," "rapid increase . . .," "moral and religious improvement . . .," and the entire argument, Gurney, *Winter in the West Indies*, 178, 179, 183, 183, and 177-84. Gurney's account of his interview with Calhoun merely outlines the points; Gurney, *Journey in North America*, 388-89.

11. "who can doubt . . .," Gurney, *Winter in the West Indies*, 195. Gurney, *Journey in North America*, 390-91, relates Clay's acquiescence. The British edition varies from the American also by the addition of a preface, styled as a letter to his brother-in-law, Thomas Fowell Buxton, and by several appendices, one of which includes his pamphlet *Free and Friendly Remarks*. The earlier account of the Great Experiment, James A. Thome and Joseph H. Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), is addressed in Ch. 2. William A. Green, "Was British Emancipation a Success? The Abolitionist Perspective," in *Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790-1916*, ed. David Richardson (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 183-303, and Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 19-41, illustrate that most observers of the Great Experiment, the great majority of whom were British abolitionists writing for a British, not American, audience, portrayed a far different picture of the experiment's results than Gurney. Those results were in fact gloomy, a point addressed in following chapters. The point of this chapter is that Gurney's message of success influenced American perceptions, if only for a few years.

12. All quotes, Gurney, *A Journey in North America*, 389. Gurney, *Memoirs*, 2: 223-24, recounts Calhoun's response with slight variation.

13. "Clay of Alabama . . .," Gurney, *A Journey in North America*, 389. "Slavery has altered . . .," Adams remarks, conversation with Alexis de Tocqueville, in Tocqueville, *Journey to*

America, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 61. “domestic slavery is the great . . .” Upshur, “Domestic Slavery, As it exists in our Southern States, considered with reference to its influence upon free government,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (Oct. 1839): 677-87, 677. A Virginian [pseud.], *A Brief Enquiry into the True Nature and Character of our Federal Government: Being a Review of Judge Story’s Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (Petersburg, Va.: E. and J.C. Ruffin, 1840), was Upshur’s treatise, published under pseudonym. “I most conscientiously believe . . .,” Clay to Lewis Tappan, July 6, 1838, *PHC*, 9: 212. J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), elucidates the slave foundations of white southerners’ political liberty in Clement Comer Clay’s Alabama, as does Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) for Calhoun’s South Carolina and William J. Cooper Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983) for the South in general.

14. “After our statement . . .,” Gurney, *A Journey in North America*, 389. “If you look over the world” and “in southern latitudes . . .,” Hammond remarks, U.S. House of Representatives, Feb. 1, 1836, *CG*, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 613.

15. “The British West India colonies . . .” and “Their productions are reduced,” Johnston remarks, Jan. 27, 1827, *SR*, 19 Cong., 2 sess., serial 145, no. 2, 17-18. “the slave trade . . .” Johnston, handwritten draft of Senate Commerce Committee Report, n.d., c. Jan. 1827, Johnston Papers, “Political Papers: British and French Shipping,” Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), makes the crucial point, drawn upon in later chapters, that while British slavery indeed entered a period of decline after 1814, slavery remained profitable in 1833. The point of this paragraph is to show that southern slaveholders perceived reasons to believe otherwise, not that they were right.

THE BULWARK OF LIBERTY

“There never before existed on this globe a nation that presented such a spectacle as Great Britain does at this moment,” John C. Calhoun warned Congress on March 13, 1840. Even as Joseph John Gurney toured Jamaica, Calhoun saw need to draw the Senate’s attention to a troubling pattern. “Apparently actuated by so much zeal on this side of the Cape of Good Hope in the cause of humanity and liberty,” Great Britain “appears to be actuated on the other side by a spirit of conquest and domination not surpassed by Rome in the haughtiest days of the Republic.” The South Carolinian drew particular attention to late news from China, where the present British ministry, the Whig government of Lord Melbourne, and its renowned Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, were “about to wage war against this venerable and peaceful people . . . to force on them the use of opium.” Continuing with his fulmination at great length, Calhoun pointed to slavery in India, Britain’s recent invasion of Afghanistan, Ireland’s hopeless plight, and even the late Chartist riots as evidence of British hypocrisy. “What a picture is presented to the mind in contemplating the present state of things in England!” Britain was hypocritical and motivated by desperation, he emphasized, points he wished his colleagues to remember as they considered British natural-law policies that threatened the American South with financial ruin.¹

British natural-law policies derived from the landmark *Somerset* case (1772) and the famous dictum of Lord Mansfield, that “England is a soil whose air is deemed too pure for slaves to breathe in.” The ruling granted freedom to James Somerset, a Jamaican slave transported to England by his master. Facing return to the West Indies, Somerset contested his master’s right to compel his departure. To rule in his favor, Mansfield, Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, had to break with precedent in British jurisprudence by refusing to accede to Jamaican laws permitting property in

slaves, which traditionally had been respected in the British Isles. In short, the central issue in the case was one of comity of law, by which the laws of one jurisdiction (or nation) are respected in another as judicial courtesy. Rejecting this courtesy, Mansfield held that England's free air bestowed Somerset natural rights, forbidding forcible deportation. In asserting natural right over comity, Mansfield therefore asserted natural law over property rights, a crucial step of logic that was in fact the principle point of the case. Somerset's counsel and leading abolitionists in Britain had sought nothing less. Nullifying property ownership in humans, the ruling set slavery, already moribund in the British Isles, to fast extinction. By its original intent, however, the *Somerset* ruling in no way threatened the slavery interests of the American South, then still under British authority. Binding only in the home islands, it did not apply to Britain's North American colonies, considered by tradition "beyond the line" of metropolitan sovereignty. Even after 1808, when Britain enacted prohibitions of the foreign slave trade, traditional interpretations of British jurisdiction remained in place. Although these prohibitions elicited an Underground Railroad to British Canada by rendering fugitive slaves free the moment they set foot on British soil, slaveholders nevertheless retained rights of compensation much as they did with slaves fleeing to the American North. If comity in these cases did little to recover their slaves, it provided slaveholders recourse to recover their slaves' value by petitioning the British government. From the standpoint of equity, then, nothing was lost.²

To Calhoun's dismay, Britain's Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 brought a reinterpretation of British colonial jurisdiction. On August 1, 1834, the day the act took effect, Britain's Grey Ministry extended the *Somerset* rationale to all British possessions in North America. Although the British Colonial Office disavowed such intent, the result was to create a comity-free cordon buffeting the American South, including British Canada, Bermuda, the Bahama Islands, and by implication every British cruiser

patrolling American waters from the mouth of the Sabine River to Cape May. According to Thomas Spring Rice, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, “the abolition of slavery . . . did not impose the duty or confer upon us a right of furthering the same result in foreign countries, by promoting the desertion of their slaves.” Issuing instructions to West Indian authorities—instructions that found their way into Bahamian newspapers frequently reprinted in Charleston and other southern ports—Spring Rice emphasized further that “justice and humanity concur in requiring us rather to discourage than to promote the resort of foreign fugitive Slaves to the shores of our colonies.”³

Yet British rhetoric stood in stark contrast to British behavior. When incidents occurred and Americans complained, Palmerston refused compensation. British discouragement to potential fugitives from slavery, moreover, amounted to nothing more than temporary “imprisonment with hard labor” and deportation “on board the first vessel which may be sailing to any foreign country where slavery does not prevail,” hardly disincentive to slaves fleeing a life of bondage. More troubling still, “the preceding rules,” Spring Rice emphasized, “have no application in the case of Slaves thrown by shipwreck or accident on the shores of the British Colony.” In those cases, which might be interpreted to include mutiny, not only would slaveholders find no recourse for their lost investment, but slaves could expect a free pass to freedom. By March 1840, several American ships had fallen victim to British natural-law policies, including the *Enterprise*, a Charleston slaver forced to seek refuge in Bermuda by rough seas. Once the storm calmed, the ship was permitted to sail, but its seventy-eight slaves intended for auction in New Orleans, were “proclaimed free by . . . having arrived in a colony in which slavery is abolished.”⁴

Calhoun championed the cause of the *Enterprise*, seeing in the British government’s refusal to grant compensation a momentous issue for the security of southern slavery. In

March 1840, British natural-law polices stood poised to bring financial ruin to the South. Since the Panic of 1837, New Orleans slave prices, \$1200 beforehand, had slumped to \$800 even as demand for slaves in the Cotton Southwest burgeoned. As slaves were the principal commodity of wealth in the antebellum South, a slump in prices was never good news for slaveholders. For South Carolinians, suppliers in the interregional market, it was more troubling still. While fueling demand in the Southwest, depressed prices reduced profit margins, rendering costs of transportation a paramount concern. Given the absence of a trans-southern railroad and the prohibitive expense of the overland route between Charleston and New Orleans, intracoastal passage by way of the Straits of Florida proved the only profitable route in a depressed market. The Straits of Florida, however, were flanked by the British Bahamas for more than one hundred miles and frequented by British cruisers and tropical storms. To protect themselves against “risks of emancipation, detention, or seizure by foreign power,” slaveowners soon found insurance policies for slave shipment indispensable. Premiums soon reflected as much, as firms such as the Merchants’, Fireman’s, and New Orleans Insurance Companies found it necessary to raise rates in the face of recurrent risk of seizure without compensation. These considerations together spelled trouble for the South. “Cases of the kind must be constantly occurring,” emphasized Calhoun to Senate colleagues, “unless, indeed, the increased hazard from this new danger should have the effect of closing the intercourse by sea between the Southern Atlantic ports and those of the Gulf, so far as our slave property is concerned.” Slaveholders would only move slaves if they found it profitable, Calhoun knew. If they did not, slave values in Charleston could only be expected to slump further, endangering the institution upon which white southerners based their republican liberty.⁵

In March 1840, Calhoun responded to British natural-law policies with the *Enterprise* Resolutions, a series of three resolves submitted to the U.S. Senate that

asked that body to proclaim the British seizure of the slaves aboard the *Enterprise* as an unwarrantable violation of international law. In recounting the circumstances that led the American intercoastal slaver to seek refuge in Nassau harbor, Calhoun informed the Senate that traditional precepts of the laws of nations extended protection to ships that entered foreign ports as a result of stress of weather. Palmerston's refusal to pay compensation for the seized slaves therefore broke precedent with international law, especially as he based his refusal on the natural-law grounds first pronounced in the *Somerset* ruling, a case that involved matters that lay entirely within British jurisdiction. If Lord Mansfield had rejected the Jamaican slaveowners' pleas for comity, that refusal was a matter that involved British law only. Palmerston's extension of the *Somerset* logic to pertain to the slave property of non-British citizens therefore also extended the applicability of its logic to international law. More troubling, just as the *Somerset* ruling had revised British law, Calhoun feared that Palmerston's assertion of British natural-rights policies stood the chance of revising international law if the assertion went uncontested. Indeed, as Calhoun interpreted them, Palmerston's natural-law policies required a revision of international law. "I hold it impossible for her to maintain the position she has taken," Calhoun concluded, referring to Great Britain and insisted that "she must abandon it as untenable, and take one of two other positions: either that her municipal laws are paramount to the law of nations . . . or that slavery—the right of man to hold property in man—is against the law of nations." As neither of these positions was tenable without fundamental revision of international law, Calhoun intended his *Enterprise* Resolutions to force the U.S. Senate go on record against any such revision, thereby affirming the inviolability of American property rights in slaves based on American positive law, and thereby providing as well security for American slavery interests that otherwise would be rendered irreparably vulnerable to British natural-law policies. The crux of the issue, he emphasized, was that the security of

American slavery prohibited revision of the law of nations, especially revisions that furthered British antislavery objectives. “To us this is not a mere abstract question, nor one simply relating to the free use of the seas,” Calhoun explained: “it comes nearer home,” threatening to render the “all-important channel . . . too hazardous for use” and to interdict “intercourse by sea” of the “greatest and most valuable portion of the property of the South as if she were to send out cruisers against it.”⁶

The responsibility for this unfortunate circumstance, Calhoun found, lay not with the British government, or even British Whigs, but the interests to which British Whigs found themselves beholden. No Anglophobe, Calhoun disavowed any intent to allege belligerency on the part of Great Britain. “I mean not to say that deliberate and intentional injustice was done,” he emphasized, nor did he “suppose that she is about to turn buccanier and plunder our coasting trade.” Rather, his target was the bloc of London moralizers that appeared to have gained the upper hand in their nation’s policymaking. Since passage of the Slavery Abolition Act seven years before, he explained to the Senate, Britain’s Whigs had lost the immense advantage in the House of Commons they had enjoyed at that time. Under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel, Britain’s Tories, long known for their reactionary defense of tradition, had reformed their image, even trading the label “Tory” for “Conservative” in an effort to portray themselves as compassionate defenders of British tradition, not mere reactionaries. Under Peel’s leadership the party had recovered steadily from the triple blows of Catholic Emancipation, the Great Reform Act, and the Slavery Abolition Act to press the Whigs for power. In fact, Britain’s Whigs found themselves a minority government, dependent upon “such adventitious aid as can be conciliated” to maintain office. “Among the subdivisions of party in Great Britain, the Abolitionist interest is one of no little power,” Calhoun explained, “and it will be seen at once that the question involved . . . is one in reference to which they would have no little sensibility.” British policies, he

concluded, had succumbed to “fanatics” with “little regard either to reason or justice where the object of their enthusiasm is concerned” for the sake of bolstering Whig strength in Parliament. The reasons for the Whig’s political straits, moreover, loomed large, yet Calhoun saw little need to explain their basis. Since the Panic of 1837, times were tough all over, evidenced unmistakably for southern slaveholders by Britain’s unsettled demand for southern cotton. Drawing notice to the recent Chartist riots and the economic basis of Britain’s Opium War, Calhoun reinforced the image that Britain was experiencing hard times and that the abolition interest was benefiting.⁷

Even then Calhoun’s purpose was not to deride British abolitionists so much as to isolate the dangers of fanaticism he perceived within the American Union. Although they fell under the authority of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and were meant to bolster American negotiations for compensation, the *Enterprise* Resolutions were intended mostly for a home audience. In one sense, Calhoun meant to influence the federal judiciary in its consideration, recently begun, of the celebrated *Amistad* case. A Spanish vessel transporting African captives off Cuba, the ship had fallen victim to a mutiny of the captives it transported. Entering American waters, it was then claimed by U.S. Navy under the laws of nations as maritime prize. The fate of the mutineers drew widespread attention, in particular from Lewis Tappan, a New York City merchant and founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, who saw in the case much the same opportunity *Somerset* had presented British abolitionists. Just as Mansfield had based his ruling on natural-rights grounds, the federal judiciary, facing competing claims by Spanish claimants and the mutineers suing for freedom, might do the same if it ruled for the captives. Calhoun saw this possibility also and sought to discourage the outcome, asking the Senate to provide a mandate affirming the laws of nations in a way that affirmed the rights of Spanish claimants.⁸

In another sense, the resolutions served as an election-year ploy. Concerned by what he perceived as fanaticism in Britain, Calhoun was even more troubled by what he saw as its influence in the American North, especially among Whigs like John Quincy Adams whose banking and tariffs programs demanded the centralized authority Calhoun so distrusted. Emphasizing that the resolutions permitted no distinction between property rights in general and property rights in slaves, Calhoun made clear his desire that the resolutions receive unanimous adoption. Short of unanimity, the resolutions would send the message that Americans were divided in their opposition to British antislavery policies, a message far different from what Calhoun sought. If northern Whigs resisted, southern Whigs were sure to notice, a result that would upset party unity and further sectional cohesiveness in the South in defense of slavery and that Calhoun had long sought. If northern Whigs complied, Democrats, more amenable to Calhoun's objectives, stood to benefit by any backlash of northern constituents. Certain "all would . . . be pleased with the opportunity . . . to stand by us on this great question, in which we are particularly concerned, as we have stood by them," Calhoun, moreover, reminded senators that southerners had repeatedly defended Maine's claims in an ongoing dispute with Great Britain over the northeastern boundary. Sure to get the attention of the antislavery bloc, this logrolling recognized no difference between landed property and property in slaves. Calhoun clarified this intent just before the Senate vote: was the Senate "ready to say that the rights of the South to the great mass of its property, that which enters so deeply into their political and social institutions, and on the maintenance of which not only their wealth and prosperity but peace and safety depend shall be outlawed and placed beyond the pale of protection? Is it prepared to distinguish between this and every other description of property, so as to leave this alone undefended?" Asserting natural law to the peril of southern interests, Great Britain had

made just that distinction. “Is she right?” Calhoun demanded. “Are you ready to say so by your votes? If so, it is time we should know it.”⁹

Adopted unanimously by the Senate on April 15, 1840, the *Enterprise* Resolutions fell far short of Calhoun’s hopes. Focusing on the unanimity of the 33-0 vote, most observers marveled at the result, a sense captured by Thomas Hart Benton when writing his memoirs years later: “this was one of the occasions on which the mind loves to dwell, when, on a question purely sectional and Southern, and wholly in the interest of slave property, there was no division of sentiment in the American Senate.” More attentive observers, however, recognized that the Senate in fact was badly divided. “Voted unanimously by twenty-two slave-breeders and eleven craven Democrats,” lamented John Quincy Adams, the resolutions were most notable for exposing the “fifteen more craven spirits *absent*, skulking from the question upon which they dared not vote either yea or nay.” Besides one genuine absence, fifteen of the sixteen recorded absences were abstentions by northerners, a pattern not unlike what Calhoun expected. Yet when analyzed by party, the vote gave Calhoun cause for concern. Whigs accounted for only eight of the absences. To Calhoun’s dismay, seven Democrats withheld support of property rights in slaves, defeating the resolutions’ political calculus and suggesting a greater influence of antislavery sentiment within the Union than Calhoun expected.¹⁰

* * *

When Gurney arrived in Washington less than a month after the Senate vote for the *Enterprise* Resolutions, Calhoun welcomed his message of the Great Experiment’s success. Faced by northerners’ uncertain commitment to defend property rights in slaves, Calhoun saw in the message hope that such a commitment would be unnecessary, at least as far as British policies were concerned. Calhoun’s anxieties over British threats had been based on his presumptions regarding British politics in 1840. He had known little about the West Indian experiment. (In fact, there was little to be

known before March 1840, as Apprenticeship had not ended in the larger of the British West Indian islands until 1838.) Rather, Calhoun had come to believe Britain's Whig governments were beleaguered politically as the result of hard times owing to social and economic dislocations brought by the Industrial Revolution. Needing votes in Parliament wherever it could get them, British Whig ministries had become dependent upon the abolitionist bloc and, for that reason, had pursued policies injurious to southern slavery interests. Although Calhoun stopped short of imputing British policies with that objective, he was by no means oblivious to the possibility. Now, however, such a link made no sense. Gurney's message of the Great Experiment's success implied that Britain stood to gain little by undermining slavery outside British jurisdiction. In fact, by Gurney's telling they stood to lose economically by such policies. London's economic realists could now be expected to hold sway over Whig policies, at least as far as slavery interests were concerned. London's moralizing lobbyists would be left to pursue their abolitionist objectives much as had Gurney, by unofficial missions to faraway capitals spreading the gospel of free labor's superiority over slavery.

Gurney's message, moreover, suggested that Britain's Conservatives, should they gain power, would provide welcome relief from a decade of British Whig rule. A party of reform, Britain's Whigs were intent on consolidating popular support for further reform, Calhoun knew, reforms that included especially dismantling Britain's elaborate system of agricultural protection, the Corn Laws. Even in light of the Great Experiment's success, therefore, he understood that Palmerston and the Whigs were likely to continue their active foreign policy to consolidate that support. In addition to the war in China, news soon arrived of the invasion of Syria. Worse still, Palmerston seemed intent on war with America, the result of numerous disputes arising out of the recent rebellion in Canada and British infringement on American shipping as part of the campaign to suppress the African slave trade. So far as Calhoun could tell, none of these disputes

involved southern slave interests; nevertheless the threat of war piqued white southerners' worst fears. British incursions during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 had left southern slavery intact, as the invaders, slaveholders themselves, had little interest in setting precedent of abolition by force of arms. Now the story could prove far different. At the very least, Britain could be expected to close the Straits of Florida. "There are, it is said, at this time ten thousand black troops in the British West Indies," warned Georgian Representative Thomas B. King in July 1841. Chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs, King cautioned that "in our present defenceless condition a force composed of armed steamers and troops of that description would not only give great annoyance to our coast, but most effectually, and at once, put a stop to all communication round Cape Florida." With this concern in view, southern slaveholders in Congress, Calhoun among them, voted appropriations for the creation of home squadron in the summer of 1841. All the while New Orleans slave values continued to decline, slumping to \$600 by 1842, half their value prior to the Panic of 1837. So long as Palmerston and British Whigs remained in power, there seemed no end for the need of heightened vigilance and appropriations ¹¹

British Conservatives, by contrast, promised peace and the status quo, especially in light of Gurney's message of the Great Experiment's success. Had Gurney reported the experiment's failure, the logic of party-power transfer in Britain could be expected to be reversed. Had British Conservatives come to power to find Britain at an economic disadvantage by the results of abolition, they could be expected to redress the situation, and as British evangelical sensibilities precluded a returned to slavery, redressing the situation meant finding ways to make the Great Experiment succeed. Their ties to Britain's landed interests meant British Conservatives were sure to prove less tolerant than Britain's Whigs of circumstances that brought disadvantage to British agriculture; the struggle over the Corn Laws taught as much. The result of the Great Experiment's

failure could therefore be expected to transform Britain's Conservatives—defenders of British slavery interests before 1833—into antislavery zealots even more earnest in pursuing antislavery foreign policies than Britain's Whigs, a sobering thought for southern slaveholders who found British Whig policies troubling enough. But southern slaveholders like Calhoun did not expect British Conservatives to come to power and find British agriculture at an economic disadvantage. Here lay the most far-reaching significance of Gurney's mission to Washington. By proclaiming the Great Experiment a success, Gurney implanted in the minds of Washington policymakers an understanding that abolition brought Britain economic advantage, not disadvantage. British Conservatives could still be expected to act logically as the economic interests of British agriculture dictated, but the logic of the Great Experiment's success pointed to foreign policies far more tolerant of the world's remaining slaveholders than the logic of failure. Believing the Great Experiment to have succeeded, Calhoun and fellow southern slaveholders therefore saw reason to look forward to a change of government in London.

Nothing demonstrated Calhoun's relaxed concern about British policies than the *Creole* mutiny of November 1841. A Richmond slaver destined for New Orleans, the ship incurred a rebellion of its transported captives much as occurred with the *Amistad*, except that the *Creole* mutineers successfully reached their preferred destination: Nassau harbor in the British Bahamas. It soon came to light that the mutineers had planned the act while still in Virginia. The revolt highlighted the risk that Britain's cordon of freedom posed to the South. Aware that Britain's natural-law policies beckoned freedom, the mutineers proceeded to carry out the most successful slave revolt in American history, liberating 128 Virginia slaves. Worse still, there was no way of knowing how far word had spread along the Atlantic seaboard of the hope the British Bahamas offered.¹²

The reaction of southern slaveholders to the mutiny was sharp, yet a peculiar pattern emerged. Although the potential threat of further mutinies seemed most damaging to the interests of Carolinian slaveholders, such as Calhoun championed with the *Enterprise* Resolutions, the sharpest reaction by far was among the importing interests of the Cotton Southwest, where most of the burden of risk had shifted by 1841 as a result of the demands of insurers now seen as indispensable to the interregional trade. Under pressure from New Orleans insurers, Louisiana Senator Alexander Barrow insisted to the U.S. Senate that “if these contemptible British subjects at Nassau were permitted to seize . . . by force of arms slaves belonging to American citizens . . . the South would be compelled to fit out armaments and destroy Nassau.” It was time, Barrow maintained, to settle “whether the British Government had a right to do what they who lived in the South denied to their own Government . . . the right of suppressing the slave trade between the States.” Alabama Senator William Rufus de Vane King agreed: “it was high time” that Britain learned just how far the “rights of property and our flag are to be respected. The grasping spirit of that power—the assumed jurisdiction over the question of slavery and the . . . search of American vessels on the coast of Africa . . . must be productive of serious difficulties between the two nations.” From state legislatures in Jackson and New Orleans, moreover, petitions soon arrived in Washington apprising officeholders that should they fail to address British natural-law policies effectively—and soon—the “slaveholding states would have the most just cause to apprehend that the American flag is powerless to protect American property.”¹³

Led by Calhoun, Carolinians by contrast counseled patience, although not because interests were not at stake. If most of the risk in the interregional trade had shifted to the Southwest by 1841, profit margins for slave suppliers on the Atlantic coast remained tight. Rather, Carolinians’ patience resulted from their acceptance of the arguments of the Mississippi and Louisiana legislatures that the American flag was powerless to

protect American slave property. If the vote for the *Enterprise* Resolutions revealed a limited commitment to protect property rights in slaves, developments since April 1840 further undermined Calhoun's confidence in the protection offered by the American Government. First and most important, the accession of John Tyler to the presidency upon the death of William Henry Harrison, elected in 1840, commenced a struggle within the American Whig party. Leaving the executive and legislative branches of government at odds, the struggle enervated Tyler's presidency and threatened the national treasury with bankruptcy. The "principles maintained by Great Britain," Calhoun continued to believe, represent "the most dangerous innovation on national rights and national honor ever claimed by one independent power of another." Nevertheless, responding to Barrow's and King's remarks in December 1841, Calhoun "expressed extreme regret that so much had been said about a war with Great Britain." To James Henry Hammond he acknowledged, too, that "the conduct of Great Britain is outrageous, but the Government is in no condition to make an issue of arms at this time. The finances are in a wretched condition, and the Executive as feeble as can be." Second, recent news from London provided hope. "As the British Government had lately fallen to the care of a new ministry," South Carolina Senator William C. Preston remarked with confidence, "there was some reason to believe that the decisions of the former British cabinet, with regard to the seizure of slaves, would be reversed." In September 1841, British Conservatives, led by Peel took office, replaced Whig ministers, and especially Palmerston, who had dominated British policymaking for the past decade. Ironically, even as slaveholders denounced British natural-law, Calhoun and fellow slaveholders looked to London for the security of slavery and their republican liberty.¹⁴

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As much as it was welcomed in the American South, the transfer of party power in London brought deep concern to antislavery proponents in the American North. As much

as southern slaveholders distrusted the American Government to protect slavery, antislavery proponents distrusted it to do much of anything else. Believers in a Slave Power conspiracy, these northerners were convinced southern slaveholders dominated the national government, bent it to their own ends, and did so to the disadvantage of northern free-soil interests. As a result, they shared a further belief: to counter the Slave Power they must look to London. “Southern men in Congress seem to have taken entire control of the public affairs,” complained James G. Birney, a Kentucky slaveholder-turned-abolitionist who emerged as the presidential candidate for the antislavery Liberty party in 1840 and again in 1844. “Just look at the debate in the Senate on the *Formosa* and *Creole* cases . . . we have to look to the influence of England for emancipation.” Lewis Tappan agreed. A founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and its succeeding organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Tappan acknowledged that “Foreign” was an integral part of the northern antislavery movement: “we look to Gr. B. to be the bulwark of Liberty.” In every sense, then, Birney and Tappan represented the threat of fanaticism Calhoun most feared.¹⁵

Birney in particular reveled in giving southern slaveholders cause for concern. Author of a series of resolutions during the 1830s advocating the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, Birney emerged as the abolitionist movement’s foremost legal mind. Although his resolutions to abolish slavery in the nation’s capital failed, for example, they forced slaveholders to concede that if the federal government possessed no power to prohibit slavery neither could it possess power to protect it, a line of argument later taken up by Salmon P. Chase to become a staple of free-labor constitutional logic. It was no coincidence, then, that Calhoun’s *Enterprise* Resolutions drew Birney’s attention. In June 1840, addressing the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, Birney outlined an elaborate set of counter resolutions. From the premise that the federal government lacked the power to protect slavery, he embraced also the *Somerset* rationale that

because slavery abridged natural rights, natural law prevailed where no positive law existed to abridge it. This natural-law argument proved especially useful to Birney because it implied that state powers over slavery extended only so far as state jurisdiction, and because the states delegated to the federal government all powers over international commerce when they ratified the Constitution, the conclusion was unmistakable. The federal government had no authority to demand compensation for the property seized from the *Enterprise*. The implications of Birney's argument were ominous for the interests of slaveholders, especially in light of Britain's prohibitions against the slave trade and their determined enforcement by the British Navy. Yet far beyond just closing the Straits of Florida, this logic would render any slave subject to seizure outside the jurisdiction of the slaveowner's home state. A Virginia slave, for example, could be seized while in transit to New Orleans as soon as the vessel entered Carolina waters. But for Birney, Calhoun's resolutions in the face of this logic stood as another example of the Slave Power's influence over the federal government.¹⁶

The *Creole* mutiny afforded antislavery proponents in Congress an opportunity to assail Calhoun's resolutions with Birney's logic. The violence of the incident at first gave abolitionists pause, as the mutiny resulted in the death of a slave broker, exacerbating slaveholders' sense of injury and leaving defenders of the mutiny open to the charge of inciting murder. Led by Ohio Representative Joshua R. Giddings, however, the antislavery bloc in Congress changed course when slaveholders in Congress received encouragement from Daniel Webster, Secretary of State in the Tyler Administration, in their demands for redress. A Massachusetts senator in April 1840, Webster had abstained from the vote for the *Enterprise* Resolutions but now embraced Calhoun's logic in demanding the British Government pay compensation. On March 21, 1842, Giddings proposed to the U.S. House of Representatives a series of resolutions based closely on Birney's logic, to become known as the *Creole* Resolutions. Giddings' stated purpose was

to contest slaveholders' claims for compensation, but the natural-law logic of his resolutions, recognized instantly for its larger purpose, created an immediate sensation on the House floor. Taken aback by Giddings' hornets' nest, moderate and conservative northern Whigs attempted to table the resolutions, resulting in the peculiar sight of slaveholders and antislavery advocates combining forces to reject the motion. With both sides looking for a fight, Giddings managed to get his resolutions accepted for consideration, only to incur the voting strength of proslavery congressmen and their allies. In collaboration with northern Democrats, southerners rejected Giddings' resolutions out of hand. Replacing them with resolutions of censure, they called for—and gained—censure of the Ohio representative for presenting “a series of resolutions touching the most important interests connected with a large portion of the Union, now a subject of negotiation between the United States and Great Britain of the most delicate nature, the result of which may eventually involve these nations and perhaps the whole civilized world in war.” Resigning his seat in protest, Giddings was soon returned by his constituents to Congress. In fact, his censure became a rallying point for the antislavery movement, much as the *Creole* Resolutions later formed the basis of free-soil opposition to slavery's extension into the western territories. Yet there was no denying that the American antislavery movement stood in need of a rally. Although non-slaveholding states controlled nearly sixty percent of House seats, Giddings gained the support of only 10.4 percent (including only two of fifty-six northern Democrats) in his effort to pick a fight with slaveholders and win it. A true measure of antislavery sentiment, the votes confirmed what many abolitionists had long accepted. “There is no reason for believing that the virtue of our own people would ever throw off Slavery,” Birney lamented. “Slavery has corrupted the whole nation.”¹⁷

Discouraged by their weakness, abolitionists like Lewis Tappan had long looked to Britain and its free labor experiment for means of furthering their cause. In 1837 Tappan arranged for and financed the compilation of *Emancipation in the West Indies*, a travel memoir by Jason A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball published the following year. Abolitionists who shared Gurney's objective of assessing the "great experiment of freedom," Thome and Kimball differed from the Englishman, however, in that they visited the islands before complete implementation of the Abolition Act. In fact, their purpose, to demonstrate the "duty" and "perfect safety of immediate emancipation," required they do so. Not all of the colonies had implemented Apprenticeship. In the larger islands of the British West Indies, like Jamaica, the freed slaves would not receive full freedom for another year, working in the meantime as apprentices, by which they worked for fixed nominal wages. Apprenticeship had been intended as part of the package of compensation offered to the former slaveholders. In addition to sharing an indemnity of £20 million, the slaveowners were permitted to benefit by the continued production of their former slaves, classified apprentices, at minimal expense. Proponents of Apprenticeship billed it also as a necessary stage of transition to prepare the former slaves for freedom, an argument denounced by British abolitionists. An advocate of immediate emancipation in the American South, Tappan took the opportunity to assess the contrast between colonies that moved directly to the free labor experiment and those that chose instead the course of gradualism. Consequently, Thome and Kimball focused their attention on Antigua and Barbadoes, which forewent Apprenticeship, and Jamaica. The contrast, they reported, was striking. Whereas in Antigua the "emancipated slaves have readily, faithfully, and efficiently worked for wages from the first," and even in Barbados the freed persons were "rising in the scale of civilization, morals, and religion," the authors found conditions in Jamaica dispirited and unpromising. To Tappan's

delight, therefore, they concluded immediate emancipation an inspiring success and the gradual course of Apprenticeship as detrimental as slavery itself.¹⁸

News of the Great Experiment's success found a receptive audience in the American North, especially northerners who harbored convictions of a Slave Power conspiracy. "I wish to recommend to your readers a book just from the press entitled "Emancipation in the West Indies," Reverend Robert Ellery Channing informed the editor of the *Christian Register and Observer*. "The results of this great Experiment surpass what the most sanguine could have hoped." New Englanders who little understood, or respected, southern ideals of republican liberty thought the news certain to prove influential. "The only ground on which I had been accustomed to hear the continuance of slavery defended at the South was that of necessity, and the impossibility of abolishing it without producing consequences of the most disastrous character to both parties," admitted Edward Everett, a Whig and Governor of Massachusetts. "I cannot but think that the information collected in this volume will have a powerful effect on public opinion, not only in the northern states, but in the slaveholding states." William W. Ellsworth, Whig Governor of Connecticut, agreed: "the Journal of Thome and Kimball . . . it is justly calculated to produce great effects, provided you can once get it into the hands of the planters. Convince them that their interests, as well as their security, will be advanced by employing free blacks, and emancipation will be accomplished without difficulty or delay." Just as the belief in a Slave Power conspiracy proved increasingly pervasive in the American North, so too did the free labor ideology that underlie the message of the Great Experiment's success. Even during the Civil War, Lydia Maria Child urged President Abraham Lincoln to look to the results of the Great Experiment conveyed by Thome, Kimball, and later Gurney as evidence that abolition would bring prosperity, not ruin, to the American South. Her plan, found in *The Right Way, The Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the West Indies* was "a very simple one . . . it is merely to stimulate

laborers by wages instead of driving them by the whip. When that plan is once adopted, education and religious teaching, and agricultural improvements will soon follow, as matters of course.” When the Port Royal Experiment, implemented in wartime South Carolina, appeared to validate Child’s Smithian rationale, abolitionists (Tappan included) were thrilled. But if the Port Royal Experiment validated anything, it was Calhoun’s arguments related to Gurney in May 1840. Conducted under the centralized authority of invading Union forces, the Port Royal Experiment trampled upon antebellum white southerners’ republican ideology as nothing else could.¹⁹

No matter southerners’ ideals, Tappan’s free labor ideology dictated remaking the South in the North’s image. Thome and Kimball’s study of the West Indies was compiled for just that reason. Tappan asked nothing more of the South than he asked of himself. Born into Unitarian Boston, Tappan had remade himself a New York City evangelical imbued with a postmillennialist eschatology. Intent on perfecting humankind, Tappan, like Gurney, was also a social conservative at odds with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, a social radical who perceived nearly as many shortcomings in northern society as he did the South. As a New York City merchant, Tappan saw much to embrace in the modern industrial order emergent in the North Atlantic with its burgeoning consumer demand so central to the city’s commerce. Tappan’s commitment to modernity led him to establish the Mercantile Agency, a credit-rating firm later to become Dun & Bradstreet, Inc. It also led him to proselytize against slavery, a sin like bad credit, he perceived, that delayed Christ’s Second Coming because it inhibited humankind’s perfection. Tappan therefore shared Gurney’s penchant for reasoning with slaveholders, yet with a greater sense of urgency. Unlike Gurney, Tappan’s audience remained fellow countrymen.²⁰

“I am anxious that influential planters in the U.S. should know the important results of emancipation in the West Indies,” Tappan wrote Henry Clay in June 1838, drawing attention to the “work of Thome & Kimball” and its findings of the benefits of

immediate abolition. “If safe and useful in the W. I.,” asked Tappan, “why not in the U. S.?” Undeterred by southern slaveholders’ republican ideals, Tappan sought to employ them to his advantage, together with an appeal to patriotism and honor. “As a friend to my country,” he remarked, “I lament that she did not set the high example to the world of giving liberty to her captives, and then following up the noble principles of liberty promulgated in the Dec. of Independence. But the U. S. allowed G. B. to bear the palm.” In the end, however, Tappan’s appeal to Clay was founded on Smithian rationale. A longtime advocate of internal improvements and economic development, Clay, a stalwart Whig, was the most likely of all southerners to heed the call of profits. Rather than contesting Jacksonian policies in Washington, Tappan suggested, Clay would profit more by persuading Frankfort legislators to abolish slavery: the “real property of Ky. would be doubled in value & a spring would be given to her agriculture, trade & commerce such as has never been witnessed.” Unlike Alexis de Tocqueville, who recently had contrasted the languidness of Kentucky to the bustling free-labor society of neighboring Ohio, Tappan urged Clay instead to look far beyond the free labor North for a compelling model of prosperity: “look at Antigua & Barbadoes!”²¹

* * *

No one looked to Antigua and Barbadoes as a model of prosperity more than John Quincy Adams. The renowned statesman from Massachusetts, a fixture in the U.S. House of Representatives since his presidency, had been earlier in life a fierce nationalist. England had often been a target of his contempt. Witnessing the battle of Bunker Hill in his youth, he had later negotiated the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812, and in 1823, as Secretary of State, rejected a British offer of alliance by authoring the Monroe Doctrine. Yet Adams, astute as he was principled, had long used Britain as a bulwark of liberty. Even the Monroe Doctrine, typically taken as a paragon of a nationalistic foreign policy, he conceded to depend upon British naval power for its

efficacy. Since that time, moreover, Adams had come to fear for the American experiment in republican government, beset by Jacksonian Democracy and a slaveholding bloc of a strength unknown to the founding fathers. More and more, industrializing Britain, with its own Whig heritage to which American republicanism owed its origins, had come to gain Adams' admiration. When British Whigs finally broke the long reign of Tory rule and began implementation of a concerted program of reform, he drew particular notice to the Abolition Act and the burden it exacted on British taxpayers. "My jealousies of the grasping and perfidious Albion have been greatly disarmed by her demonstrated ardour in the pursuit and persevering propagation of universal freedom," Adams confided to Richard Rush in December 1842. "I cannot see fraud or hypocrisy in the sacrifice of one hundred millions of dollars for the purchase of eight hundred thousand Slaves to set them free." Try as he might, Adams could locate no equivalent of the British taxpayer in the American Republic of the 1830s. Indeed, he took little pride in his own country "when I see the cotton, rice, and tobacco planter breeding his own children for sale, fattening upon the sweat of the brow of his slaves . . . proclaiming slavery the corner stone of the edifice of freedom, and railing at the fraudulent munificence and hypocritical abolitionism of the 'grasping and perfidious Albion.'"²²

In his efforts to contest Jacksonian Democrats and southern slaveholders, Adams had taken every advantage offered by southern fears of British Whig policies. As early as May 1836, when news first arrived in Washington of Texas' successful revolt against Mexican rule, Adams contested early calls for Texas annexation in Congress by emphasizing that annexation was sure to provoke war. That war would follow with Mexico seemed undeniable, but as that prospect offered little deterrence to annexation, Adams emphasized that Mexicans could expect foreign alliances. "Will your foreign war . . . be with Mexico alone? No sir," he insisted. "Great Britain has recently, at a cost of one hundred millions of dollars, which her people have joyfully paid, abolished slavery

throughout her colonies in the West Indies . . . she will not—it is impossible that she should—stand by an witness a war for the re-establishment of slavery” in Texas. Reminding colleagues in the House of Representatives that Mexico had abolished slavery in the territory in 1829, Adams explained that annexation could only produce a demand for slaves in Texas. “No war was ever so popular in England,” he assured southerners, “as that war would be against slavery, the slave trade, and the Anglo-Saxon descendant from her own loins.” In no small part owing to Adams’ opposition, the Texas issue became too contentious for President Andrew Jackson and three succeeding administrations. Not until 1843 would annexation again emerge as the threat it did seven years earlier. Even then, Adams insisted that “freedom of this country and of all mankind depended upon the direct, formal, open, and avowed interference of Great Britain to accomplish the abolition of slavery in Texas.”²³

Adams’ admiration for British Whig policies received their most forceful statement in a lecture presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society on a rainy night in November 1841. The topic addressed Britain’s recent war in China, known commonly as the Opium War. His interpretation, he knew, was out of step with popular opinion, especially among southerners and Democrats. “I expect to take some hot shot for this lecture,” he cautioned his wife beforehand. Finding it an “altogether mistaken notion that the quarrel is merely for certain chests of opium,” Adams explained to the distinguished audience, who filled the hall despite the weather, that opium provided only the occasion for conflict. It is the “mere incident to the dispute,” he insisted, “no more the cause of the war than the throwing overboard of the tea in Boston harbor was the cause of the North American revolution.” Rather, describing the Chinese government as a “hereditary, patriarchal despotism . . . founded upon the principle that as a Nation they are superior to the rest of mankind,” Adams placed the blame for the war squarely on the Chinese: “the cause of the war is the Ko-tow!” Finding that the “pretension on the part of the

Chinese that in all their intercourse with other nations, political or commercial, their superiority must be implicitly acknowledged and manifested in humiliating forms,” Adams slowly began to reveal his true purpose for the lecture. In stark contrast to Calhoun, who in Congress in March 1840 cited Britain’s involvement in the Opium War as a shameful depredation, Adams made clear his admiration for the British because they stood up to the despotic Chinese. In the process, he left little doubt as to his disdain for northerners who permitted southern slaveholders free reign over the policies of the federal government by their apathy to the slavery issue.²⁴

Yet more than any contrasts between the British and northerners, Adams meant to draw attention to contrasts between the British and southern slaveholders. “The war of Great Britain with China is a branch of that war against Slavery which she has undertaken and is now waging throughout the globe,” he confided to Richard Rush, a longtime friend and colleague in government. “It is a war of her Democracy most reluctantly waged by her rulers . . . her people have made it the hinge upon which the whole system of her intercourse with other nations of the earth revolves.” Significantly, then, Adams spoke of slavery in two interrelated senses: both as a patriarchal philosophy shared by both southerners and Chinese and as systems of institutions, laws, and policies attendant to that philosophy. Further, Adams argued that both senses meshed into one ideology, and did so in conflict with the modern, free labor ideology shared by the British people and American northerners. In short, Adams identified a emerging struggle between slavery and modern freedom, an ideological conflict of global proportion that cut right through the American republic in ways that rendered the Monroe Doctrine and its geographic rationale artifacts of an obsolete world order. Recognizing that the outcome of this struggle was by no means assured, neither worldwide nor within the republic itself, Adams perceived in Britain’s cause against the Chinese nothing less than the “cause of human freedom—a glorious and blessed cause!”

As for the cause of his own countrymen, and that of the American republic in its national and foreign policies, Adams could not help but ask: “are we to be the antagonist champions?”²⁵

For his own part, Adams resolved to fight such an eventuality, even if it meant being out of step with great numbers of his fellow countrymen. After a lifetime of speaking and acting on behalf of his country, he no longer felt compelled to do so, especially if his fellow countrymen were intent on being out of step with modernity. Significantly, his remarks to the Massachusetts Historical Society signified this intent even as Adams received appointment as Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in December 1841, within a matter of days of his lecture. As he expected, the lecture brought him “hot shot,” as southerners and Democrats in the House, disapproving of his appointment, refused to serve under his direction and soon attempted to censure him when he made further divisive remarks. With the *Creole* Resolutions introduced the following spring, Adams in fact grouped himself with the antislavery bloc in the House, and when Giddings received censure, Adams was left to despair southern slaveholders’ grip had on the American republic. As a result, Adams looked to Britain as a bulwark of liberty even more than previously. In February 1843, when Caleb Cushing, a fellow Massachusetts representative, threatened to leave the Whig ranks and become “Northern servile, or dough-face,” Adams interceded, revealing just how strong his attachment to Britain had become. Observing that “there was a war now in parturition between Freedom and Slavery throughout the globe . . . a war for the abolition of slavery, at the head of which would be Great Britain,” Adams made no mistake in his wish that his colleague join him in joining forces with Britain. Refusing, Cushing became a stalwart Democrat, even emerging as the party’s national chairman by the eve of the Civil War. It was fitting too, Adams thought, that soon after their

conversation Cushing accepted appointment as U.S. Minister to China, only recently opened to American diplomats by virtue of Britain's Opium War.²⁶

In one respect, however, Adams found himself in step with most Americans: he perceived little reason to believe the Great Experiment had proven anything but a success. Interviewed by Gurney in May 1840, Adams had also worked with Tappan in their unsuccessful effort to gain a natural-law ruling from the Supreme Court in the case of the *Amistad* captives (the captives went free anyway, on a point of technicality). As with Calhoun and southern slaveholders, then, Adams thought Britain lacked economic incentive to pursue antislavery foreign policies. He believed the British pursued their struggle against slavery because of their commitment to a modern world order, not because they perceived themselves disadvantaged by that commitment. Yet the prospect of a change of party in Britain could only strike Adams far differently than it did southern slaveholders, who looked forward to the end of British Whig governments that Adams so esteemed. Long distrustful of Britain's Tories-turned-Conservatives, he saw little reason to believe their commitment to the global war against slavery would prove as strong. In fact, Adams would soon express "strong doubts of a compromise between their commercial and their moral policy, much too obsequious to the cause of slavery for real fidelity to the cause of justice and of man."²⁷

NOTES

1. "There never before existed . . .," "Apparently actuated . . .," "about to wage war . . .," and "What a picture . . .," Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, Mar. 13, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., App., 269, 269, 269, 268. Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951), vol. 3, 61-64, 493 n6, a conspicuous example of scholarship influenced by Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, analyzes Calhoun's speech.

2. William M. Wiecek, "Somerset: Lord Mansfield and the Legitimacy of Slavery in the Anglo-American World" *University of Chicago Law Review* 42 (Fall 1974): 86-146, and Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, 36-41, elucidate limitations of the original *Somerset* ruling. Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981) draws attention to the importance of comity to southern slaveholders during the early republic.

3. “The abolition of slavery . . .” and “justice and humanity . . .,” Spring Rice to [Lieutenant Gov., Bahama Islands], Nov. 4, 1834, in *Royal Gazette and Bahama Advertiser*, Jan. 28, 1835.

4. “the preceding rules . . .,” Spring Rice to [Lieutenant Gov., Bahama Islands], Nov. 4, 1834, in *Royal Gazette and Bahama Advertiser*, Jan. 28, 1835. “proclaimed free . . .,” W. Tudor Tucker [U.S. Consul, Bermuda] to John Forsyth [U.S. Secretary of State], Mar. 2, 1835, T262, roll 2. Newspapers like the Charleston (S.C.) *Courier* were known to reprint news from the West Indies. The *Enterprise* numbered among the “slave seizure cases,” recounted often, most recently by Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government’s Relations to Slavery*, completed and edited by Ward M. McAfee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 104-11. Prior to March 1840 In two prior cases, the *Comet* (1830) and *Enconium* (1834), Palmerston granted compensation on grounds they occurred before the Abolition Act took effect. Three cases occurring afterward, the *Enterprise* (1835), *Hermosa* (c. 1840-41), and *Creole* (1841), became the subject of prolonged diplomatic negotiation. David M. Turley, “Free Air’ and Fugitive Slaves: British Abolitionists versus Government over American Fugitives, 1834-61,” in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, ed. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher, 163-82 (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980), 163-82, analyzes Whigs’ extension of natural-law policies to the West Indies.

5. “risks of emancipation . . .,” *CREOLE Cases: Arguments in Favor of the Defendants* (New Orleans: Auguste Brusle, 1842), 4. A brief published by the New Orleans law firm of John Slidell, Judah Benjamin, and Charles M. Conrad, counsel for the New Orleans Insurance Company, *CREOLE Cases* elucidates insurers’ concerns. “Cases of this kind . . .,” Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, Apr. 15, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 328. Laurence J. Koltikoff, “The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804-1862” *Economic Inquiry* 17 (Oct. 1979): 496-518, especially 498, depicts slumping prices. Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1978), 1-157, demonstrates the crucial importance of slave values to the antebellum South. Robert. H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003) highlights the inverse relationship between southerners’ declining opinion of slave trading and its importance to the southern economy.

6. “I hold it impossible . . .,” “she must abandon it . . .,” and “To us this is not . . .,” Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, March 13, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., App., 267, 268. “intercourse by sea . . .,” Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, Apr. 15, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 328. Calhoun’s remarks of April 15, 1840 were on the occasion of the Senate’s voting on the resolutions. As Calhoun introduced them to the Senate, the resolutions read : (1) That a ship or a vessel on the high seas, in time of peace, engaged in a lawful voyage, is, according to the laws of nations, under the exclusive jurisdiction of the State to which her flag belongs, as much so as if constituting a part of its own domain; (2) That if such ship or vessel should be forced, by stress of weather or other unavoidable cause, into the port of a friendly power, she would, under the same laws, lose none of the rights appertaining to her on the high seas; but, on the contrary, she and her cargo and persons on board, with their property, and all rights belonging to their personal relations, as established by the laws of the State to which they belong, would be under the protection which the laws of nations extend to the unfortunate under such circumstances; (3) That the brig *Enterprise*, which was forced unavoidably by stress of weather into Port Hamilton, Bermuda island, while on a lawful voyage on the high seas from one port of the Union to another, comes within the principles embraced in the

foregoing resolutions; and that the seizure and detention of the negroes on board by the local authorities of the island was an act in violation of the laws of nations, and highly unjust to our own citizens to whom they belong. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by James Buchanan of Pennsylvania and including Henry Clay of Kentucky, revised the resolutions in minor detail. U.S. Congress, SCFR, "Calhoun's Resolutions of March 4, 1840," RG46, 26 Cong, 1 sess. Also in *PJC*, 15: 129.

7. "I mean not to say . . .," Among the subdivisions of party . . .," "fanatics," and "little regard . . .," Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, March 13, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., App., all 268. "suppose that she is . . .," Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, Apr. 15, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 328.

8. Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the AMISTAD: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. 11, emphasizes southerners' concerns of a federal judiciary ruling on natural rights grounds.

9. "supposed . . . all would . . .," "ready to say . . .," and "Is she right?," Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, Apr. 15, 1840, *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 328.

10. "this was one of the occasions . . .," Thomas Hart Benton. *Thirty Years' View; or, the History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820 to 1850*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1856) 2: 183. "Voted unanimously . . .," Adams remarks, diary, Mar. 21, 1843, Adams Family Papers, MHS, roll 46. Also in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1874-77), vol. 11, 342. Emphasis in original. (Further reference to Adams' diary cites only the published *Memoirs*, as no difference was found between the original manuscript and the published version for the material in concern.) South Carolina's William C. Preston was the one senator actually not present.

PARTY VOTE BY SECTION, U.S. SENATE VOTE TO ADOPT THE
ENTERPRISE RESOLUTIONS, Apr. 15, 1840*

		SLAVEHOLDING STATES	NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES
DEMOCRAT	For	16	10
	Against	0	0
	Absent	0	6
WHIG	For	5	1
	Against	0	0
	Absent	1	8

* Compiled from *CG*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 329; Adams, ed. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 11, 342; and *BDAC*. Seats from Conn., Del., and Va. vacant. John C. Calhoun and William C. Preston of South Carolina, here designated as having no affiliation with either national party, are excluded from the table. SLAVEHOLDING STATES (1840): Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES (1840): Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

11. "There are, it is said . . .," King remarks, July 7, 1841, *HR*, 27 Cong., 1 sess., serial 393, no. 3, 1, 4. Muriel E. Chamberlain, *'PAX BRITANNICA'? British Foreign Policy, 1789-1914*

(London: Longman, 1988), especially 1-18, 77-101, demonstrates Whig needs to placate Britain's emergent middle-class electorate whose interests required frequent intervention abroad. Koltikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans," 498, demonstrates prices continued to decrease until 1843.

12. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 108, 372, makes the point of the *Creole* mutiny's standing among American slave revolts. *CREOLE Cases* reconstructs the ship's voyage in extensive detail, noting also that four female slaves and one child elected to continue to New Orleans, presumably owing to family considerations. Especially valuable also is U.S. Consul John T. Bacon's depositions taken at Nassau, included in Bacon to Daniel Webster, Nov. 30, 1841, Despatches from Consuls, Nassau, British West Indies, T475, roll 5. Also in *SD*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., serial 396, no. 51, 2-46. Edward D. Jervoy and C. Harold Huber, "The *Creole* Affair" *Journal of Negro History* 65 (Winter 1980): 196-211, recounts the mutiny and southerners' concerns about the implications of British natural-law policies.

13. "if these contemptible British subjects . . ." and "whether the British Government . . .," Barrow remarks, U.S. Senate, Dec. 22, 1841, *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., 47. "It was high time . . .," King remarks, Dec. 22, 1841, *ibid.*, 47. "slaveholding states would have . . .," "Resolutions of the Legislature of the State of Mississippi in reference to the Right of search and the Case of the American brig *Creole*," Feb. 26, 1842, *HD*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., serial 404, no. 215. "Resolutions of the Legislature of Louisiana, Relative to the State of Affairs between the United States and Great Britain," Feb. 8, 1842, *HD*, 27 Cong. 2 sess., serial 402, no. 116, were similarly worded. Howard Jones, "The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the *Creole* Slave Revolt" *Civil War History* 21 (Mar. 1975): 28-50, analyzes the rhetoric of southerners' responses to conclude honor, not financial stake, their principal concern, a line of argument repeated in several subsequent publications.

14. "principles maintained by Great Britain . . .," Calhoun remarks, U.S. Senate, Dec. 22, 1841, *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., 47. "The conduct of Great Britain . . .," Calhoun to Hammond, Dec. 31, 1841, *PJC*, vol. 16, 28-29. "As the British Government . . ." Preston remarks, Dec. 22, 1841, *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., 47. In his remarks to the Senate, Barrow incorrectly referred to the *Hermosa* as the *Formosa*, a mistake repeated by contemporaries and in historical literature. See note 14 below.

15. "Southern men in Congress . . .," Birney to Tappan, Jan. 14, 1842, *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938; reprint, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1967) vol. 1, 656-59, 659. Birney's reference to the *Formosa* repeated Barrow's misspoken reference in Congress; see note 13 above. "We look to Gr. B . . .," Tappan to John Scoble, Mar. 1, 1843, in Tappan, *A Side-Light on Anglo-American Relations, 1839-1858: The Correspondence of Lewis Tappan and Others with the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*, ed. Annie H. Abel and Frank J. Klingberg (Lancaster, Pa.: Association for the Study of Negro Life, 1927), 113-21, 117. Eric Foner, *Free Soil Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); and Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, elucidate the basis of northern antislavery advocates' belief that southern slaveholders dominated the federal government. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": *Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 65-71, highlights antislavery advocates' reliance on British assistance and the reasons they denied the existence of any such ties when approached by non-abolitionists. Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery*

Cooperation (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1972); and Edward P. Crapol, "The Foreign Policy of Antislavery, 1833-1846," in *Redefining the Past: Essays in honor of William Appleman Williams*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner, 85-113, 238-40 (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1986), also emphasize British ties.

16. General Anti-Slavery Convention [First, 1840], *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention, Called by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and Held in London, from Friday, June 12th to Tuesday, June 23rd, 1840* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1841), 105-111, reports Birney's draft resolutions and his explanation of their logic. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 74-84, and Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 335-38, 474, illuminate Gurney's constitutional thought.

17. "a series of resolutions . . .," remarks of the resolution of censure, *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., 344-46, 348. "There is no reason for believing . . .," Birney to Tappan, Jan. 14, 1842, *Letters of James Gillespie Birney*, vol. 1, 658. William Jay, *The CREOLE Case, and Mr. Webster's Despatch; With the Comments of the N.Y. American* (New York: New York American, 1842) contrasts Webster's logic to Birney's. Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1955), 148-52, 190-206, 221-22, recounts Birney's ties to the *Creole* Resolutions. Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933; reprint Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957), 177-90, 283-88, emphasizes the *Creole* Resolutions as the turning point in the antislavery campaign.

PARTY VOTE BY SECTION, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTES TO TABLE
REP. JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS'S *CREOLE* RESOLUTIONS, MAR. 22, 1842*

		SLAVEHOLDING STATES	NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES
DEMOCRAT	For	0	8
	Against	38	32
	Absent	8	14
WHIG	For	14	31
	Against	25	29
	Absent	14	27

* Compiled from *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., 342; and *BDAC*. One seat from N.C. vacant. John Snyder of Pennsylvania, having no affiliation with either national party, is excluded from the table. SLAVEHOLDING STATES (1842): Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES (1842): Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

(Continued next page.)

PARTY VOTE BY SECTION, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTES TO CENSURE
REP. JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS, MAR. 22, 1842**

		SLAVEHOLDING STATES	NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES
DEMOCRAT	For	38	39
	Against	0	8
	Absent	7	9
WHIG	For	41	6
	Against	3	58
	Absent	9	21

** Compiled from *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., 344-46, 348; *HJ*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., vol. 37, 567-80; and *BDAC*. One seat from N.C. vacant. Giddings ineligible to vote on the question of censure. John Snyder of Pennsylvania, having no affiliation with either national party, is excluded from the table.

PATTERNS IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTES TO TABLE THE
CREOLE RESOLUTIONS AND CENSURE REP. JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS†

	FOR CENSURE	AGAINST CENSURE	ABSENT CENSURE
FOR TABLING	18 of 241 7.5%	32 of 241 13.3%	2 of 241 0.8%
AGAINST TABLING	92 of 241 38.2%	25* of 241 10.4%*	8 of 241 3.3%
ABSENT TABLING	15 of 241 6.2%	13 of 241 5.4%	36 of 241 14.9%

† Compiled from the tables above.

18. “great experiment of freedom,” “duty,” “perfect safety . . .,” “emancipated slaves . . .,” and “rising in the scale . . .,” James A. Thome and Joseph H. Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months’ Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), iv, vi, vi, vi, vi; for the authors’ assignment, iii-iv. Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, 129-62, details the terms of Apprenticeship and its problems. Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 36-41, recounts the role of British abolitionists in bringing Apprenticeship to an early end.

19. “I wish to recommend . . .” and “The results of great experiment . . .,” Channing to [editor of *Christian Register and Observer*] n.d. (c. May 1838), in American Anti-Slavery Society, “Correspondence between the Hon. F.H. Elmore, One of the South Carolina Delegation in Congress, and James G. Birney, One of the Secretaries of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *The Anti-Slavery Examiner* no. 8 (1838): 1-68, 53. “The only ground . . .” and “I cannot but think . . .” Everett to Edmund Quincy, Apr. 29, 1838, *ibid.*, 55. “the Journal of Thome and Kimball . . .” Ellsworth to A.F. Williams, May 19, 1838, *ibid.*, 55. “a very simple one . . .” Child, *The Right Way, the Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West*

Indies, and Elsewhere (Rev. ed. New York: American Antislavery Society, 1862; reprint, Boston: Elibron Classics, 2001), 96. James M. McPherson, "Was West Indian Emancipation a Success? The Abolitionist Argument during the American Civil War," *Caribbean Studies* 4 (1964/65): 28-34, relates how abolitionists during the Civil War held true to convictions even after shortcomings of British West Indian emancipation had long become apparent. I wish to thank Prof. McPherson for sharing his article, included in a journal difficult to locate. Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964) recounts the wartime context of the South's first large-scale free labor experiment.

20. This paragraph draws from the following literature: Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), vii-xv, 98-125, 185-204, 226-247; Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1969; reprint, Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1989), 3-38, 118-77; Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xi-xvii, 111-28; *idem*, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, Rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 3-20, 77-102; *idem*, "The Boundaries of Abolitionism," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 3-23; David Eltis, "Abolitionist Perspectives of Society after Slavery," in *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*, ed. James Walvin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 195-213, 255-62; David B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), xii-xix, 107-320; Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989), 9-13, 201-417; Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery*, xi-xvii, 1-41, 111-220; *idem*, "Anti-slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism," in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, ed. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980), 335-50; *idem*, "The Ideology of Anti-slavery," in *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas*, ed. David Eltis and James Walvin, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 21-35; and Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, With an Introduction by Thomas Bender and essays by John Ashworth, David Brion Davis, and Thomas L. Haskell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1-13, 107-309.

21. All quotes, Tappan to Clay, June 5, 1838, *PHC*, 9: 199-200. In a memorable depiction, Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, The Henry Reeve Text as Revised by Francis Bowen and further corrected by Phillips Bradley, Abridged with an Introduction by Thomas Bender (New York: Modern Library, 1981), 226-29, contrasted the free labor Ohio to slaveholding Kentucky.

22. "My jealousies . . ." and "when I see the cotton . . .," Adams to Rush, Dec. 30, 1842, Adams Papers, MHS, roll 154. The Abolition Act stipulated an indemnity of £20 million, or \$100 million by rates of exchange of the day, or, conservatively, \$2.5 billion today. Samuel F. Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), especially 458, recounts Adams' gravitation toward Britain. James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 155-220, emphasizes that Adams authored the Monroe Doctrine with an understanding of prevailing unionist logic that was soon obliterated by the advent of Jacksonian partisan politics.

23. “But will your foreign war . . .,” “Great Britain has recently,” and “No war was ever,” Adams remarks, U.S. House of Representatives, May 25, 1836, *Register of Debates in Congress*, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 4044. “freedom of this country . . .,” Adams remarks, May 31, 1843, Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. 11, 380.

24. “I expect to take . . .,” Adams to Louisa C. Adams, Nov. 23, 1841, Adams Papers, MHS, roll, 154. “altogether mistaken notion . . .,” “hereditary, patriarchal despotism . . .,” “the cause of the war . . .,” and “pretension on the part . . .,” and Adams remarks, lecture, Massachusetts Historical Society, Nov. 22, 1841, published as “Lecture on the War with China,” *Niles*, Jan. 22, 1842, 326-30, 328, 327, 330, 328. Emphasis in the original. The *North American Review* declined to publish Adams’ lecture, thinking it too controversial. Charles F. Adams Jr., “J. Q. Adams and the Opium War,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 43 (February 1910): 295-326, reprints the lecture. Few studies notice Adams’ Opium War lecture. Lynn H. Parsons, “Censuring Old Man Eloquent: Foreign Policy and Disunion, 1842” *Capitol Studies* 5 (Fall 1975): 89-106, 95, is an exception.

25. “The war of Great Britain . . .,” “cause of human freedom . . .,” and “are we to be . . .,” Adams to Rush, Dec. 30, 1842, Adams Papers, MHS, roll 154. James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Vintage, 1990); and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), demonstrate how antebellum southerners identified the same global-ideological developments and embraced the role of antagonist champions.

26. “Northern servile . . .” and “There was war . . .,” Adams remarks, diary, Feb. 28, 1843, Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. 11, 328, 319-20.

27. “strong doubts of a compromise . . .” Adams remarks, diary, May 13, 1843, *ibid.* vol. 11, 374-75.

THE CONVENTION OF LONDON

On the evening of January 22, 1842, as the S.S *Britannia* approached its mooring in Boston harbor, awaiting newsmen clambered aboard even before the ship came to full rest. Risking life and limb, they eagerly sought out the ship's most celebrated passenger, Charles Dickens. Anticipation of the British novelist's arrival had electrified America for weeks, as he was without question Americans' favorite author. Winning their hearts with his vivid renditions of early Victorian England, Dickens won their hearts also because his books were extraordinarily cheap, although not by the author's design. Everywhere in America editions of *Sketches by 'Boz,' Pickwick Papers*, and *Oliver Twist* were available at discount prices for one simple reason: antebellum Americans disdained centralized authority. Refusing the federal government anything but the minimum of powers to regulate commerce, they refused it the necessary authority to conclude an international copyright agreement, a situation that just also happened to redound to their economic benefit. True, as a result of the absence of such an agreement American authors received no protection from piracy outside the United States, yet American writes were few in number and none commanded a readership abroad comparable to Dickens' popularity in America. The only losers by the absence of the agreement, therefore, were non-American authors. "A writer not only gets nothing for his labours," Dickens fumed, "any wretched half-penny newspaper can print him at its pleasure." In fact, Dickens found his great fame worked to his disadvantage. "I am the greatest loser by it," he lamented, as publishers, merchants, and readers—practically everyone in America—profited except the novelist himself.¹

It should have come as no surprise, therefore, that Dickens visited America with ulterior motives weighing heavily on his mind. As with many Europeans who visited Jacksonian America, he wished to observe American democracy first hand, and a

reading tour, planned to last through the winter and spring of 1842, would of course assist in self-promotion. Yet Dickens was already immensely popular in America. Mostly he intended his visit to offset lost royalties with profits from ticket sales to filled auditoriums. Intending also “to do his best to shame the Americans into the passing of an International Copyright Law with England,” he soon proved true to his word. Chastising his American audiences for failing to ensure that their republic lived up to its international responsibilities, he called loudly and often for an international copyright agreement, even taking his lobbying efforts to the floor of Congress. Not surprisingly, the mood of his visit quickly soured as his American audiences took offence at what many perceived was the author’s shameless regard for his own interest. Acrimony mounted, providing Dickens material sufficient for two further books that captured his disdain for most things American. As the *Britannia* approached Boston in January 1842, however, Americans remained unaware of the ulterior motives of Dickens’ visit. Nor did they suspect that they were about to be lectured for falling short of their international responsibilities. Rather, they were “on tiptoe,” as Charles Sumner noted, “to see who shall catch the first view of Dickens above the wave.”²

By coincidence the *Britannia* brought Americans a further surprise that also reflected British disappointment with the American republic’s failure to live up to its international responsibilities. Disembarking with Dickens, Thomas Motley Jr., the brother of the historian of the Netherlands John Lothrop Motley, brought with him the latest diplomatic correspondence from London. (Before the transatlantic cable, correspondence of the foreign service was frequently conveyed by private citizens enlisted into temporary service as diplomatic couriers.) Included among that correspondence was a treaty recently signed by Britain’s new Conservative ministry with the four other leading powers of Europe—Austria, France, Prussia, and Russia. Called variously the Convention of London, the Great Power Right of Search

Convention, and the Quintuple Treaty (it was signed by five nations), the treaty had drawn the attention of Edward Everett, the American minister to Britain, who arranged to secure a copy and send it by the *Britannia* for the Tyler Administration's perusal. The treaty was also soon noticed by American newspapers. A week after Motley's arrival in Boston, the existence and objectives of the Convention of London were reported by *Niles National Register*: "a treaty was signed in London, Dec. 20, by the Earl of Aberdeen on the part of Great Britain for the prohibition of the slave trade, in which it is stated the trade in slaves is declared piracy and the right of search for the detection of the violations of the treaty stipulated in the most extensive sense."³

Designed to achieve the final suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, the Convention of London numbered among the most ambitious multi-national initiatives prior to the League of Nations. It also proved among the most misunderstood and forgotten topics in nineteenth-century Atlantic history in part because, like the League of Nations, it proved a failure. In fact, it was never fully implemented (see chapter 4), yet even had the treaty received full implementation, its explicit terms fell short of clarifying its implicit implications. On its face the treaty called for little more than mutual concessions of the right of search between the five signatory nations within a specified zone. The encompassed area, however, was immense. Extending from 80° east longitude westward to the coast of the Americas between 32° north and 45° south latitude, the search zone encircled Africa from a point just south of Casablanca to include Sri Lanka and all points westward in the Indian Ocean in addition to the entire Atlantic Ocean from a point 700 miles south of Buenos Aires northward to Savannah, Georgia. By including the U.S. coastlines of Georgia and Florida and the entire coast of the Gulf of Mexico, the search zone therefore encompassed the route of the American intercoastal slave trade. By the treaty's explicit terms—which seemed to apply only to the ships of the five signatory nations—this inclusion of the American intercoastal trade

seemed irrelevant to American interests. Yet the implications of the treaty were intended to extend far beyond its explicit terms.⁴

Although negotiated with the view of suppressing the slave trade, the Convention of London in reality targeted the removal of obstructions to the trade's suppression, in particular aspects of international law that permitted certain governments to impede the trade's suppression (whether purposely or otherwise). Because traditional precepts of international law prohibited nations from searching other nations' ships except in times of war, efforts of one nation to suppress the slave trade shipped by the flag of another during times of peace required bilateral concessions of the right of search. Quite simply some nations refused this concession. The Convention of London was intended to surmount their objections. It was hoped that the very completion of a humanitarian treaty by Europe's five leading powers would cause recalcitrant governments to rethink their previous stands. Yet if moral suasion failed, the treaty's implications rendered their objections without legal standing. Declaring "any vessel which may attempt to carry on the slave trade shall, by that fact alone, lose all right to the protection of their flag," the treaty in effect amounted to a revision of international law within the bounds of its immense zone of search—including the American coast.⁵

The Convention of London stood to revise international law because it represented a renewal of the Concert of Europe that had dominated continental affairs after the Napoleonic Wars. Intended as an instrument of hegemony to restore order to war-torn Europe, the original concert had sought to reassert traditional principles of legitimacy that had been displaced by a quarter century of social and political revolution. For more than two decades after the Congress of Vienna, the collective weight of Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia had acted as a powerful instrument of social and political regulation, and although the concert had been in disarray since the Quadruple Treaty of

1834 (when Britain had broken ranks to pursue its own interests), it continued to possess lawmaking hegemony with a convention its critics now dubbed the Quintuple Treaty.⁶

Designed by Palmerston, whose Quadruple Treaty had undermined the Concert of Europe in 1834, the Convention of London was intended to rekindle the concert's hegemony for the purpose of furthering British antislavery objectives. In particular the Convention of London sought to interrupt the transit of African captives to leading slavery-based competitors of Britain's free-labor experiment in the West Indies. Committed to abolishing the entire transatlantic system of slave trading since it abolished its own slave trade in 1807, Britain had found international law an impediment to its efforts at suppression. For this reason it undertook to construct a web of bilateral treaties after the end of the Napoleonic wars to permit its navy to police the oceans. The problem with the bilateral approach, however, was that it was only as strong as its weakest link, and since Britain had proven unable to convince every nation of the world to concede it the right of search, slave traders simply moved their trade under the flags of those nations.

By the late 1830s, Britain had successfully concluded treaties with every principal maritime nation except the United States and as a result the lucrative trade had come to take the cover of the American flag. The fact was well known, and although few Americans engaged in the trade directly, they continued to resist British overtures for a search agreement owing to a number of factors. First, memories of the War of 1812 prompted even staunch antislavery advocates like John Quincy Adams to resist conceding Britain the right of search. Yet it seems doubtful Jacksonian Americans would have conceded the right anyway. Their penchant for *laissez faire* precluded granting the federal government the extensive authority to regulate commerce, much less granting it the power to permit foreign nations to regulate American commerce. As Dickens found with Americans' inhibitions to an international copyright agreement, moreover,

Americans' refusal to commit themselves to a right of search agreement redounded to their economic advantage (and therefore to the disadvantage of nations earnest in their efforts to suppress the trade, in particular Britain). It could do so because Jacksonian Americans' penchant for *laissez faire* also inhibited the construction and deployment of a naval force sufficient to police the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, slave traders exploited American intransigence on the right of search issue practically at will, flying the American flag at their convenience to avoid British patrols.

These problems were further compounded by American maritime policies, again dictated by Americans' penchant for *laissez faire*, that prevented close regulation of transfers of ship ownership to foreign purchasers. Absent such oversight, fast-sailing clippers often traded hands soon after their launch from Baltimore shipyards. Usually the recipients were Portuguese, Brazilian, or Spanish merchants who then maintained the ships' American registry to avoid British patrols in transit to the coast of Africa, a crucial aspect of the transatlantic trade (called the auxiliary trade) that supplied the commodities of barter necessary to purchase captives from African middlemen and at the same time provided the supplies needed to transport slaves across the Atlantic (manacles, stores of fresh water, etc.) Once in the Bights of Benin or Biafra or off the coast of Angola, even ships not bearing an American registry could sail past British patrols by unlawfully hoisting the American flag, a practice that condemned more than 16,000 African captives to sale in the Americas in 1841 alone.⁷

Exasperated by his inability to prevent slave traders from exploiting American policies of *laissez faire*, Palmerston decided to abandon the bilateral approach and rekindle the Concert of Europe. By negotiating the Convention of London, his purpose was to force all countries—Americans in particular but not only—to live up to their international responsibilities. It was an ingenious maneuver, recognized by experts and critics alike. Henry Wheaton, an American jurist and author of *Elements of International*

Law, saw at once the threat the hegemony of the Convention of London posed for American shipping interests. Serving as U.S. Minister to Prussia at the time of the convention's signing, Wheaton informed Webster that the convention "leaves us no alternative but to accede to the Treaty or to be considered by the rest of mankind as opposing an insurmountable obstacle to the final suppression of the Slave trade. Lord Aberdeen ha[s] left us no other alternative than to submit to the exercise of search, under the name of examination, and of course without enjoying the securities provided by the Treaty against the abuse of the practice." In short, the Convention of London nullified traditional precepts of the freedom of the seas by substituting the traditional belligerent right of search for a peacetime right of visit (or right of examination) that asserted the right of all ships to know the true nationality of all others. Absent the convention, the rights of search and visit differed only in name. With the treaty, however, the right of visit represented a provocative departure from precedent that shifted the burden of proof for authenticating a ship's nationality from the British Navy to the owners and crew of the ship in question. "Disguise it as you will, the British pretension is the exercise of the right of visitation and search in time of peace, upon the vessels of a state which has not consented to its exercise by special compact," Wheaton emphasized. "The only means of escaping from this consequence is by acceding to the Treaty." Otherwise American shipping interests would find itself vulnerable to British search policies similar to those that had led to the War of 1812.⁸

The Convention of London therefore stood to solve Britain's American problem in its efforts to suppress the slave trade whether Americans acceded to the treaty or not. But if Americans joined the treaty to protect their shipping interests, the legal implications of the convention would then extend even further, promising to threaten American slavery interests in ways that had come to cause grave concern in the American South. Because the convention declared the slave trade piracy, and because the treaty's designated

search zone encompassed the principal route of the American intercoastal slave trade, American accession to the treaty stood to revise international law in ways even more threatening to American slavery interests than John C. Calhoun feared when he urged the U.S. Senate to adopt his *Enterprise* Resolutions. Calhoun had based his objections to British natural-law policies on grounds that comity of law prohibited the assertion of British national policies to the detriment of non-British interests. The Convention of London stood to render Calhoun's objections groundless by rendering any slave who crossed from one nation's jurisdiction to another subject to seizure by the convention's prohibitions against slave trading under any flag, not on grounds of British natural-law policy. Although the grounds differed, the result would be to entrench British natural-law policies far more firmly than had the British relied only on those policies themselves.⁹

In short, at almost precisely the same time southern slaveholders convened in Congress to lament the recent *Creole* mutiny (December 22, 1841), the new British Conservative ministry in which southern slaveholders placed so much hope completed the Convention of London (December 20, 1841) that very much furthered the antislavery policies of previous Whig governments rather than reversed them. Yet this disparity was not obvious to Washington policymakers at the time. Besides taking five weeks for news of the convention to reach America (it arrived with Dickens in late January), further developments related in Chapter 4 obscured the commitment of the Peel Ministry to their predecessors' antislavery policies. Partly for these reasons the Convention of London did not prompt a reevaluation in Washington of British antislavery policies that some observers believed was in order. Instead, that reexamination fell to American diplomats, in particular to an envoy with a poor reputation whose credibility in Washington fell far short of what was needed to revise prevailing opinion in America of the results of the Great Experiment.

“The experiment in West India has failed,” Abel P. Upshur learned in May 1842, only a matter of weeks after news of the Convention of London first arrived in America. Now serving as Secretary of the Navy, the former Virginia high court justice and acclaimed jurist of states’ rights now found himself privy to diplomatic correspondence as a member of John Tyler’s cabinet. In some cases, including this one, he even received unofficial correspondence directly, providing him privileged access to first-hand knowledge gained in Europe capitals. In this case Upshur’s correspondent, Duff Green, wrote from Paris, but for several months previously he had been captivated by developments in London.¹⁰

Duff Green had traveled to London in the fall of 1841, spending two months in the British capital before leaving for Paris, where he remained for most of the following year. A former Jacksonian Democrat and publisher of the *United States Telegraph*, Green had traveled to Europe for reasons partly personal. At one time a principal figure in Washington circles, Green had alienated Whigs by his early affiliation with Andrew Jackson and then had alienated Democrats by his support of South Carolina’s attempt at nullification in 1832. The implications of his estrangement had followed him as he tried his hand at a number of business speculations, leaving him short of connections for his latest speculation in western Maryland coal and prompting him to seek capital in Europe.

At the same time, however, he benefited by President Tyler’s own political estrangement, which provided him the opportunity to act as an unofficial agent during his stay in Europe. In September 1841, when Tyler’s cabinet threatened to resign in response to his opposition to Whig financial legislation, Green volunteered his services as advisor, even recommending Upshur for appointment as Secretary of State. “No man has established stronger claims to the confidence of the state Rights party,” Green emphasized, a recommendation that figured in Upshur’s appointment to the Navy Department when Webster decided to remain in Tyler’s cabinet. The opportunity to serve as a diplomatic agent emerged when Webster further insisted that his longtime friend Edward Everett, the former

Massachusetts governor outspoken in his advocacy of abolition, receive confirmation as U.S. Minister to London, a consideration that alarmed southern slaveholders and even riled Tyler's close friend. "The present condition of the country imperiously requires that a Southern man & a slaveholder represent us at that court," Upshur protested. "How could a politician reared & living in lower Virginia fail to see this?" Because Tyler saw the wisdom of placating Webster, Green therefore received an opportunity to reenter Washington circles, if only in correspondence submitted from distant Europe. Intent on keeping close watch on Everett and assuming the role of counter informant, Green took as his principal concern the one subject southern slaveholders refused to entrust to Everett: British antislavery policies.¹¹

Arriving in London in November 1841, Green soon recognized that the recent change of British government complicated matters of British diplomacy far more than was understood in America. A single man no longer dominated British foreign policy, as had Palmerston for much of the previous decade. True, the office of Foreign Secretary was technically entrusted to Aberdeen, yet Peel insisted on shouldering the responsibility of representing the ministry's foreign policies in Parliament. By no means merely a clerk, Aberdeen shared responsibilities of overseeing policy with Peel, whose attentiveness to matters of defending Britain's Corn Laws eclipsed Aberdeen's.

It also mattered, Green understood, that the Conservative party of 1841 was not the Tory party of old. The abolition of slavery in Britain's West Indian colonies had transformed the interests of British Conservatives. In stark contrast to the expectations of Calhoun and fellow southern slaveholders, who hoped British Conservatives would reverse the antislavery policies of their Whig predecessors, Green quickly grasped that this hope was ill founded. Forced to accept the *fait accompli* of abolition in the West Indies, Britain's Conservatives, he understood, had found themselves transformed from laborlords to landlords. If previously their interests had been to defend slavery from abolitionists, their interests subsequently led them to protect the landed interests in the

new free-labor experiment. The chief instrument in this protection were the Sugar Duties. A variant of Britain's system of agricultural protection, the Sugar Duties provided West Indian producers a virtual monopoly of the British home market for sugar, much as Britain's Corn Laws provided a monopoly for Britain's wheat and corn producers.

Similar in function, Britain's Sugar Duties and Corn Laws drew similar ire from Britain's middle and working classes, who saw in their payment of artificially priced sugar and foodstuffs a shameful subsidy to support Britain's archaic landed class. In an important sense, however, the two systems of tariffs differed. Unlike the relatively static grain production of the British home islands, West Indian sugar production remained unsettled from the recent conversion from slave to free labor. In this sense, therefore, the Sugar Duties posed a potential boon for Britain's Conservatives. If the Great Experiment succeeded in increasing production, prices would fall, placating consumers' demand for lower prices, and alleviating political pressure for tariff reform. But because this calculus was subject to reversal, the Sugar Duties also posed an enormous political risk for Britain's Conservatives. If the Great Experiment faltered, the implications could exacerbate political pressures that posed stark implications for Conservatives' defense of the Corn Laws.

Little understood in Washington, the relationship between Britain's Corn Laws and the Great Experiment may have escaped Green's attention but for the Convention of London signed soon after his arrival in Britain. The five-power treaty differed plainly from the dozens of unilateral pacts Britain had concluded in previous years. Intrigued by the difference, Green also thought significant the economic depression and calls for reform that dominated British politics in the winter of 1841-42. Taken together these considerations drew Green's attention to the circumstances of Britain's recent change of ministries.

The Conservatives gained office, Green learned, by defeating a Whig attempt to reform the Sugar Duties. Responding to an economic downturn, the preceding Whig

government had sought to provide consumers relief from high foodstuff prices. Failing in the attempt, it lost office and Britain's economic fortunes worsened. "England is now in a crisis," Green observed, noting in particular the role of the tariff. "Cheap bread is now as much the cry in England as cheap goods was with us in the day of Nullification."¹²

In light of the crisis, Green thought the Whigs' response to losing power significant. Although they had held office for much of the previous decade, Britain's Whigs found that maintaining themselves in power required distasteful compromise of their most prized principles. Now relegated to Opposition benches, the Whigs were intent on asserting Smithian principles in an effort to reaffirm their place as the party of Britain's emergent urban middle class. "The Whigs now go for an entire repeal of the corn laws," Green noted. "The agitation on this subject is such that a short crop must bring a revolution parties, and the Tories feel that another change of administration may bring innovations most dangerous to them & the Aristocracy."¹³

This consideration led Green to realize that Britain's Conservatives gained, and hoped to maintain office, on the basis of abolitionist support. Although it made little sense in faraway Washington, especially among southern slaveholders who expected proslavery policies from Britain's Conservatives. The Peel Ministry had in fact forged an alliance with Britain's abolitionist bloc. "The Tory party have obtained power by radical and Chartist votes," he emphasized in letters to Washington. This surprising alliance, Green also understood, resulted from more than just considerations of political expedience. As Green examined the debates that brought British Conservatives to power—the Sugar Duties debate of May, 1841—he realized that Britain had encountered the problem of slavery and progress.¹⁴

* * *

Britain's Sugar Duties, like its Corn Laws, protected British agriculture from foreign competition. The Corn Laws protected landowners in the British Isles with a guaranteed

monopoly of the British home market for their grain production, and the Sugar Duties did the same for sugar producers in the West Indies. Protected from competition, landowners could then adjust production to best meet their particular interests. As a result, consumers found themselves at the mercy of landowners. So long as production kept pace with Britain's burgeoning demand (Britain's population had nearly doubled since 1780), prices remained constant. But if production leveled off or diminished, inflation quickly beset consumers. The hardest hit, of course, were Britain's wage laborers and their middle-class employers, pressured by workers' protests and their own evangelical guilt to increase wages to offset inflation. These pressures lay at the root of a free-trade movement emergent among Britain's middle class and Whigs, the Anti-Corn Law Leagues resisted by Britain's landowners and their Conservative representatives. Unlike the Corn Laws, the Sugar Duties applied to a non-essential foodstuff. Yet the British liked their sugar, especially Britain's working class, for whom few luxuries were attainable. Demand therefore remained high, if not always constant, in the face of high prices. As far as Whigs were concerned, moreover, the Sugar Duties made for an attractive target because those levies benefited West Indian planters, a peripheral interest group in the British polity for whom Whigs had never held high regard. By its movement to reform Britain's Sugar Duties in May 1841, therefore, the Melbourne Ministry intended to commence the long-anticipated assault on Britain's Corn Laws. Starting at the periphery and intending to work their way toward the center, Britain's Whigs also hoped victory of the West Indian interests would splinter Conservative resistance, easing the fight in its final stages.

The first stage, however, proved anything but easy. Although similar to the Corn Laws in many respects, the Sugar Duties differed by ties to the Great Experiment. Given this relationship, Whigs reasonably anticipated abolitionist support. The Sugar Duties, after all, had been enacted at the insistence of Tories and moderate and conservative Whigs, skeptics of Smithian logic who doubted free labor could ever outproduce slavery. In the face of this skepticism, passage of the Abolition Act had

required compromise, as any bill that passed the Commons faced the challenge of the Tory-dominated Lords. Of the three points that proved instrumental to placating opposition in the upper house—indemnity, apprenticeship, and protection—it had been the protection, in the form of the Sugar Duties, that most offended principled Smithians. It was slave labor, after all, not free labor, that Smithians were certain would require protection when the Great Experiment proved free labor superior to slavery. Yet Smithian rationale had also permitted an easy rationalization: if the Great Experiment indeed proved successful as Smithians expected, the Sugar Duties could always be repealed later. With this mindset abolitionists had focused their energies opposing Apprenticeship and permitted the Great Experiment to establish a monopoly for West Indian sugar producers. While colonial sugar incurred only a revenue levy of 24s. per cwt., foreign (slave-grown) sugars would be assessed a protective duty of 63s. per cwt.¹⁵

The Great Experiment thus emerged from Parliament anything but the product of an invisible hand. In fact, the Great Experiment and the Sugar Duties became inextricably tied together. Although abolitionists and radical Whigs expected that free labor would prove protection unnecessary, there was no certainty it would. Adam Smith's claims for the superiority of free labor rested on a conviction of its superior cost-efficiency. For the experiment to prove protection unnecessary, landowners would then need to translate increased efficiency into increased production, as it was the volume of the produced supply, not the efficiency of a producer's expense, that determined market price. This reality did more than prefigure assessments of the Great Experiment by British consumers—it stood in stark contrast to the assessment Joseph John Gurney shared with his Washington audiences. Whereas Gurney had emphasized the merits of increased cost efficiency (and especially social and religious implications), for British consumers assessment of the Great Experiment turned largely on the simple matter of

production. In London the price of sugar—and the price of sugar alone—told the tale of the Great Experiment.

As a result, by May 1841 most observers in Britain agreed that the Great Experiment had veered toward a failure. Both in an absolute sense and in comparison with the world market, sugar prices in the Britain had skyrocketed. As late as 1836, two years before the end of Apprenticeship in Jamaica, the price of British West Indian muscovado (unrefined sugar) matched that of Cuba and Brazil at approximately 27s per cwt. (exclusive of duty). Since the end of Apprenticeship in 1838, West Indian muscovado had jumped to 37 s. (61s. with duty), while the rest of the world enjoyed deflated priced of Cuban and Brazilian muscovado at 22s. Given the immense volume of British consumption, the difference between the price of the British levy and the world market translated to £4 million per year. This figure not only represented one-fifth of the total indemnity paid to the former West Indian slave owners, it was seized upon by Britain's Anti-Corn-Law League as a debilitating subsidy incurred by Britain's middle class to finance Britain's privileged class.¹⁶

Because rising prices dampened demand, moreover, the revenues Britain collected from sugar sales were declining. By May 1841, faced by a worsening economy, labor unrest, angry free-traders, diminishing revenues, and the need to finance a war in China, the Whig Melbourne Ministry resolved to address the problem of diminishing revenues by proposing a reduction in the Sugar Duties from 63s. to 37s. per cwt. (only 13s. more than the colonial levy), and placing foreign-grown sugar (59s. with duty) nearly on par with West Indian producers (61s.). Just the smallest increase in price, therefore, would draw slave-grown sugar into the British market. Demand would be met and a fixed equilibrium price of 61s. established. While the Whig proposal promised consumers little direct relief, it held the prospect of stimulating demand—and therefore increasing revenues—by the fact the equilibrium would always adjust to demand. It also

appealed to Anti-Corn Law Leaguers who could take satisfaction that West Indian planters would receive no greater subsidy by an increase in demand.¹⁷

In short, the proposal was a modest first step toward the Whigs' goal of repealing protection. Nevertheless, Whigs emphasized that it was in fact the crucial first step. "This is a question not to be looked at merely as a commercial and financial one," Lord Russell, the Melbourne Ministry's leader in the Commons, informed Parliament as he introduced the proposal to reform the Sugar Duties. It was, he emphasized, "a great national question . . . not merely to the finances of the year, not merely for the commercial regulations for the present time, but for the conduct of the finances of this country, and the regulation of the commercial affairs of this country, for a long time to come." It was understandable, therefore, that Britain's Conservatives, led by Robert Peel, rose to meet the challenge, provoking a debate that would dominate Parliament's attention in eight sessions over a period of nearly two weeks.¹⁸

The debate over the Sugar Duties pivoted on the question of whether West Indian free labor could compete with Cuban and Brazilian slave labor. It was understood, moreover, that the measure of competition was production alone. Contrary to all available evidence, especially the rising price of sugar that occasioned the move for repeal in the first place, Whigs answered positively. "There was no reason why the people of this country should not enjoy refined sugar at 3*d.* per pound instead of paying 7*d.* for course sugar," Earl Radnor informed the Lords. "From the most recent and correct intelligence on the condition of Antigua," Radnor found that "the production of sugar there had more than doubled since the introduction of free labour, and that the value of land had increased more than four or five-fold." Significantly, however, Radnor divulged that he gained his evidence from "reading *Gurney's Tour through the West Indies.*" The Quaker's account, maintained Radnor, demonstrated that "ever since slavery had been abolished, sugar had increased in price, and could be produced at less

cost, which fact clearly established, that free-grown sugar could compete with sugar, the produce of slave colonies.”¹⁹

In response, Conservatives dismissed Gurney’s findings. “As to the statement that sugar from our colonies was no dearer than slave-grown sugar,” Lord Ashburton remarked, “the Gentleman who had expressed that opinion, influenced no doubt as he was by the best feelings of humanity, had been led away by such feelings, and his judgement had been somewhat biased.” Rejecting Gurney’s findings, Ashburton found strong proof to the contrary in “the fact that the change made in our colonies by the abolition of slavery had been followed by greatly increased price of sugar; and, as the cause of that increase, the reduced quantity of its supply.” Production in Antigua may well have increased as Gurney reported, Ashburton acknowledged. But Antigua was not representative, certainly not in comparison with Jamaica, and certainly not in competition with Cuba and Brazil. “Throughout the greater number of the West India islands,” Ashburton emphasized, “it is as certain, as far as our experience had yet gone, that the establishment of freedom had greatly reduced the supply of sugar.”²⁰

Britain’s diminished production, Conservatives insisted, encouraged the expansion of slavery-based production in Cuba and Brazil to meet the shortfall. Their expansion of production, Conservatives emphasized, was reflected in the falling world price for muscovado between 1836 and 1841 (from 27 to 22 s.), which occurred despite Britain’s boycott of slave-grown sugar. To now open British markets to the products of slavery could only exacerbate existing trends. It would further stimulate production in Cuba and Brazil and ruin any prospect for the Great Experiment to recover from its initial difficulties. Worse still, the expansion of slavery-based production in Cuba and Brazil would require greater numbers of slave laborers. Opening Britain to slavery-produced sugar now, Conservatives insisted, would be tantamount to encouraging the African slave trade. Petitions from Jamaican landowners put these points frankly: “if the slave-

grown sugar were admitted into England, the proprietors of Jamaica would be unable to carry on those measures of improvement which they had lately begun. They also felt that the contemplated alteration would be an encouragement to the slave-trade, which this country had made great sacrifices to suppress.” Reading these petitions, Lord Harewood “thought it most extraordinary that such a measure should be proposed when it was known that our colonies were about recovering from the state of embarrassment and adversity which the great change of the emancipation had necessarily and naturally produced.” Britain’s abolitionists, of course, were certain to resist the idea that the Great Experiment necessarily brought embarrassment. Nevertheless, Harwood challenged abolitionists in Parliament to face the bitter reality: “the proposal, if carried into effect . . . would be most injurious to the moral and religious improvement throughout the world, and almost fatal to the population of the West Indies.”²¹

In remarks that brought the Conservative case to a close, Peel echoed these arguments. “I have made up my mind in favour of this continued exclusion of sugar, the produce of slave labour,” he announced. “My conviction mainly rests on a consideration of the state of the West Indies, and of the progress of the great experiment of slave emancipation.” Making no mistake in his refutation of the Great Experiment’s Smithian rationale, Peel asked the Commons: “can we see with indifference Jamaica reduced to the condition of St. Domingo?” Turning to the abolitionist bloc, Peel summoned their votes. “Is this to be the result of that great experiment of emancipation which had been proclaimed to be so successful? Is this to be the great and striking example which we are to hold up to the imitation of all other countries?” Peel urged the abolitionist bloc to face reality: having sought to convert slaveholders into abolitionists, they had failed. Indeed, their failure now threatened to entrench slavery worldwide. If abolitionists could no longer hold the hope of perfecting humankind, they could at least prevent its regression by joining Conservatives in the cause of agricultural protection.²²

In concluding Whig remarks, Palmerston responded by urging abolitionists to stay the course. Through the course of the debate it had become apparent that nothing had been resolved between the parties. The balance, therefore, was to fall to the abolitionist bloc. Recognizing as much, Palmerston emphasized that nothing could undermine human progress more than agricultural protection. As Foreign Secretary, he reminded humanitarians, he had proven an implacable champion of antislavery interests. In completing numerous treaties to combat the African slave trade, the negotiations, he emphasized, had always proven difficult because negotiators of foreign nations invariably alleged that Britain had economic motives to suppress that trade. "I regret that much has been said in this debate which is ill calculated to undeceive them in this point," he now complained. "We have endeavoured to persuade them that free labour is cheaper in the end than slave labour, and that the cessation of the slave-trade would be no injury, but in fact a benefit to them. We have been justified in holding this language to the Brazilians because we held it to our own West-India colonists." To contradict that example now would not only be disgraceful, Palmerston emphasized, it would be to do the world a disservice. "We told them that in the end they would find free labour less expensive than slave-labour, and we told them the truth," he affirmed. "Nothing that has yet happened in the working of the great experiment which we are making in the West Indies leads me in the slightest degree to doubt that the assertion we made to them is true."²³

Significantly, Palmerston did not refute Conservatives' economic arguments, only their charges of negligence. A principled Smithian, Palmerston could not claim free labor more productive than slave labor; he could only emphasize the merits of its cost efficiency. Again speaking of Brazilians, he urged Parliament: "let us convince them by our conduct, that in our doctrine we were sincere." "Let us convince them that we do believe free labour to be, as it unquestionably is, cheaper than slave labour." Nor did Palmerston's

colleagues refute Conservatives' economic arguments, in particular the principal point of contention: that production in the West Indies had fallen since implementation of the free labor experiment. Indeed, at the debates' opening while introducing the ministry's proposal, Russell acknowledged that in Jamaica "the crop of 1839 fell considerably below the average of the four years of apprenticeship, which was itself considerably below the average of the six years preceding. The crop of 1840 appears to have been shorter still . . . and even this is not to be expected to be equaled by that of 1841."²⁴

In fact, Whigs had no intention of refuting Conservatives' claims of diminished production. After all, inflated sugar prices resulting from diminished production had prompted the call to reform the Sugar Duties in the first place. Instead, Whigs chose as their point of contention the reasons for the diminished production. Whereas Conservatives maintained that the Great Experiment stood no hope of competing with slave labor, Whigs emphasized that the experiment had suffered by absence of competition. Guaranteed a monopoly by the Sugar Duties, West Indies landlords had grown complacent, failing to undertake the needed improvements to translate the increased efficiency brought by free labor into increased production. What the Great Experiment needed most was competition, not privileged protection that encouraged sloth. "The question," Palmerston reminded Parliament, "is between free trade on the one side, and monopoly on the other."²⁵

Nor did Palmerston refute Conservatives' contention that opening British markets to slave-grown sugar would encourage the slave trade. Given the notoriously high mortality rates among the overworked bondsmen in Cuba and Brazil, any demand for increased production was certain to spur demand for imports of African captives. Nor would Palmerston have disagreed, if pressed, that an invigorated slave trade would have injured the Great Experiment. While it is clear that Palmerston believed free labor could hold its own in equitable competition with slave labor, he had no confidence that it could

do so in the face of continued slave imports, much less with an increase in the trade. A point revealed by indirection, Palmerston clarified his understanding, for example, that the Great Experiment held no prospect of deterring the trade by itself, no matter how successful it might prove. “The suppression of the slave-trade is to be effected by two means,” he emphasized. “First, by vigilance and activity of that maritime police, which, by virtue of our treaties with other powers, we are enabled to establish; secondly, by those measures of internal administration which foreign governments may put into execution, either in compliance with our suggestions, or in fulfillment of treaties concluded with us.” No free-labor experiment alone would ever stop the trade, with or without protective tariffs. The trade could only be stopped by coercion. “I lay great stress upon this, because it is only from England, and from the exertions of England, that any hopes can be entertained of the extinction of the slave-trade, and of the ultimate abolition of slavery throughout the world,” Palmerston asserted. “It is England alone that feels any deep and sincere interest in the matter.”²⁶

Taken together, these concessions proved damning commentary of the loftiest objectives of the Great Experiment. When Palmerston spoke confidently of free labor’s competitiveness to slavery, he presupposed a world in which the slave trade had been eradicated. The Smithian promise of increased cost efficiency held little hope of converting the world’s slaveholders into abolitionists when slaveholders cared little about efficiency. Only in the absence of replenished populations of African captives—certain to increase slave prices, shrink profit margins, and therefore evoke a concern for efficiency—could the Smithian logic to which Palmerston subscribed effect a persuasive influence on the world’s slaveholders.

In short, Palmerston acknowledged the problem of slavery and progress. Given a perfectly free global market, one in which the slave trade remained unchecked, slavery stood no chance of meeting its end. A free-trade Whig attentive to the consumer

interests of the British middle class, Palmerston understood better than most the paramount importance of consumer demand and the remarkable responsiveness of the world's slave systems to that demand. As Foreign Secretary for much of the previous decade, and a government minister for thirty years, Palmerton had also attained an unsurpassed understanding of British interests. Only by careful control of key elements of the global market, Palmerston knew, could Britain hope to rid itself of competition from slavery. Absent coercion, slavery was certain to remain a fixture. Therefore Britain must commit to coercion.

* * *

The Convention of London was intended as the keystone of Britain's commitment to coercion. The hope of eradicating slavery throughout the world lay not with the Great Experiment, Palmerston emphasized to Parliament. Rather, it lay with officeholders in Washington, D.C., in particular their willingness to concede the British Navy the maritime right of search. Influenced by natural-rights ideals, both Americans and the British had enacted prohibitions of slave imports almost simultaneously early in the nineteenth century. Since that time, however, the objectives of the two nations had changed dramatically. With their autarkic supply of slave labor, Americans denied themselves further imports from Africa with few negatives consequences. In contrast, the British West Indies suffered irreparably. With the slave population of the British West Indies unable to maintain its own numbers by natural reproduction, a slow but certain decline set in, especially after 1814.

Before Waterloo, the British Navy benefited by the laws of nations, as during times of war belligerents are entitled to search the ships of all nations for contraband. With its powerful navy, Britain had dominated Atlantic sea lanes during the war, reducing the number of slaves embarked from Africa by more than 75 percent, from 86,702 in 1807 to 20,803 seven years later. Intercepting African captives bound for competitors

permitted West Indian planters, denied the luxury of further imports, to compete for the duration of the war.

But after 1814, British West Indian slavery remained profitable because Britain's Sugar Duties guaranteed West Indian planters a market. Denied competition from abroad, however, it became increasingly uncompetitive on the world market, outdistanced by the burgeoning economies of Cuba and Brazil now permitted access to the markets of Europe that had been closed to them during the Napoleonic wars. In their efforts to reverse this trend, Britain found the laws of nations now hampered its objectives, as the right of search was limited to times of war. In the absence of effective means of suppression, the Atlantic slave trade burgeoned along with the economies of Cuba and Brazil, rising unevenly from 20,803 embarkations in 1814, to 61,407 by 1817, 71,702 eight years later, and 100,742 by 1830. In response, the British government began the Herculean task of negotiating right-of-search treaties with every maritime nation, with comprehensiveness always a key element for success, as slave traders demonstrated an uncanny ability to fly flags of nations yet to complete effective arrangements with Britain. In short, Americans possessed no economic incentive to suppress slave trading to other nations after 1807. Suppression of that trade to Cuba and Brazil was unimportant to them. In contrast, Britain possessed economic incentives. The suppression of the slave trade became a crusade, combining elements of economic logic, moral earnestness, and outrage at the shamelessness of other peoples who benefited by Britain's moral righteousness. Nor was it a secret that Britain's denying itself continued imports of African captives placed British producers at a competitive disadvantage. At the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1822, when the British envoy urged fellow delegates to shut the markets of Europe to the exports of slave-trading states, he reported the proposal met no success beyond its having been "met . . . with a smile."²⁷

By 1841, as Palmerston informed Parliament, the United States stood in the way of the Atlantic slave trade's effective suppression—and therefore in the way of slavery's eradication. Great strides had been made in recent years, denying slave traders the use of the Brazilian, Spanish, and Portuguese flags, yet the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies had provided yet another stimulus to the trade. Embarkations from Africa again reached as high as 86,502 in 1839, the year after Apprenticeship ended. Almost all of these slaves were conveyed to Havana and Rio de Janeiro with the assistance of the one government's flag that yet refused cooperation: the United States. These trends were well known in Britain, especially to abolitionists, as were Americans' objections to the right of search. In fact, the British Navy had recently seized a large number of American vessels on the coast of Africa, heightening tensions with the U.S. government and fueling a war scare even as Palmerston addressed Parliament. With negotiations at an impasse, Britain's abolitionists could only imagine that Conservatives were right in claiming that a reduction in the Sugar Duties would lead to a boom in the Atlantic slave trade unprecedented in scale. Americans, abolitionists were sure, would never concede the right of search. They would declare war first, an eventuality most abolitionists, pacifists at heart, could not countenance.

But Palmerston assured Parliament that the Whig Melbourne Ministry had taken measures to ensure the American flag would not be put to such use. When Palmerston asserted "if we had thought that this measure would give to the slave-trade any encouragement, which we should not be able by other means to counterbalance, we would not have proposed the measure to Parliament," he referred to specific means of counterbalance. He had recently completed negotiations for a "Christian league against the slave-trade" with the governments of Austria, France, Prussia, and Russia.²⁸

The counterbalance was the Convention of London. There was just one problem: although completed in practically all its details, the treaty remained on the drawing

board, where it was likely to remain so long as Palmerston remained in office. The convention required the cooperation of five governments, one of which, France, refused to conclude the treaty with Palmerston, the result of an objection that stemmed from Palmerston's handling of the Levant crisis the previous year. The reasons for France's resistance were widely known. Palmerston, therefore, provided British abolitionists twice the reason to side with Conservatives. Not only did the Sugar Duties seem the surest means of attaining the greatest good in the short term, the only long-term solution required means unlikely to come about so long as Palmerston remained in office.

Whig efforts to reform the Sugar Duties therefore met defeat in May 1841 by a vote of 281 to 317. Although the Melbourne Ministry surprised observers by refusing to resign immediately, Conservatives soon forced a vote of no confidence, nationwide elections in July, and a formal change of ministries in September. Peel and his party had depended upon abolitionist votes to beat back an attack on Britain's landed establishment. Given the compelling logic of suppressing the slave trade—both in terms of coalescing the political support of abolitionists and pursuing the economic logic of assisting West Indian landowners by undermining the Great Experiment's competitors—the Peel Ministry surprised few observers when in October 1841 it informed the French government of its wish to conclude negotiations of Palmerston's five-power treaty at an early date. When France agreed, Aberdeen seized the opportunity, completing negotiations by the end of fall and reveling in the favorable implications, both political and diplomatic. We have yesterday signed our Slave Trade Treaty," Aberdeen informed Princess Lieven on December 21, 1841. "It is a grand affair, and will be highly appreciated in this country," an indication of Aberdeen's attentiveness to the new Conservative ministry's abolitionist allies. Yet Peel's Foreign Secretary revealed as well that the Convention of London served purposes beyond political expedience: "It leaves very little more to be done upon this subject by means of negotiation."²⁹

* * *

It appeared no coincidence to Green, therefore, that on December 20, 1841, the same day Britain's new Conservative ministry concluded negotiations for the Convention of London, it notified the American government of the treaty's objective. Explaining that he had earlier the same "day concluded a joint Treaty with France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia, by which the mutual right of search within certain latitudes is fully and effectually established for ever," Aberdeen informed Everett of his government's desire to see the United States join the treaty. "This is, in truth, a holy alliance," confided Britain's Foreign Secretary, intimating but leaving vague the treaty's hegemonic purpose and coercive implications. In contrast to his successor, Aberdeen hoped to mollify the American government. Given his contempt for American *laissez faire*, Palmerston may well have sought to antagonize the principal obstructionists to his anti-slave trade stratagem by presenting the convention as a *fait accompli*. Aberdeen, however, elected to introduce the convention amid an air of moral suasion. Emphasizing that he "would have rejoiced to see the United States assume their proper place among the Great Powers of Christendom, foremost in power, wealth, and civilization, and connected together in the cause of mercy and justice," Aberdeen left little doubt that he would extend the American government an opportunity to join the Convention of London.³⁰

Nor was it a coincidence, Green thought, that the Peel Ministry soon approached Everett again. On December 26, 1841, within a week of the treaty's signing, Aberdeen announced his government's intention to name a special mission to the United States. The envoy, Lord Ashburton, "would go with full powers to make a definitive arrangement on every point in discussion between the two countries," including the Maine boundary and of course the Convention of London. In exchange for American cooperation with British slave-trade objectives, Everett learned, the Peel Ministry suggested its willingness to settle

other points in discussion, in particular the Maine boundary, on terms favorable to American interests. Here was a clear departure from the tactics of previous Whig governments.³¹

Aberdeen, however, took care not to appear too eager to compromise British territorial interests. Aware that “the measure would by some persons be called a concession,” a reference to Palmerston, Aberdeen instead pursued indirect channels to offer potential outlines of compromise. Recounting a conversation with Ashburton before the minister departed for America, Everett informed Webster that “I understood Lord A. to intimate that he should be authorized to agree to a stipulation expressly limiting the right of search in the African seas to the suppression of the Slave trade, if the United States would be willing to come into the agreement of the Five Powers on such a condition.” Furthermore, Ashburton remarked “that he had seen Sir Robert Peel that day, and that from the conversation between them, he felt warranted in saying that this Government would agree to any stipulation which might be necessary to remove the difficulty relative to impressment, as connected with a concession of the right of search.” Intimations as to the possible course of compromise emerged even from diplomats from other countries assigned to London. Russian minister “Baron Brunnow,” Everett informed Webster, “told me he had reason to be confident that this government would agree to a conventional line of Boundary on the Northeast,,” forsaking Palmerston’s earlier claims that would have enlarged New Brunswick considerably at Maine’s expense. Aberdeen even intimated that he was not averse to “paying to the U.S. a pecuniary indemnity for the territory north of the St. John’s,” concession of considerable substance from Palmerston’s previous stance.³²

Given these intimations, Everett, the official American minister in London, was quick to emphasize the difference. “The President, I think, will be struck by the marked change in the tone of the present Ministry,” he wrote. Sympathetic with abolitionism, the former Massachusetts governor hoped the change in British tone would produce a

change in American policies. “With a view of uniting the great maritime powers in one policy, and also from the friendly motive of removing a ground of discontent between the United States and Great Britain,” he thought a formal proposal for the United States to join the Convention of London was only a matter of time. “I should not be surprised,” he informed Daniel Webster, “if a proposition to join in the treaty above alluded to, should be made to us, by Russia or France or even by the Five Contracting Parties.” Everett also expressed to Webster his hopes that the United States would accept the offer: “with respect to the right of search in the African seas, is it out of the question for the United States to come into the agreement with the Five Powers? There surely can be nothing derogatory to our honor, in making common cause with them in this way? How would our interests suffer?”³³

Everett’s hopes of transforming the Convention of London into a six-power, transatlantic alliance only confirmed southerners’ suspicions of his inattentiveness to American slavery interests. That Britain’s new Conservatives ministry represented a departure from previous Whig governments came as no surprise to Calhoun and fellow proslavery advocates. They had anticipated the change would favor their interests, yet the Convention of London in no way fit these expectations. “The news of the late treaty of the Slave Trade has fallen like a thunder bolt amidst the Slavery party,” J G. Whittier reported. Writing British abolitionists only a matter of days after the first news of the treaty arrived in America, Whittier marveled at the treaty’s effect on Calhoun and his slaveholding colleagues: “they scarcely know what to say or do in reference to it.”³⁴

* * *

In the winter of 1841-1842, therefore, Duff Green found his services in demand once more. After years of political estrangement, he found himself in the perfect location to provide the information southern slaveholders needed to make sense of the Convention of London. Having traveled to Europe in part to shadow Everett, especially regarding

British antislavery policies, he set himself to work in earnest to fulfill his responsibilities. Certain the answers would prove influential in Washington, he took pains in particular to understand the recent political alliance between British Conservatives and abolitionists, finding himself drawn to the climactic Sugar Duties debate of May 1841. Reporting the results of the Great Experiment as the British understood them, Green found that Washington policymakers scarcely knew what to say or do in reference to his reports no less than they did the Convention of London.

NOTES

1. "A writer not only gets nothing . . ." Dickens to Lord Brougham, Mar. 22, 1842, in Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, et al, ed., *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-), 3: 145. "I am the greatest loser by it," Dickens to Forster, Feb. 24, 1842, *ibid.*, 3: 82. Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy*, Intro. by Charles Dickens the Younger (London: MacMillan and Co., 1903), 19-20, recounts the *Britannia's* arrival.
2. "best to shame the Americans . . .," Dickens to Lord Brougham, Mar. 22, 1842, in Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, et al, ed., *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-), 3: 145. "We are on tiptoe . . .," Sumner to Lord Morpeth, Jan. 19, 1842, in Edward L. Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 4 vols. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877-94), 2: 201.
3. *Niles*, Jan. 29, 1841. Everett to Webster, Dec. 31, 1841, postscript dated Jan. 3, 1842, Despatches from Ministers, Great Britain, M30, roll 45 (also in *PDW*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 176-77) reports that a copy of the treaty was included among the despatches sent aboard the *Britannia* on its departure from Liverpool on January 4.
4. The boundaries of the search zone were specified in Article II of the treaty, the text of which is available from numerous published sources, including: *CG*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., App., 217-20; *British and Foreign State Papers* (London: H.M.S.O., 1841-1977) 30: 269-301; *DNI*, Mar. 11, 1843, 3; *Niles*, Apr. 9, 1842, 89-91; *DM*, Apr. 13, 1842, 3-4; and Duff Green, *Facts and Suggestions: Biographical, Historical, Financial and Political* (New York: Richardson and Company, 1866), 119-26.
5. "any vessel which may attempt . . ." provision of Article I, the Convention of London, *CG*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., App., 217-20.
6. The Convention of London has eluded the exhaustive, authoritative study it deserves, particularly relative to its ties to the Great Experiment. Among the most informative existing studies are: Paul M. Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814-48: Diplomacy, Morality, and Economics* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 164-208; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 166; St. George L. Sioussat, "Duff Green's 'England and the United States': With an Introductory Study of American Opposition to the Quintuple Treaty of 1841," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 40 (April 1930): 175-276; and Hugo Fischer, "The Suppression of Slavery in International Law," *International Law*

Quarterly 3 (Jan. 1950): 28-51, 45. The Quadruple Treaty of 1834, signed between the governments of Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal, had set these nations apart from Austria, Prussia, and Russia, more reactionary governments that had formed the Holy Alliance separate from the Concert of Europe and had frequently acted independent of Britain and France. As the Sioussat title above suggests, existing scholarship most often refers to the Convention of London as the Quintuple Treaty.

7. *TST*, query arrivals to Americas, 1800-1850. This and the preceding two paragraphs draw from the following studies, each of which highlights aspects of American ties to the transatlantic slave trade after 1807, a topic that has drawn much attention from scholars yet stands in need of fuller treatment in light of recent scholarship of slavery and abolition: George E. Brooks, Jr. *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters, and African Middlemen: A History of American Legitimate Trade with West Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1970); Cyrus T. Brady, Jr., *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa, With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade with Zanzibar* (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1950); Peter Duignan and Clarence Clendenen. *The United States and the African Slave Trade, 1619-1862* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962); David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Warren S. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); John G.B. Hutchins, *The American Maritime Industries and Public Policy, 1789-1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1941); and Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999). In addition, British consular despatches from Baltimore highlight ties between the city's shipbuilding interests and slave trading merchants. See especially John McTavish [British Consul in Baltimore] to Palmerston, Jan. 30, 1840, *PPST*, vol. 19 (1840), Series D, 62-73.

8. "leaves us no alternative . . ." and "Disguise it as you will . . .," Wheaton to Webster, Jan. 26, 1842, *DW*, roll 16.

9. The implications of the Convention of London for entrenching the legal basis of British natural-law policies has received little or no attention from scholars. The reason probably owes to the fact that those implications were never manifested as the convention was never fully implemented.

10. "The experiment in West India . . .," Green to Upshur, Apr. 28, 1842, Green Papers, UNC, roll 4.

11. "No man has established . . .," Green to Tyler, Sept. 10, 1841, *ibid.*, roll 4. "The present condition of the country . . .," Upshur to Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, Aug. 7, 1841, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM. Green has often been presumed influential as a diplomat, an interpretation fostered by his self-serving *Facts & Suggestions, Biographical, Historical, Financial and Political, Addressed to the People of the United States* (New York: Richardson, 1866). Even his influence as a political advisor can easily be overstated; Tyler probably would have appointed Upshur, a close friend and states' colleague, anyway. In a prominent study, Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), xii, portrays Green as "prolific and influential" as a diplomat, a case built upon Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 11-16, 15, which condemns Green's reports from Europe as "far-fetched and propagandistic." St. George L. Sioussat, "Duff Green's 'England and the United States': With an Introductory Study of American Opposition to the Quintuple Treaty of 1841," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 40 (April 1930): 175-276, 178, also presumes Green's high-ranking correspondents heeded his diplomatic reports. More recently, Freehling, *The Road to*

Disunion, 386-87, finds Green both influential and mistaken in his reporting West Indian emancipation disastrous.

12. “England is now in a crisis” and “Cheap bread . . .,” Green to Calhoun, Jan.3, 1842, *PJC*, 16: 33-34.

13. “The Whigs now go . . .” and “The agitation on this subject . . .,” Green to Calhoun, Jan. 3, 1842, *ibid.*, 16: 33-34. Green’s views of the state of Britain’s political parties, it should be noted, reflected his familiarity of American politics. Party divisions in Britain were in fact far less rigid than in America. This circumstance was often lost on Green, who for instance tended to cast British Conservatives as far less responsive to social ills of the day than Peel and many Conservatives in fact proved.

14. All quotes, Green to Calhoun, Jan. 3, 1842, *ibid.*, vol. 16, 33-34. C. Duncan Rice, “‘Humanity Sold for Sugar!’ The British Abolitionist Response to Free Trade in Slave-Grown Sugar,” *Historical Journal* 13 (Sept. 1970): 402-18, examines the British abolitionists’ decision to protect the Great Experiment.

15. Philip D. Curtin, “The British Sugar Duties and West Indian Prosperity,” *Journal of Economic History* 14 (Spring 1954): 157-64.

16. Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 270. Curtin, “The British Sugar Duties and West Indian Prosperity,” 157-64, 158-59. Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, 230-31.

17. Curtin, “The British Sugar Duties and West Indian Prosperity,” 158-59. Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, 230-31.

18. All quotes, Russell remarks, British Parliament, Lords, May 7, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 16-17.

19. All quotes, Radnor remarks, British Parliament, Lords, May 7, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 5.

20. All quotes, Ashburton remarks, British Parliament, Lords, May 7, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 5-6.

21. All quotes, Harewood remarks, British Parliament, Lords, May 7, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 1-2.

22. All quotes, Peel remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 18, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 615-18.

23. All quotes, Palmerston remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 18, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 652.

24. “Let us convince them . . .,” Palmerston remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 18, 1841, *ibid.*, 58: 653; “the crop of 1839 . . .,” Russell remarks, British Parliament, Commons, *Hansard*, 58: 27.

25. All quotes, Palmerston remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 18, 1841, *Hansard*, 58: 655.

26. All quotes, Palmerston remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 18, 1841, *ibid.*, 58: 648, 654.

27. Figures in this and the preceding paragraph, *TST*, query of departures, Africa combined, 1800-1850. "met . . . with a smile," in Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 22. Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), demonstrates that the uncompetitiveness of the British West Indies, frequently thought to date from the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, instead dated from 1814 when the effects of abolition combined with those of the postwar resurgence abroad built upon continued slave imports.

28. All quotes, Palmerston remarks, British Parliament, Commons, May 18, 1841, *Hansard.*, 58: 648, 650.

29. *Hansard*, 58: 667. "we have yesterday signed . . .," Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, Dec. 21, 1841, *The Correspondence of Lord Aberdeen and Princess Lieven, 1832-1854*, ed. E. Jones Parry (Camden Third Series, vols. 60 and 62, London: Royal Historical Society, 1938, 1939), vol. 60, 190.

30. "day concluded a joint Treaty . . ." and "This is, in truth, a Holy Alliance . . .," Aberdeen to Everett, Dec. 20, 1841, *PPST*, 21: D, 282.

31. "Lord Ashburton would go with . . .," Aberdeen remarks, in Everett to Webster, Dec. 31, 1841, M30, roll 45. Also in *PDW*, ser. 3, 1: 173-77.

32. "the measure would by some persons . . .," Aberdeen remarks, in Everett to Webster, Dec. 31, 1841, *ibid.* "I understood Lord A. to intimate . . .," "said that he had seen Sir Robert Peel . . .," "Baron Brunnow . . .," Everett to Webster, Jan. 21, 1842, DW, roll 16. Also in *PDW*, ser. 3, 1: 491-93.

33. "The President, I think . . .," Everett to Webster, Dec. 28, 1841, M30, roll 45. "With a view of uniting . . ." and "I should not be surprised," Everett to Webster, Dec. 28, 1841, Despatches from Ministers, Great Britain, M30, roll 45. "with respect to the right of search . . ." Everett to Webster, Jan. 3, 1842, DW, roll 16. Also in *PDW*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 488-90.

34. J.G. Whittier to Joseph Sturge, Jan. 31, 1842, in Abel and Klingberg, *A Side-Light on Anglo-American Relations*, 92.

THE ASHBURTON CAPITULATION

“Prepare for war,” Duff Green urged the Tyler Administration in January 1842, “this is our only hope.” Writing from Europe just as word of the Convention of London arrived in America, Green doubted southern slaveholders would know what to make of the treaty. They expected British Conservatives to reverse Whig policies, not further them, much less complete a five-power treaty to eradicate the transatlantic slave trade. The error of southern slaveholders, Green saw, stemmed from the premise of British motivations. Informed that the Great Experiment had proven successful, southern slaveholders had taken comfort in the presumption that the British had benefited by West Indian abolition, as the experiment’s success implied Britain possessed economic disincentive to abolish slavery elsewhere. As such, British antislavery policies could be concluded as essentially moral, not economic, in foundation, and extraneous, not central, to Britain’s vested interests. From these presumptions southern slaveholders like John C. Calhoun hoped British Conservatives would abandon the antislavery campaign begun by Britain’s Whigs and spearheaded by Lord Palmerston, as Britain’s Conservatives had traditionally placed considerations of economic interest above moral arguments when the two were found to conflict.¹

Such hopes were groundless, Green found. Far from bringing Britain economic advantage, “the experiment in West India has failed,” he reported to Abel P. Upshur in April 1842. Drawing from his research on recent British politics, in particular the Sugar Duties debate of the previous May, Green arrived at conclusions far different from those entertained in Washington. Whereas antebellum Americans often portrayed Britain as the richest and most powerful nation in the world, the envy of all other nations, Green found “the condition of England at this time calls for the sympathy of the world.” Indeed, to other members of Tyler’s cabinet, as well as Calhoun, his relative by marriage, Green

emphasized that “England is now in a crisis.” He insisted, furthermore, that the crisis resulted from Britain’s commitment to West Indian abolition. “I am convinced that she thought slave labour was dearer than free labour,” he observed, but as “the experiment in West India has failed the question now is to cheapen the production of manufactures by a repeal of her Corn Laws or [to] raise the cost of producing cotton by abolishing slavery in the United States.” In short, Green found that British Conservatives possessed economic incentive to abolish slavery elsewhere, a situation that suggested continuity, rather than conflict, between the moral and economic influences on British antislavery policies. The Convention of London exemplified this symbiosis. What appeared at first glance a humanitarian initiative unrelated to Britain’s free-labor experiment was in fact closely related. “The monomania of the present age is a false philanthropy,” Green maintained, emphasizing that Britain’s “war on slavery and the slave-trade is intended to increase the cost of producing the raw material in the United States, Brazil, and Cuba.”²

In this characterization of British antislavery motives Green of course agreed with John Quincy Adams that Britain had declared war on slavery. Yet, significantly, he portrayed British motives in a fundamentally opposite light. Whereas the Massachusetts representative perceived Britain as acting from a position of strength, Green emphasized that weakness and desperation motivated British antislavery policies, an argument that might have been expected to create a stir in Washington. Yet to a remarkable extent Green’s warning of the motivations of Britain’s Conservatives fell on deaf ears. Writing Green a year later, Upshur questioned the very premise of Green’s logic: “what has England to gain by crippling any one faculty of the U. States . . . and what has either of them to lose by establishing the closest and most friendly relations?”³

Duff Green’s efforts to warn the Tyler Administration of the basis of the Peel Ministry’s abolitionist motives in part fell victim to the circumstances of the Convention

of London's arrival in America. After receiving a copy of the treaty from Lord Aberdeen in the first week of January 1842, Edward Everett conveyed the treaty by the first packet bound for America, the S.S. *Britannia*. Consequently, when the treaty arrived in Boston in late January, the Washington, D.C. *Madisonian* reported the significance of the ship's arrival but made no mention of the treaty:

HIGHLY IMPORTANT FROM EUROPE
ARRIVAL OF THE BRITANNIA STEAMER
APPOINTMENT OF A BRITISH SPECIAL MINISTER TO THE UNITED STATES
LORD ASHBURTON
ARRIVAL OF CHAS. DICKENS ⁴

First word of what was to become known as the Ashburton Mission, the *Madisonian's* headline arrived as welcome news to Calhoun and fellow southern slaveholders. Hopeful the recent change of British governments would bring change to British policies, they saw the mission as a significant departure. If Americans had learned anything over the previous decade from dealing with Britain's Whig governments, it was that Palmerston would never volunteer a special mission. The selection of Lord Ashburton as the emissary also seemed promising. A longtime Tory who had served in Parliament since 1806—far before the Slavery Abolition Act and even before Britain's Slave Trade Abolition Act of 1807—Ashburton was the title of Alexander Baring, head of Baring Brothers, the London financial firm that held extensive investments in the United States. Ashburton also happened to be a longtime friend of Daniel Webster, the present American Secretary of State, who in the past had often served as legal counsel for the Baring firm. Ashburton's sympathies for things America in fact ran deep, as his wife, a Philadelphian, acknowledged played a part in the Peel Ministry's choosing him for the assignment. "These honors were thrust upon him as the person most zealous in the cause of America & the most sanguine as to the possibility of

settling the long pending differences between the two countries,” Lady Ashburton confided in Webster. “To borrow your own significant phrase, ‘if you don’t like him we can send you nothing better.’”⁵

In short, Ashburton’s selection as special emissary accomplished much of what Aberdeen intended by the selection. With a treaty at his disposal designed to compel American cooperation with British anti-slave trade policies, Aberdeen hoped instead to win American assent with the goodwill of a surprise special mission, a favorable boundary compromise, and a disarming envoy. Still, the Peel Ministry’s motives for negotiating the Convention of London were sure to receive heavy scrutiny by Washingtonians the moment Ashburton proposed American acceptance of the treaty. In the end, however, no such scrutiny occurred. Ashburton never asked the American government to join the Convention of London. As a result, southern slaveholders found little reason to heed Green’s dire warnings of war, much less his explanation of British antislavery motives.

* * *

Envisioned as a means of gaining American acceptance of the Convention of London, the Ashburton Mission changed fundamentally between its initial announcement on December 26, 1841, and Ashburton’s departure for America six weeks later. As a result of the failure of one of the five original signatory governments to ratify the convention, the Peel Ministry abandoned hope of gaining American acceptance by the time of Ashburton’s departure on February 10. Without all five governments, the treaty lost its power of coercion, and absent that hegemony Americans were unlikely to prove any more cooperative than in the past. Nevertheless, the Peel Ministry proceeded with Ashburton’s mission anyway. Cancellation was sure to bring negative consequences, and in any event some good might still come of it. Ashburton proceeded to Washington, however, with changed objectives. Rather than offering the American

government boundary concessions to win its cooperation with Britain's campaign against the slave trade, Ashburton received instructions to win boundary concessions from the Americans, which in fact he accomplished. The resulting Treaty of Washington of August 1842, otherwise known as the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, represents a rare instance of territorial cession by the American republic. Ashburton's gains, however, came at a considerably higher price than either he or members of the Peel Ministry would ever bring themselves to admit. Instructed to avoid mention of the right of search, the right of visit, or the Convention of London, Ashburton in fact did so. But in proceeding with the mission in the belief that Ashburton's negotiations would bear no relation to Convention of London, the Peel Ministry blundered by committing the British government to policies that undermined its campaign against the slave trade and by implication the Great Experiment.

France's refusal to ratify the convention prompted the changed objectives of Ashburton's mission. Providing for exchange of ratifications two months after its initial signing in London on December 20, 1841, the convention encountered resistance in the French Chamber of Deputies by republican groups who wished to embarrass the July Monarchy. Normally French republicans, zealous proponents of the antislavery cause, could have been expected to support the Convention of London and work for its success. But presented an opportunity to embarrass the French monarchy, French republicans put aside their antislavery sentiments in an effort to bring about a cabinet crisis and force a change of government. While representatives from the governments of Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia exchanged ratifications in London on February 19, 1842, the French government, the Orleanist ministry headed by François Guizot, found itself the subject of censure for negotiating the convention.⁶

In their efforts to contest the Guizot ministry, French republicans received assistance from three American diplomats in Paris—Lewis Cass, American Minister to

France, Henry Wheaton, on leave from his post as American Minister to Prussia, and Green in his unofficial capacity as an agent of the Tyler Administration. Emphasizing that the American republic would never consent to a treaty that abridged the freedom of the seas, they exploited the principal strength of the Convention of London and turned it into an argument useful to French republicans. Meant to isolate the United States from the alliance of Christian nations, the convention rendered American ships—and American ships alone—unprotected in the new maritime order that extended British cruisers an expansive right of visit. By the same token, however, American diplomats could claim that the Convention of London left American ships—and American ships alone—free of obligation to the British government. In short, the United States could claim status as most favored nation because it alone remained free of British oversight of its commercial interests.

Taking up the argument, republican deputies berated Guizot for denying French shipping, colonial, and consumer interests the benefits of most-favored nation status enjoyed by Americans. Censured for signing the convention and risking a vote of no confidence should he dare to proceed with its ratification, Guizot informed the Peel Ministry of his intention “to adjourn the ratification of the treaty of the 20th of December, 1841, and to propose modifications which should either annul or render it acceptable to the Chambers.” Guizot, however, was simply buying time. While he enumerated to the Peel Ministry a number of modifications regarding technical aspects of the convention, he understood that the only modification that would make it acceptable to the Chambers was to have the American government join the convention, a circumstance that would deprive Americans their most-favored nation status. Guizot therefore awaited the outcome of the Ashburton Mission. If Ashburton gained American acceptance, the arguments of the French republicans would be overcome, and France too would ratify the convention. But if Americans refused, then Guizot would also refuse.⁷

The French rejection placed the Peel Ministry in an embarrassing dilemma. Announced with the intention of gaining American acceptance of the Convention of London, the Ashburton Mission now found itself deprived of the one objective that made it most attractive to the Peel Ministry. "I had another interview today with Lord Ashburton," Everett wrote on January 31. "He fears that French Ministry may not be able to ratify the Treaty of the 20th Dec., in the face of the vote of the Chambers; and seemed to entertain little hope, under the discouraging circumstances of the non-ratification of France, that America would come into the Treaty." Still, given the basis of the French rejection, the possibility existed that the logic of the convention could work in reverse. Intended to gain American acceptance by the force of the international pressure it represented, the convention stood the chance of regaining its promise of international pressure if the Peel Ministry could somehow arrange for American acceptance of the convention, which would then permit Guizot to ratify. The price of American acceptance could be expected to be high, and likely would involve concessions along the Oregon boundary. Yet, given the implications for the Great Experiment, if the Peel Ministry could secure American cooperation in suppressing the Atlantic slave trade the price might be worth it.⁸

Ultimately any thoughts of securing American acceptance of the Convention of London short of French ratification were shelved as a result of a second principal influence that prompted fundamental revision of the Ashburton mission's agenda: the arrival in London in early January 1842 of news that mutinous slaves aboard the American slave-trading vessel *Creole* had sought refuge in the British West Indies. In Washington, where policymakers still had little idea of the stake British Conservatives had in the success of the Great Experiment, there existed considerable expectations that the new Conservative Peel Ministry would reverse the natural-law policies of previous Whig governments. If in fact the Peel Ministry had acted as southern slaveholders

expected, and disavowed Palmerston's natural-law policies that had given rise to the *Creole* mutiny, the gesture might have assuaged southern slaveholders' fears of British policies sufficient perhaps to gain American acceptance of the Convention of London.

Yet the Peel Ministry's actions did not correspond to the hopes of John C. Calhoun and his slaveholding colleagues in Congress. Far from disavowing Palmerston's natural-law policies, the Peel Ministry upheld them and rejected American claims for extradition of the *Creole* mutineers. "The law officers of the Crown have decided against the power to deliver up the 19 slaves guilty of murder on the *Creole*," Everett informed Webster. "They are unanimous" and maintain that "the nineteen cannot be tried in any British court." Given the hysteria on the floor of Congress upon receiving news of the *Creole* mutiny, the refusal to renounce Britain's natural-law policies negated any hope that the American government might accept the Convention of London short of French ratification.⁹

Unwilling to pursue the Convention of London if it meant abandoning Britain's natural-law policies, the Peel Ministry also resisted canceling Ashburton's mission. Palmerston would argue that British interests would have been better served had the mission never existed. But once offered, the mission was not so easily retracted. After recent wars in China and Syria, the British public were hopeful of peace. Retracting a mission billed as a peace overture seemed a recipe for more war. Nor was it easy to explain why France's rejection of the Convention of London should lead to cancellation of a peace mission to America. If anything, worsened French relations brought by the French rejection suggested a need to improve relations with Americans, not risk them further. Therefore Ashburton's mission went forward.

Instructed to avoid discussion of the Convention of London in his negotiations, Ashburton found Webster surprisingly open to discussion of American responsibility for preventing the fraudulent use of the American flag. When Webster offered to commit the American government to suppression efforts, Ashburton leaped at the opportunity.

When Webster volunteered to commit the American government to support of an African squadron of eighty guns to suppress the slave trade, and when he further agreed to join the British government in remonstrances to slave-trading governments, Ashburton believed he had gained peace at a bargain price. “If this arrangement can be brought to execution by Treaty,” he confided to Aberdeen, “I shall consider it to be the very best fruit of this mission.” For little more than the price of an adjustment of the Minnesota boundary favorable to American interests, Ashburton believed he had secured a significant step toward eradicating the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁰

* * *

On January 2, 1843, several months after concluding his mission to Washington, Ashburton recounted for Webster the controversy their negotiations stirred upon the British envoy’s return to London. On the whole the Treaty of Washington had met with popular approval in Britain, Ashburton reported, yet there was no denying that the treaty fell short of meeting unanimous approval. From his estate in Hampshire country, Ashburton wrote Webster that he had seen good reason to avoid London since his return from Washington in September 1842. “I myself have been buried here in the country,” he confided, explaining that his estate, the Grange, offered a pleasant retreat from the criticism his mission had stirred. “Early next month we are again all to meet in the Great Babylon where the conflict of parties in our Congress is to begin,” he continued. “I should probably not attend if it were not to look after my own character when the critics open their attack upon what they call the Ashburton Capitulation.”¹¹

Ashburton took it as a source of comfort that his critics were few in number, but it troubled him that what they lacked in quantity they more than made up for in credibility. “In speaking of critics,” he noted, “I should in fairness state that they are nearly, if not exclusively, reduced to one—our ex secretary of state,” Lord Palmerston, “who is labouring hard in his vocation of a fault finding leader of opposition.” More than

anyone else, Ashburton knew, Palmerston understood that the original purpose of Ashburton's Mission had been to arrange for the United States to join the Convention of London. Yet the Treaty of Washington nowhere mentioned that convention. By this measure Ashburton's diplomacy could only be judged a failure, especially as the treaty he negotiated appeared to Palmerston to surrender that convention in the name of peace. Never bashful about employing military force to further British interests, Palmerston could not help but think that Ashburton had surrendered British interests to further prospects of peace. No sooner had Ashburton returned to London in September 1842, than a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* (London) highlighted this theme. The signing of the Treaty of Washington, noted the author, represents "a formal abandonment by England of all attempt to persuade the United States to join the rest of Christendom in a treaty for the suppression of the slave trade, and thus at once proclaims that we give up all hopes upon that score."¹²

Palmerston, who Ashburton knew to be "the author of the angry articles of the *Morning Chronicle*," found the Treaty of Washington the product of incompetence, even duplicity. "There can be little doubt that the three subjects" of the boundary, extradition, and the slave trade "were negotiated as a whole" and "that they were all either to be taken or rejected together." This understanding, as Palmerston saw it, resulted from the fear that the U.S. Senate might reject one or more of the provisions: "which one was likely to be rejected?" Palmerston thought none. He believed each clearly redounded to American advantage. Drawing attention to the provisions for joint cruising (the joint naval cooperation between the American and British navies to suppress the slave trade), Palmerston asked: "Is it probable that the Senate should have refused this? Why should they? It grants no right of search. It establishes no principle to which the Americans can object, or even have objected." Having crafted the Convention of London to circumvent

American objection to British search policies, Palmerston was now angry that his successors in office had approved a treaty that catered to American objections.¹³

Beyond the provision for joint cruising, Ashburton gained a promise that Americans would join the British government in voicing remonstrances to other governments. “This is really too pitiful,” Palmerston discerned. “Nobody could have expected to see Great Britain brought down to so low a pitch of degradation as to go and beg another Power to help her in representing to a third party the ‘propriety and duty’ of fulfilling engagements entered into towards England” for the purpose of suppressing the slave trade. Britain, Palmerston knew, could enforce its own treaties, It had done so on numerous occasions during his tenure in the Foreign Office, in particular with the infamous “Palmerston Act” of 1839, whereby Parliament authorized unilateral force to compel the Portuguese government to comply with Anglo-Portuguese treaty obligations to suppress the slave trade. “If Spain and Brazil do not fulfill their engagements,” Palmerston now asked, “why not act towards them as we did towards Portugal?” Remembering that the Palmerston Act had proven remarkably successful—Portugal, faced with the threat of war, had quickly complied with its obligations—Palmerston concluded that Ashburton’s failure to remember Portugal’s newfound earnestness in suppressing the trade attributable to more than his inexperience as a diplomat. “Perhaps, after all, Lord Ashburton may not have been duped,” Palmerston reflected, “but may have been giving effect to the feelings and principles which it is well known he entertains with regard to America.” The chief financial officer of the Baring Brothers firm, Palmerston implied, put his firm’s extensive interests in America before the interests of his own country.¹⁴

As criticisms of Ashburton mounted in following weeks, the Peel Ministry and Ashburton found it necessary to defend themselves, even going so far as to appeal to the members of the Tyler Administration for assistance in refuting the charges. In October,

Lord Aberdeen, admitting to Edward Everett a “strong wish to be furnished with some of the articles written in the United States against the treaty,” conceded as much. Less direct, Ashburton also sought solace, writing Webster just after the beginning of the new year, within weeks of the opening of Parliament in February, when Palmerston was sure to attempt to censure the Peel Ministry for its concluding the Treaty of Washington. In contrast to Aberdeen, however, Ashburton made no attempt to refute Palmerston’s charges. Confiding in Webster his belief in the overriding importance of peace, Ashburton reflected little on the impact of peace on the slave trade, slavery in the Americas, or the Great Experiment. “The important thing,” Ashburton noted, “is that we have shaken hands cordially.”¹⁵

Yet even before Ashburton concluded his letter of January 2, news arrived from Washington that lent strong credence to Palmerston’s criticisms. “I had thus far left my letter unfinished,” Ashburton wrote Webster in a postscript dated January 7, “and in the meantime the President’s speech reaches us.” The speech, the president’s annual message, drew attention to Ashburton’s treaty. “I can’t hardly believe my eyes,” Ashburton remarked. “The deliberate approval of Gen. Cass’s interference” with the French Chamber of Deputies’ vote on the Convention of London, the “indiscretion . . . that our cruising article was the result of our consideration of what is called the right of search,” and the “further assertion that the practice of visiting in cases of suspicion is only the assertion of the right of search in a different form,” all struck Ashburton as “startling propositions.” Forced to admit that he had either been duped by Webster or that opinions had changed drastically in the three months since concluding his talks with Webster, Ashburton chose the latter. “At a total loss to conceive what could have to entirely confound and upset all facts and all reasoning on this subject since I left Washington,” he never afterward brought himself to accept that Webster, his longtime

friend, had negotiated the Treaty of Washington with the Convention of London very much in mind.¹⁶

* * *

Henry Wheaton brought the connection between Ashburton's mission and the Convention of London to Webster's attention. Writing from Paris in late January 1842, the American Minister to Prussia took it upon himself to advise Webster as to how to best counter the Convention of London. A respected jurist and author of *Elements of International Law*, Wheaton recalled for Webster a ploy proposed by the Russian government at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818. Hesitant to permit the British Navy the right to search its ships, the Russian government instead proposed a scheme of joint cruising on the western coast of Africa. "This may have been intended at the time by the astute Russian cabinet as a mystification," he emphasized, one that held far better promise of protecting Russian naval interests than making headway against slave traders. "I see indeed but little prospect of the five great European powers now consenting to it," Wheaton conceded, "but would you not put G. Britain completely in the wrong by proposing it?"¹⁷

Proposed by Webster and accepted by Ashburton and the Peel Ministry, Wheaton's scheme for joint cruising provided the means by which the Tyler Administration defeated the Convention of London. Although Wheaton's exact intentions remain unknown, there can be no doubt he understood the implications of the scheme for joint cruising. Whether Webster understood as much also remains uncertain. If he did, however, he nevertheless believed that defeating the convention need not equate to shirking American obligations to suppress the slave trade. "An arrangement of this kind, will, I think, be acceptable here, and I trust will prove effectual," he wrote Everett. "If it should so prove" we shall have "accomplished an object greatly desired by the Government and People of this country." In any event, Wheaton's scheme for joint cruising, quickly

accepted by the Peel Ministry as a step in the right direction toward the trade's ultimate extinction, formed Article Eight of the final Treaty of Washington. As such, when President Tyler, submitting the treaty for Senate consent, admitted that "the treaty obligations subsisting between the two countries for the suppression of the African slave-trade . . . could not but form a delicate and highly important part of the negotiations which have now been held," he took delight also in assuring the Senate that the "treaty I now submit to you proposes no alteration, mitigation, or modification of the rules of the law of nations."¹⁸

Democratic opponents of the Treaty of Washington did not share the understanding that Article Eight was intended to provide an alternate and preferable means of suppressing the slave trade to the Convention of London. "We are left entirely in the dark as to the motives which influenced the negotiators in forming this article," Pennsylvania Senator James Buchanan complained during the debate for ratification. "Did the British Government demand this sacrifice at our hands? Was it necessary to appease the wounded pride of England at the disappointment she experienced when France—our ancient and faithful ally—refused to ratify the quintuple treaty, and identified herself with us in resisting the right of visitation and search?" Thomas Hart Benton, from Missouri, and that upset the treaty neglected the Oregon boundary, charged that all the points in the treaty "were the points Great Britain wished settled; and she got them all arranged according to her own wishes." Pointing to these wishes, and reminding his colleagues of past ties between British policies and American abolitionists, Benton thought it "neither politic nor decent to join the crusade of European powers to put down the African slave trade" so long as the American South remained committed to slavery. "No entangling alliances" should be [our] motto!" Benton proclaimed, as he insisted that "the eighth and ninth articles of the treaty bind us to this naval alliance with Great Britain."¹⁹

From Wheaton's perspective, of course, entanglement was the whole key to the scheme for joint cruising, a point recognized by Senate supporters of Webster's treaty. The central premise of the Convention of London had been that there existed one—and only one—means of effective suppression of the slave trade: a universal right of visit.. Should the British government now sign a treaty for joint cruising, whereby both the rights of search and visit were explicitly denied, it would negate its own claim of the necessity of the right of visit. Significantly, Calhoun recognized as much. "It is objected that the arrangement entered into is virtually an acknowledgment of the right of search," Calhoun noted during the debates for ratification. As for himself, "He did not so regard it. On the contrary, he considered it, under all the circumstances, as a surrender of that claim on the part of Great Britain."²⁰

This theme of surrender was soon taken up in Europe. "England has signed, by the hands of Lord Ashburton, her own condemnation," observed the Paris *Constitutionnel*, "for she will have thereby admitted that the *right of search* is not the only means of putting down the slave trade, and thereby given full force to all the arguments of the French opposition." Directing his criticism of Ashburton from London, Palmerston delighted in quoting French newspapers: "the *Courier Français* is quite right. Lord Ashburton *has* abandoned the right of search question, and we confess we cannot now see how M. Guizot can venture to ratify the treaty of 1841 without exciting the strongest feelings of indignation in the French opposition. How can Lord Aberdeen ask France to make concessions which the United States have refused to make to Lord Ashburton?" Writing from Berlin, Wheaton happily seconded Palmerston's observations. "This arrangement has decided the course of the French Government in respect to this matter," he noted. "Its ambassador in London notified to the conference of the five great powers the final determination of France not to ratify the treaty of December, 1841 . . .

The treaty of 1841, therefore, now subsists only between four of the great powers by whom it was originally concluded.”²¹

All that remained was to assess the implications. “I beg leave to congratulate you, sir,” Wheaton wrote Webster, “the policy of the United States may consequently be said, on this occasion, perhaps for the first time, to have had a most decisive influence on that of Europe.” Newspapers across France agreed, bringing calls to repeal past treaties with Britain for the suppression of the slave trade. “To what consequences the cowardly imbecility of this Government is leading! Palmerston bemoaned. “Jonathan enjoys making a dupe, and he has his fill of that pleasure on this occasion.”²²

* * *

In its defense of the Treaty of Washington against Palmerston’s criticisms, Britain’s Peel ministry won the battle only to recognize it held little hope of winning the war. With a completed treaty in hand and the sympathy of the British public that the Treaty of Washington had been negotiated in good faith, Peel led the defense in the Commons in the winter of 1843. Refusing to link the treaty with the fate of the convention, he maintained that Ashburton had secured everything that could be won. Faulting Palmerston for poisoning relations with France, Peel insisted that the Treaty of Washington should not be measured against the promise of the Convention of London but instead against the poor state of Anglo-American relations Palmerston had left. The French would be held responsible for retracting their commitment to the convention and made to live up to their previous obligations. The Americans would be held to task by the new arrangement of joint cruising to enforce their laws against the abuse of their flag. Peel would also continue to insist that the Treaty of Washington in no way abridged British claims of right of visit. Palmerston, with no tangible alternative to offer in the place of the Treaty of Washington (he could only argue the ministry sat on its hands

rather than follow through with the Ashburton Mission), could only look on helplessly as Peel secured Parliament's approval of Ashburton's efforts.

Unfortunately for the Conservative ministry, however, the French proved increasingly uncooperative, the Americans' African squadron was no substitute for abridging the freedom of the seas, and in April 1843 Aberdeen himself, when pressed by Webster, even admitted that there was no discernable difference between the rights of search and visit. These results left the volume of the transatlantic slave trade regulated by market forces, not British naval strength, and certainly not American naval strength, as the African squadron's typical complement of four ships simply faced a hopeless task of policing the length of the west African coast. These results offered a gloomy prognosis for the Great Experiment, as well as for the fortunes of Britain's Conservative party, still pressed at home by the effects of the artificially-inflated prices brought by Conservatives' loyalty to protectionism.

With the campaign against the slave-trade unlikely to break competition from Cuba and Brazil, the Peel Ministry shifted the focus of its free-labor campaign to direct economic pressure, an opportunity provided by the impending lapse of the first Anglo-Brazilian trade agreement signed upon Brazilian independence in 1828. Britain had secured privileged terms in that agreement, privileges Brazilians now wished to end but not at the price of abolishing slavery demanded by the Peel Ministry. An impasse resulted, redounding to the advantage of American merchants in Brazil, and leaving Britain's Great Experiment still without a break from foreign competition and British consumers without a break from high prices of sugar. At length, as British Conservatives proved incapable of breaking the economic strain that beset British consumers and their party, Peel relented and in 1845 began directing a retreat from protectionism. Irreparably splitting his party, Peel's decision cost Conservatives dearly in the coming two decades as Britain's Whigs benefited by their schism. British

consumers benefited as well, as first the Corn Laws and then the Sugar Duties were repealed, providing consumer relief.

The implications of the repeal of the Sugar Duties for the Great Experiment and the transatlantic slave trade proved dramatic, much as Conservatives had predicted during the Sugar Duties debate of May 1841. Uncompetitive with the world's remaining slavery-based export economies, the Great Experiment swooned once denied its monopoly of the British market. In turn, the opening of Britain's markets to slave produce provided a stimulus to Cuban and Brazilian production, resulting in a dramatic rise in the transatlantic slave trade during the late 1840s. Disembarkations in Brazil, as few as 11,113 in 1846, soared to 40,356 in 1848 and 64,453 two years later. This added disadvantage of competition from Cuban and Brazilian slave labor pushed free labor in the British West Indies into a decline from which it never recovered, leaving a legacy of ruin so great that historian Eric Williams, writing a century later, was certain that Britain had intended that result.²³

American shipping interests and merchant houses in Brazil joined British consumers and Whigs as the principal beneficiaries of the British Conservatives' political straits after the failure of the Convention of London. Even ardent proslavery champion Henry Wise was embarrassed by the riches. Appointed U.S. Minister to Rio de Janeiro in 1843, Wise quickly grasped Brazil's de facto establishment that operated free and clear of official Brazilian prohibitions against slave trading with American assistance. "Every patriot would blush for our country, did he know and see as I now do, how our citizens sail and sell our flag to the uses of that accursed traffic," Wise informed Secretary of State Calhoun in 1845. "Our flag alone gives the requisite protection against the right of visit, search, and seizure, and our citizens are consigned in the business and take in the profits." Nor was there any doubting the profits and the Americans' attraction to them. It was common knowledge that a single shipment of

imported African captives netted from 600 to 1200 percent profit, meaning enterprising speculators could deploy multiple vessels, assume the slowest would fall capture to the American or British squadrons, and still net immense profits. Further, American participation in these schemes came at minimal risk. American merchant houses such as Maxwell, Wright & Co. supplied American ships, flags, and registries to Brazilians who would then incur the risk of moving the captives. There was profit enough in the sales of ships. During the five year period ending in 1845 sixty-four American vessels were sold in Rio de Janeiro alone. During the same period fifty-six U.S. ships filed papers leaving the Brazilian capital destined for Africa. “As there was almost no legitimate commerce between Brazil and Africa, U.S. Consul Thomas Gordon reported, “these figures indicate use for the slave trade.”²⁴

In broaching the subject of legitimate trade in Africa, Gordon’s missive pointed to further conflict between American merchants and British policies. Beyond humanitarian concerns and the hope of bolstering the Great Experiment, British anti-slave trade policies promised to wean Africans from their traditional patterns of commerce centered on slave trading and replace it instead with legitimate commerce, as British officials and merchants preferred to call it, distinct from commerce in slaves. Having denied themselves a stake in commerce in slaves, British merchants had logically undertaken to invest in legitimate African commerce only to see their investments undermined by the continued operation of the slave trade. The hope of civilizing Africa and crisscrossing the immense continent with a legitimate trade in fact proved a principal interest of British Whigs, especially Palmerston. British hopes for legitimate trade in Africa—yet another component of Britain’s designs for a world order safe for free labor—therefore provided direct economic incentive for continued pursuit of the campaign against the slave trade even after British repeal of the Sugar Duties preempted the slave-trade calculus for saving the Great Experiment. British interests in legitimate trade in African

also explains in part Britain's unprecedented invasion of Brazil in 1850-51 that resulted in a prompt and permanent end of the Brazilian slave trade. Britain's repeal of the Sugar Duties, producing a boom in Brazilian sugar production and resulting demand for African slaves. Partly based on humanitarian motives, the move in Brazil was largely design to stabilize African commerce after the boom threatened British investments in legitimate trade in Africa.²⁵

From his position in Brazil, Wise saw the advantage gained by American merchant houses and the reasons the British government sought to deny Americans those advantages. When Wise's efforts to enforce American laws brought responses from American coffee merchants such as Maxwell, Wright & Co., he found himself forced to admit that his moral objections to American involvement in the Brazilian slave trade could only redound to British merchants. "I am aware that these attempts to enforce the laws of the US will have the effect only to drive consignments from American to British houses, and to give the latter more monopoly of the African trade."²⁶

Even after the demise of the Brazilian slave trade in the early 1850s, American merchants continued to thrive by their involvement in the African auxiliary trade. Brazil's misfortune proved Cuba's gain, providing a stimulus to the transatlantic trade to the Spanish colony just off the American republic's southern shore. As the trade to Cuba boomed throughout the 1850s, so too did the involvement of New York City merchants. Protected in their pursuit of the illegal trade by Britain's limited ability to police the Atlantic Ocean, British hesitancy to employ the tactic used against the weak Brazilian monarchy in 1850-51 against a colony of a European nation, and the American sectional crisis that encumbered enforcement of American slave-trade laws, American involvement in the Atlantic slave trade continued to undermine British hopes for Africa until the American Civil War brought a sudden change in American policy.

By the time of the Civil War, British hopes for the success of the Great Experiment had long faded. This change in British commitment to the keystone of its free-labor agenda after 1833 resulted partly from shortcomings of the Peel Ministry's diplomacy with the Tyler Administration in 1842. But before the British abandoned hopes for the Great Experiment with repeal of the Sugar Duties in 1846, there remained hope that the experiment might be saved by means other than policies for the slave trade's suppression. In the summer of 1843 that hope led the Peel Ministry to approach the Tyler Administration with a diplomatic proposal far more provocative than the Ashburton Mission.

In the end, it would be this proposal, not Duff Green's efforts—nor the efforts of others—that precipitated a change in Americans' understanding of British antislavery motivations. Green would continue in his attempts to influence Washington policymaking, but in the end his writings influenced his critics far more than his friends.

NOTES

1. "Prepare for war . . .," Green to Webster, Jan. 24, 1842, DW, roll 16 (also in *PDW*, ser. 1, vol. 5, 181-82).

2. "the experiment in West India . . .," and "the condition of England . . .," Green to Upshur, Apr. 28, 1842, Green Papers, UNC, roll 4. "England is now in a crisis," Green to Calhoun, Jan. 3, 1842, *PJC*, 16: 33-34. "war on slavery and the slave-trade . . .," Green to Calhoun, Jan. 24, 1842, *ibid.*, 16: 84. "the monomania of the present age . . .," Green remarks, in [Green], "War with America. An Examination of the Instigation and Probable Effects. By a Kentuckian," *Great Western Magazine* 1 (April 1842): 70-97, 85, a British publication. Green found no publisher in the United States but forwarded the article to Upshur in an attempt to place it; Upshur to Green, July 11, 1842, Green Papers, UNC, roll 4. Green's article is reprinted in Sioussat, "Duff Green's 'England and the United States,'" quote 250. Green's daughter, Margaret, married Calhoun's son, Andrew Pickens Calhoun.

3. "what has England to gain . . .," Upshur to Green, May 20, 1843, Green Papers, UNC, roll 4.

4. *DM*, Jan. 25, 1842.

5. "These honors were thrust upon him . . .," Lady Ashburton to Webster, Jan. 12, 1842, DW, roll 16. Also in *PDW*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 490. Webster had recently used the phrase in reference to Everett's receiving appointment as minister to London.

6. M. François Guizot, *Memoirs to Illustrate the History of My Time*. 8 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1858-67; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1974), 6: 147-56. [Duff Green.] ["The Right of Search"], letter to the editor of the *Boston Post* dated Paris, January 29, 1842, *Boston Post*, n.d.; reprint, Washington, D.C. *The Globe*, March 22, 1842, 1.

7. In addition to Guizot's memoirs cited in note 6 above, Sioussat, "Duff Green's 'England and the United States'" and Lawrence C. Jennings, "France, Great Britain, and the Repression of the Slave Trade, 1841-1845," *French Historical Studies* 10 (Spring 1977): 101-25, examine French reaction to the Convention of London.

8. Everett to Webster, Dec. 21, 1842, postscript dated Jan. 31, 1842, DW, roll 16 (also *PDW*, ser. 3, 1: 494-96).

9. Everett to Webster, Dec. 21, 1842, postscript dated Jan. 31, 1842, *ibid.*.

10. Ashburton to Aberdeen, Apr. 25, 1842, *British and Foreign State Papers*, 40: 708-09.

11. All quotes, Ashburton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1843, DW, roll 18.

12. "In speaking of critics . . .," Ashburton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1843, *ibid.* "a formal abandonment . . .," [remarks attributed to Palmerston,] *Morning Chronicle* (London), Sept. 20, 1842; reprint *DNI*, Jan. 28, 1843. Palmerston was widely presumed to be the author of the article in the *Morning Chronicle*, a leading Whig journal.

13. "the author of the angry articles . . .," Ashburton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1843, DW, roll 18. "There can be little doubt . . .," "which one was likely to be rejected?," "Is it probable . . .," [remarks attributed to Palmerston,] *Morning Chronicle*, Sept. 20, 1842.

14. "This is really too pitiful," "If Spain and Brazil do not fulfill . . .," "But perhaps, after all," [remarks attributed to Palmerston,] *Morning Chronicle*, Sept. 20, 1842. Leslie M. Bethell, "Britain, Portugal, and the Suppression of the Brazilian Slave Trade: The Origins of Lord Palmerston's Act of 1839," *English Historical Review* 80 (October 1965): 761-84, details Palmerston's intent on unilateral action to compel Portuguese compliance.

15. "strong wish to be furnished . . .," Aberdeen remarks, quoted by Everett, Everett to Webster, Oct. 17, 1842, Despatches from Ministers, Britain, M30, roll 45. "The important thing . . .," Ashburton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1843, DW, roll 18.

16. All quotes, Ashburton to Webster, Jan. 2, 1843, postscript dated Jan. 7, 1843, DW, roll 18.

17. Wheaton to Webster, Jan. 26, 1842, DW, roll 16.

18. "An arrangement of this kind . . .," Webster to Everett, Apr. 26, 1842, DW, roll 17. Also in *PDW*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 543-44. "treaty obligations . . ." and "treaty I now submit to you . . .," Tyler remarks, *SED(U)*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., no. 11.

19. "We are left entirely in the dark . . ." and "Did Great Britain . . .," Buchanan remarks, U.S. Senate, n.d. [c. Aug. 19, 1842]. *The Works of James Buchanan, Comprising his Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, 10 vols., ed. John Bassett Moore. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960) 5: 354-55. "were the points Great Britain . . .," Benton remarks, U.S. Senate, n.d. [c. Aug. 19, 1842], in Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 2: 421. "neither decent nor

politic . . ." and "No entangling alliances. . .," Benton remarks, U.S. Senate, Feb. 1843, in *ibid.*, 2: 451.

20. "It is objected . . .," Calhoun speech in the U.S. Senate, executive session, Aug. 1842 (c. Aug. 19), *CG*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., App., 49-53. Also in *PJC*, vol. 16, 393-409.

21. "England has signed . . ." and "'the *Courier Français* is quite right . . .," [remarks attributed to Palmerston], *Morning Chronicle* (London) Sept. 20, 1842; reprint *DNI*, Jan. 28, 1843. Wheaton to Webster, Nov. 16, 1842, Despatches from Ministers, German States and Germany, M44, roll 4. Also in *SD*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., serial 416, no. 223 (Feb. 24, 1843), 47-48.

22. "I beg leave to congratulate you, sir . . .," Wheaton to Webster, Nov. 16, 1842, Despatches from Ministers, German States and Germany, M44, roll 4. "To what consequences . . .," [remarks attributed to Palmerston], *Morning Chronicle* (London) Sept. 20, 1842; reprint *DNI*, Jan. 28, 1843.

23. *TST*, query of disembarkations, Brazil, 1826-1850.

24. "every patriot would blush . . .," Wise to Calhoun, Feb. 11, 1845, Despatches from Ministers, Brazil, M121, roll 15. "As there was almost no . . .," Gordon to Buchanan, Sept. 18, 1845, Despatches from Consuls, Rio de Janeiro, T172, roll 12. Wise to Buchanan, May 1, 1845, M121, roll 15, reports well-known profits of 600 to 1200 percent. Lawrence F. Hill, *Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Brazil* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1932) details the practices of American merchant houses in Brazil during the 1840s. Roger Anstey, "The Profitability of the Slave Trade in the 1840s." In *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies* (ed. Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden, 84-93. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 292. New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977) demonstrates typical returns sufficient to cover the loss of one ship in three.

25. Robert J. Gavin, "Palmerston's Policy Towards East and West Africa, 1830-1865" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1958) examines Palmerston's hopes for legitimate trade in Africa and the central place of British slave-trade suppression policies in achieving those objectives.

26. Wise to Maxwell, Wright & Co., Dec. 9, 1844, in Wise to James Buchanan [U.S. Secretary of State], Dec. 9, 1844, Despatches from Ministers, Brazil, M121, roll 15.

5.

FOX'S PROPOSAL

John Quincy Adams regretted to acknowledge the Treaty of Washington an American triumph. Long accustomed to regarding Britain as a bulwark of liberty, Adams initially thought the treaty in no way infringed on that role. In the settlement of the boundary, the plan for joint cruising, even the extradition article, he saw what most observers saw: a practical compromise to preserve peace. In the months immediately after the treaty, in fact, Adams acknowledged his belief that Britain was engaged in a global war for the abolition of slavery. But the more Adams looked, the less he liked what he saw. Southern senators had voted overwhelmingly in support of giving away Maine lands. In looking for an explanation, Adams soon discerned what he believed was a transatlantic proslavery bargain. Believing Britain's Conservatives unreliable on questions relating to slavery, Adams now convinced himself of their intent to discard British Whigs' antislavery program to curry the favor of southern slaveholders. With little loyalty to the antislavery cause, British Conservatives, Adams thought, looked to forge an alliance with southern slaveholders in an effort to circumvent the American tariff and undermine northern manufacturing interests. In an elaborate extension of the Slave Power thesis he already harbored, Adams foresaw a further initiative from the Peel Ministry in the summer of 1843 that would cement the alliance begun with the Ashburton Mission.

When the Peel Ministry's proposal arrived in Washington in August 1843, however, it approached nothing that Adams or even southern slaveholders expected. Instead of proffering a blueprint for a transatlantic proslavery alliance, the proposal sought American assistance to save the Great Experiment. By implication it also represented an official report of the results of the free-labor experiment. As such, the proposal corroborated Duff Green's earlier findings that had found little hearing in

Washington, suggested that Britain's commitment to a global war against slavery rested on motivations that reached far deeper than American policymakers had thought possible, and prompted leading southern slaveholders to reexamine the results of the Great Experiment.

* * *

As the Twenty-seventh Congress adjourned in early March 1843, Adams remained in Washington rather than return home to Quincy. With his chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Committee set to expire with the next Congress in December, and with its privileged access to State Department files, he took advantage of his present privileges to spend the next several weeks studying diplomatic correspondence. In the process he revised his understanding of the Treaty of Washington and the British Conservative government that had negotiated it.¹

That John C. Calhoun headed Senate support of the treaty and southerners voted overwhelmingly in its favor struck Adams as significant, but Palmerston's objections, the Peel Ministry's response, and the Cass correspondence soon also figured into the focus of his research. "The controversy between Lewis Cass and Daniel Webster about the Ashburton Treaty, the rights of visitation and of search, and the Quintuple Treaty," he noted on March 21, "still, with the comet, the zodiacal light, and the Millerite prediction of the second advent of Christ and the end of the world within five weeks from this day, continue to absorb much of the public and of my attention." The closer Adams looked, the more he saw the Treaty of Washington as a subterfuge to defeat the Convention of London and Palmerston's antislavery program. Just as rumors began to circulate that "6 votes could not have been had for the treaty" if the treaty had not rejected the legal principles of the Convention of London, southern support of the Maine boundary settlement began to take on added meaning to Adams. The treaty's extradition article also drew his ire. If interpreted literally, its provisions could be taken to obligate

Britain to return fugitive slaves, thereby undermining the legal underpinnings of British natural-law policies. “A grosser fraud was never practised upon nations than was intended by that article,” Adams fumed, certain the Tyler Administration drafted it with the view of its literal interpretation.²

By May 1843 Adams was convinced that British Conservatives had sold out British Whigs’ antislavery agenda. Admitting “strong doubts of a compromise between their commercial and their moral policy, much too obsequious to the cause of slavery for real fidelity to the cause of justice and of man,” Adams began to believe the worst of British Conservatives. Believing Whig policies had been sacrificed in exchange for Maine lands for a military road in New Brunswick, for example, Adams could only imagine what favors British Conservatives would trade to gain a reduction in American tariffs. Tariff reform was already a prominent objective of John Tyler, John C. Calhoun, and southerners in general; it certainly would become even more central if tariff reduction were coupled with the acquiescence to American annexation of Texas. Adams knew from his experience on the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the Tyler Administration had sought funding in February 1843 to support an official mission to London to negotiate a treaty of tariff reduction. The request failed. Nevertheless word came in May that the person to whom the official mission was to have been delegated—Duff Green, whose previous ties to Andrew Jackson and present ties to John Tyler made him anathema to American Whigs—had departed for London anyway in an unofficial capacity, news that alarmed Adams. Asked by Joshua Leavitt his opinion of the present British ministry, Adams replied that he “distrusted them altogether,” believing “their real policy far from desiring to favor the abolition of slavery, wither in our Southern States or in Texas,” but “on the contrary, that for a suitable equivalent they will readily acquiesce both in the annexation of Texas to this Union and to the perpetuation of slavery here, to weaken and to rule us.” To Adams’ dismay, the days of Britain as a

bulwark of liberty seemed over, a prospect made all the more alarming when Webster resigned in early May. With Tyler certain to name a southerner to the State Department, Green already on his way to Britain, and Conservatives in power in London, the outcome seemed inevitable. "Texas," Adams was certain, "will be the great topic before Congress next session."³

It was in this context that Adams learned of abolitionists Lewis Tappan and Stephen Pearl Andrews' plans to approach the Peel Ministry with a proposal to finance the abolition of slavery in Texas with British backing. Returning to Quincy in late May, Adams received the abolitionists on the last day of the month, only hours before their departure for London. Hearing the proposal, Adams was struck by the scheme's simplicity and questioned Andrews about his belief that Texans wished to abolish slavery. A New England-born attorney who had moved to Texas to promote the abolition of slavery, Andrews seemed bent on wishful thinking, Adams thought, especially as the plan hinged on British backing. Expressing doubt that the Peel Ministry would cooperate, Adams remarked that he "distrusted the sincerity of the present British Administration in the anti-slavery cause."⁴

Nevertheless Adams saw in Andrews' plan of a win-win situation. Acceptance would be welcome, but even rejection would prove useful. "You will be able to communicate to that government valuable information," he reasoned, "and at any rate can collect information that will be important here with regard to their view." With a long record of citing Britain as a bulwark of liberty, Adams had created a precedent he expected southern slaveholders would now exploit. Having cast Britain as a legitimate threat to southern slavery interests, but now having lost faith in that threat, Adams wished the Peel Ministry to go on record with its rejection, evidence he could then use to refute claims of British meddling.⁵

When Tappan returned to Quincy during the first week of August 1843, reporting the Peel Ministry's rejection of Andrews' proposal, Adams thought the news confirmed "all my suspicions of the duplicity of the British Ministers on the subject of Texas and slavery." Prepared to believe the worst about the Peel Ministry, Adams now went on record with invective that sharply contrasted his hopes of the Palmerston era. "The policy of the British Government is to cherish, sustain, and protect the institutions of slavery in our Southern States and Texas," he lamented, "and their task is to do it by humbugging the abolitionists in England into the belief that they intend directly the reverse."⁶

Adams in fact understood little about the present state of politics in Britain. Unlike Duff Green, who had traveled to London and recognized the significance of the Great Experiment in British politics, Adams expressed little opinion of British abolition beyond his admiration of the British people for incurring the indemnity in 1833. As a northern Whig with a faith in progress, Adams undoubtedly accepted Gurney's opinion of the Great Experiment's success, as did most everyone in Washington. Green's interpretation of British Conservatives' antislavery motives therefore would have made little sense to Adams, much as they made little sense even to Green's correspondents in the Tyler Administration. During the first week of August 1843, however, those motives became evident with unmistakable clarity. Adams had anticipated the Peel Ministry would soon propose a further agreement to the Tyler Administration, one that would trade tariff reduction for acquiescence in the annexation of Texas. Yet the ministry's motives proved far different.

* * *

Washington, D.C., was nearly deserted the first week of August 1843. Adjourned since March, Congress was not set to meet again until December, and even President Tyler and most of his cabinet found reason to avoid the sweltering capital. Only Abel P. Upshur remained. The former Secretary of the Navy and now Secretary of State, Upshur

found himself detained in the city by the immense quantity of paperwork resulting from his recent change of office. This circumstance provided exactly the situation for which, Edward S. Fox, Great Britain's Minister to the United States, had been waiting. Instructed earlier by his government to approach the Tyler Administration with a proposal he was certain would create a sensation in Washington, Fox had purposely waited for a moment when its presentation might avoid unwanted controversy.⁷

The proposal was for an emigration agreement. The Peel Ministry, Fox explained, had instructed him to request the Tyler Administration's assistance in implementing a program of labor recruitment in the United States. Contracts would be signed with individuals willing to emigrate abroad. They would then be transported to British colonies where they would be obliged to work for one year, after which time they would be at liberty to leave or remain in British possessions as they pleased. Fox made it clear that the Peel Ministry preferred that any agreement with the federal government remain informal. Any binding agreements, it was understood, would need to be made with individual state governments. But to obtain agreements with the states, Fox and the Peel Ministry understood, it was crucial to obtain the Tyler Administration's consent. As there was reason to hope that the federal government might encourage the operation, Fox even volunteered to explain the reasoning that prompted the proposal in the first place. The "British West Indian Colonies are suffering severely in their productive industry from a dearth of agricultural laborers," he explained, and in response to this labor shortage, "it has appeared to Her Majesty's Government that it might be possible to obtain a supply of labourers from amongst the class of free coloured men inhabiting the United States."⁸

To his surprise, Upshur found himself listening to an official assessment of the Great Experiment. Unsolicited, that assessment revealed a situation in the West Indies far different from that previously emphasized by Joseph John Gurney and Lewis Tappan. The proposal also struck Upshur as unmistakable evidence that the Peel

Ministry had resolved to save the Great Experiment even in the face of considerable embarrassment. But even more striking, the proposal included an implied threat.

The positive incentive for acceptance amounted to little more than the promise an emigration agreement held for promoting emigration among American free blacks. “Considering how that class of the inhabitants are circumstanced in America,” Fox explained, the British government expected that the “promotion of emigration amongst them might not improbably be as satisfactory to the United States and their Rulers as it would be to Great Britain and to the British Proprietors in the West Indies.” Fox knew also that he need not elaborate on this point. Upshur, long an officer of the Colonization Society of Virginia, was well aware of longstanding efforts by American whites to promote emigration among American free blacks. Upshur’s involvement with the colonization movement also provided him an unsurpassed understanding of the problems involved in promoting emigration. Especially troublesome, Upshur understood, was the problem of enticing American free blacks to move away from the United States—the only land the great majority of them had known—to Africa, where on the continent’s western shores American colonization societies had established settlements to receive immigrant freed persons. The most important of these colonies was Liberia, at once the linchpin of the American colonization movement and the movement’s greatest liability. While providing a destination for emigrants, Liberia’s great distance from the United States both encumbered the movement with immense transportation costs and discouraged immigration, as its status as a frontier society on a remote coast offered little appeal to prospective emigrants.

It seemed no coincidence, therefore, that Fox now also broached the subject of Liberia. “Her Majesty’s Government have for some time past been desirous of ascertaining, authentically, the nature and extent of the connection subsisting between the American Colony of Liberia on the Coast of Africa and the Government of the United

States,” Fox related. Informing Upshur that Liberians had greatly extended their territorial boundaries, the minister explained also that Liberians monopolized trade with the native inhabitants to the disadvantage of British merchants in West Africa. “In case of its becoming necessary to stop the further progress . . . of such pretensions,” the British Minister explained, the Peel Ministry wished to “be informed whether the Authorities of Liberia . . . are under the protection and control of the United States Government” and whether “it is to that Government that applications must be made when the occasion above alluded to may require.”⁹

* * *

Already surprised by Fox’s revelations, Upshur perceived a threat in his government’s proposal. If the United States agreed to break ties with Liberia and redirect American emigration to the West Indies, the Tyler Administration could rest assured that Britain lacked motive to exploit America’s race problem, as Britain stood to benefit by it.. Otherwise, however, the Peel Ministry made no promises. In short, Fox’s proposal appeared to Upshur an offer not to be refused. Far from the proslavery bargain John Quincy Adams feared of the Peel Ministry, “the operation,” Fox acknowledged, “is one of some delicacy.” Had Adams and northern antislavery advocates learned of the operation, their estimation of British Conservatives undoubtedly would have improved. But in the nearly deserted capital in the heat of August, Upshur found it easy to suppress news of the proposal. Dealing with it briskly and then quietly filing it away, he spared the Tyler Administration the controversy news of its response to the operation was certain to stir.¹⁰

Upshur’s response drew upon his long familiarity with American colonization only to arrive at a conclusion that pointed to a departure from southerners’ previous commitment to emigration. A vice president in the Virginia Colonization Society, he understood the West Indies a far more attractive destination for American emigrants

than the strife-stricken frontier society of Liberia. Nor was it a minor point that the British government agreed to assume all expenses of transportation, costs that had always burdened colonization efforts to the remote African coast.

Nevertheless Upshur dismissed the possibility of an agreement, either formal or otherwise. Pointing to the states' prerogatives over matters of citizenship, he wrote, "this Government would not have the authority to enter to any agreement . . . even if such a thing were necessary or desirable." Maintaining that the Constitution delegated all powers over emigration to the states, Upshur understood that Fox sought a formal agreement less than the Tyler Administration's informal influence in securing agreements with states where freed persons might be recruited. Considering the proposal neither necessary nor desirable, Upshur rejected this possibility also. "In the slave holding states of our Union the negro race belongs to a distinct caste and are . . . the objects of special and peculiar legislation which is rendered necessary in order to carry out the general policy of those States in regard to their slaves." Even aside from the changes in legislation necessary to permit British recruiters entry into slaveholding states, "the [mere] possibility that frauds might be practiced," he emphasized, "would tend to keep the public mind in a state of uneasiness and apprehension." It would take only "a single slave . . . imposed upon them as a free man . . . to produce an unfriendly excitement which is very desirable to avoid." British policies had already given rise to the Underground Railroad and depressed the values of slaveholders' dearest property. Imagining the implications of a British-directed colonization effort reaching deep into the South, Upshur informed Fox "even, therefore, if the Government possessed full power over the subject—which it does not—it would not be disposed to offer any encouragement to . . . the contemplated measure."¹¹

After refusing to encourage American emigration to the West Indies, Upshur revealed little willingness to encourage emigration at all. Liberia, he emphasized to Fox,

had been established by a voluntary association, not the “authority of our Government, nor has it ever been recognized as subject to our laws and jurisdiction.” Founded in 1821 by the American Colonization Society, “its objects were to introduce Christianity and promote civilization in Africa, to relieve the slave holding states from the inconvenience of the free blacks among them . . . and to present the slave-holder an inducement to emancipate his slaves.” Had these objectives retained equal priority in August 1843, Upshur may have asserted stronger ties with Liberia, as recent calls in Congress and from New York and Maryland newspapers had urged the Tyler Administration. Even as recently as March 1843, Upshur’s predecessor in the State Department had expressed a willingness to do so, explaining that the “American Government takes a deep interest in the welfare of the People of Liberia and is disposed to extend to them a just degree of countenance and protection.” Yet Upshur, provided a perfect opportunity to assert American authority over Liberia, refused. “Those authorities are responsible for their own acts and . . . must rely for the protection of their own rights . . . to the friendly consideration of all Christian powers.” Upshur’s reasoning revealed far greater appreciation for the colony’s civilizing mission than its benefits to southern slaveholders. “It is just beginning to exert, in a sensible degree, its beneficent influences upon the destinies of the African race and promises, if it be only sustained, to do much for the regeneration of that quarter of the globe.” While he acknowledged that the colony was one of “peculiar interest” to Americans, it was because, he explained, “it is identified with the success of a great object, which has entitled the feelings and called into action the enlarged benevolence of a large proportion of our People.” But that object was no longer shared by an increasing number of southerners, chief among them Upshur, the South’s leading States’ Rights legalist and proponent of slavery as a positive good. Established in an era when few Southerners considered slavery anything other than a necessary evil, Liberia had always seemed distant. To Upshur in August 1843, it seemed

more distant than ever. Far from asserting American authority against British interests, he assured Fox that Britain could expect American assistance. "This Government will be at all times prepared," Upshur explained, "to interpose its good offices to prevent any encroachment by the Colony upon any just right of any Nation."¹²

* * *

Upshur's willingness to placate British complaints on Africa reflected his concern for the implications of rejecting the Peel Ministry's immigration proposal. Other precautions also seemed in order, especially in light of news of the recent efforts of Lewis Tappan and Andrew Stephens in London. Although their efforts failed, initial reports suggested otherwise. Reporting as early as July 22 that "Lord Aberdeen had given a promise that the British government would spare no legitimate means to effect the abolition of slavery in Texas," the *Niles National Register* provided fuller details upon arrival of the bi-weekly packet from Liverpool two weeks later, the same week Fox called unexpectedly at the State Department. "No legitimate means should be spared to effect the great object of abolishing slavery in the republic of Texas," American abolitionists reported of their meeting with Aberdeen, adding his assurance that the "British government were determined to proceed by the fair and open interchange of diplomatic intercourse with Texas or its accredited representatives."¹³

To Upshur, therefore, pursuing the annexation of Texas seemed a further logical precaution to guard against British antislavery policies still little understood in Washington and as yet undetermined in their ultimate objectives. Since its founding in the spring of 1836, Texans had extended an open invitation for annexation to the United States. This invitation had been received favorably by southerners, especially slaveholders of the lower South. Even as early as March 1837 John C. Calhoun had declared "Texas must be annexed to the Union!" to the delight of Charleston onlookers,

eliciting “long and loud cheering” as he explained the “vital importance to the South of the annexation.

Upshur also thought the “interests of the two countries closely connected.” Believing he could “serve his country’s interest best by promoting that of Texas,” Upshur looked to Texas statehood as a logical extension of the slave South. Yet annexation, he realized, was far more easily promoted than accomplished. Like John Quincy Adams and northern antislavery proponents who lamented that Northerners supported their cause too little, Upshur lamented that Northerners were uncertain allies in defending slavery interests. Calhoun’s *Enterprise* Resolutions had revealed as much, as had northern opposition to Texas annexation. Worse still, abolitionists worldwide encouraged northern intransigence, as newspapers revealed in early August with reports of the recent World Antislavery Convention in London. “Mr. L. Tappan of New York said that Mr. J. Quincy Adams had assured him that he would resist annexation with all the power that God had given him; but he is now at a very advanced age—eighty-four.” In hopes of bolstering the aged Adams, the convention, Upshur also learned, adopted resolutions opposing the annexation of Texas and lauding Adams’ decade-long efforts in Congress in opposition to southern slavery interests.¹⁴

Upshur and Adams also differed fundamentally in their perceptions of the British Government and its commitment to the antislavery cause. While Adams dismissed the Peel Ministry as less dedicated to opposing southern slavery interests than British Whigs, Upshur benefited by the knowledge of Fox’s proposal. Limited to second hand information, Adams understood British motivations to have been essentially moral in foundation. Believing the Great Experiment a success, Adams presumed Britain lacked economic incentive to pursue a global war against slavery, a presumption that led him to admire British Whigs greatly because it seemed to Adams that they were pursuing that war anyway. The belief that Britain lacked economic incentive to pursue antislavery

objectives led Adams to presume further that British Conservatives had little reason to commit to the antislavery cause. Consequently Adams gave up on Britain as a bulwark of liberty at precisely the same time that Upshur received first-hand knowledge of the British government's understanding of circumstances in the West Indies. As those circumstances were far different from what Adams (and all Washington policymakers) had previously thought the case, Upshur therefore perceived reasons to see in British Whigs and Conservatives alike what Adams had previously seen in British Whigs: a bulwark of liberty that threatened slavery interests throughout the world, including perhaps especially in the United States.

Besides highlighting the extent of West Indian misfortune, Fox's proposal, revealed to Upshur an alarming characteristic of British political economy. In seeking to gain the Tyler Administration's cooperation and emphasizing that volunteer emigrants could expect fair treatment, the British Minister explained that the Peel Ministry's program to recruit immigrant labor had been carefully designed to "prevent the possibility of a modified slavery being introduced into the British West Indian colonies." Intriguing in its own right, this precaution seemed especially significant in light of recent news from India. Only two weeks before readers of *Niles National Register* learned that the "act for the abolition of slavery in India passed the supreme council on the 7th April and became a law." Significant to few Americans with the exception of abolitionists and a Secretary of State attuned to British policies relating to slavery, this snippet of news seemed to hold little relevance for American interests in Texas. But after Fox's proposal of early August, it appeared otherwise. By implying that slavery could reemerge in the British West Indies if precautions were not taken, he illuminated three aspects of British political economy that struck Upshur as especially pertinent. First, it seemed unmistakable that if precautions were necessary to prevent slavery's reintroduction in the British West Indies, free labor in the British West Indies had proven less profitable

than slavery. Yet, secondly, it was also clear that the British had committed themselves to free labor. Third, while it was expected that British Whigs thought a return to slavery morally unthinkable, apparently British Conservatives had accepted as much as well. From India came indications of just how far that commitment extended. Britain was committed to implementing free labor throughout its empire even as its government acknowledged in the most telling way possible the substantial economic cost of renouncing slavery.¹⁵

It was this circumstance that alarmed Upshur in early August 1843, especially as rejection of the Peel Ministry's bargain did little to solve Britain's economic predicament. Well aware of Britain's immense financial, industrial, and military capabilities, and especially of its naval power that could penetrate the American South as deeply as any program to recruit immigrant labor, Upshur knew that Britain would endure economic losses only so long. The moral superiority that the British claimed for renouncing slavery in the face of economic disincentives might help to prolong their patience, but their moralism might also inspire hostilities against nations that refused to renounce slavery and the advantages gained by Britain's commitment to free labor. This consideration seemed especially significant in light of Upshur's limited means of addressing problems in Texas. "Pressed by an enemy on her borders, her treasury exhausted, and her credit almost destroyed, Texas," Upshur understood, was "in a condition to need the support of other nations and to obtain it upon terms of great hardship and many sacrifices to herself." Prevented by Northerners from assisting Texans in any significant sense, Upshur immediately perceived reason for alarm in the options the republic faced. "It is an important thing to England to obtain an influence over the policy of Texas," he wrote within days of Fox's unexpected visit, "and the present situation of that country offers her every encouragement to make the attempt."¹⁶

Unable to address the Texas problem immediately, Upshur nevertheless could begin to build a case for annexation. The first step was to notify Texans to expect changes in the American government's previous policy of resisting annexation, a departure that came as welcome news to Isaac Van Zandt, Texas Minister to Washington and a longtime proponent of Texas statehood. "Mr. Upshur, I think, is disposed to act up to my most sanguine expectations," he informed his government in the second week of August. "The Secretary is fully alive to the important bearing which our institutions have upon this country" and "expresses some alarm lest England is attempting to exercise some undue influence upon our affairs." It was also necessary to collect information, Upshur recognized, to determine exactly what influence England might reasonably attempt to exercise. Within a week of receiving Fox's proposal, Upshur addressed two sets of instructions to accomplish that purpose. One set went to Kingston, Jamaica (see Chapter 6). The other, which has received far more attention from scholars, Upshur directed to William Murphy, American Chargè in Washington-on-the-Brazos.¹⁷

Upshur urged Murphy to be vigilant and provided direction for recognizing signs of impending British encroachment in the Texas republic. This direction, he believed, required he elaborate his understanding of British motives. Upshur's details, provided at considerable length, later drew the attention of historians. To scholars who considered Upshur's instructions to Murphy without considering Fox's proposal of the previous week, Upshur's detailed explanation of British motives seemed the product of either unreasonable anxiety or ulterior motives largely irrelevant to matters of British political economy. Yet when considered in light of Upshur's understanding of the British commitment to free labor and the details Fox provided of it, the candor of those instructions assume a significance altogether different. "In the great staples of sugar and cotton her colonies of the East and West Indies are unable to compete with the slave labor of the United States, Texas, and Brazil," Upshur emphasized of Great Britain in

those instructions. “Experience has shown that those articles cannot be produced by any considerable extent on the continent by the labor of white men, and of course if slavery can be abolished on that continent the great rivals of her colonial industry will be removed.” By “labor of white men,” Upshur meant free labor. But it also occurred to him that Fox’s emigration proposal had targeted American freed slaves, not whites. These considerations, Upshur clarified, explained British antislavery ambitions as Murphy might expect to see them soon emerge in Texas. “No other adequate motive can be found for her determined and persevering course in regard to domestic slavery in other countries.”¹⁸

Upshur did not elaborate as to that course, referring to nothing more specific than “many of her most important measures.” Yet Upshur, like most Americans of his day, was well familiar with the record of British diplomacy in Latin America. “The diplomacy of England has heretofore been scarcely less successful than her armies in obtaining her the largest share of commerce of the world,” he emphasized to Murphy, knowing that Texans had recently signed a treaty for the suppression of the slave trade similar to treaties that Britain had demanded of Latin American republics during the 1820s in return for diplomatic recognition. Upshur also knew Britain, consistent with those treaties, had secured favorable terms of trade that undermined Latin Americans’ efforts to develop a manufacturing sector. Those terms virtually exempted British merchants from domestic tariffs. “It is of little consequence to her whether twelve or fifteen thousand Africans in Texas be bound or free, but it is of great consequence to her to create a sympathy with that people, to acquire an interest in their industry, to found a claim upon their favor and to control their policy.” Once controlled those policies, Upshur feared, would emancipate Texas’ twelve-to-fifteen thousand slaves of African descent for no other reason (he implied) than to gain favorable terms of trade and reduce competition for the British West Indies. Like Brazilians, who had quickly regretted conceding Britain favorable terms of trade and promises to suppress the slave trade

upon which Brazilian agriculture depended, Texans seemed vulnerable to surrendering their independence. Already they had conceded the British Navy the right to search their merchant ships for the purpose of suppressing the international slave trade by sea. Perhaps they had also obligated themselves to suppressing the international slave trade by land—an alarming prospect for Southerners wishing to emigrate or sell slaves to the republic. Texas, after all, differed from Brazil in one crucial respect. When Brazilians surrendered their independence, British-dictated policies nowhere approached the Red River valley.¹⁹

The threat of British policies so near was most obvious for southern interests. Emphasizing that “few calamities could befall this country more to be deplored than the establishment of a predominant British influence and the abolition of domestic slavery in Texas,” Upshur explained that “if Texas were in that condition, her territory would afford a ready refuge for the fugitive slaves of Louisiana and Arkansas, and would hold out to them an encouragement to run away which no municipal regulations of those States could possibly counteract.” The Underground Railroad to Canada would pale in comparison to the establishment of British free-air policies in Texas. Far from sharing Adams’ belief that the Treaty of Washington of 1842 preempted the legal grounds of British free-air policies, Upshur expected Canada would continue attracting runaway slaves from the South. While irritating, Upshur perceived little danger in that eventuality because “the distance of that country from the slave holding states affords a sufficient security against any serious injury from that source.” British-assisted emancipation in Texas was a far different matter. “It is not difficult to see that quarrels and war would grow out of this state of things.”²⁰

By no means, however, were southerners the only obstacle to annexation. Northerners, Upshur knew, could not be expected to reverse years of opposing slaveholders’ wishes for Texas on the grounds that annexation was necessary to defend

slavery. Worse still, it was clear that many Northerners—Adams among them—wished slavery abolished in Texas, even with British assistance. Looking to surmount this opposition, Upshur believed the case for annexation easily made when past patterns of British diplomacy were considered in combination with unmistakable patterns of southern consumer demand. “Give to England more favorable terms of trade than the United States can obtain and her manufactures of all kinds will be thrown into Texas, not merely for the supply of that country, but with a view to have them smuggled . . . across the Red River and through the interior waters of Louisiana.” Long opposed to protective tariffs and with their preference for British to northern manufactures, Southerners could be expected to embrace the opportunity. “Thus the manufacturing States of our Union will not only lose the market of Texas itself,” Upshur explained, “but they will lose to a great extent, the still more valuable market of our Southern and South Western States. The result is not only probable . . . it is almost certain.” To his close friend Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, Upshur clarified these points further: “I am sanguine in the belief that I can make the question so clear that even the Yankees will go for annexation . . . there is one point on which you may be sure of them & that is their interest. As I can show them that the annexation of Texas will be for the good of their commerce & manufactures, I shall probably have their support.”²¹

* * *

Upshur’s interest in possible British encroachments in Texas extended beyond simply building a case for annexation. More important were the reasons that underlie Fox’s proposal and the Peel’s Ministry’s bargain that Upshur rejected, especially as that rejection might require further precautions besides annexing Texas. Accordingly, on the same day he urged Murphy to keep watch for signs of increasing British influence on the Texan government, Upshur also forwarded instructions to Robert Monroe Harrison, American Consul in Kingston, Jamaica.

NOTES

1. Adams, *Memoirs*, 11: 336-49 relates Adams' repeated visits to the State Department in March 1843.
2. "The controversy between Lewis Cass . . .," Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 11, 341-42 (Mar. 21, 1843). "6 votes could not have been had . . .," Thomas Worthington to Willie P. Mangum, May 22, 1843, Mangum, *Papers*, ed. Henry T. Shanks, 5 vols. (Raleigh, N.C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1950-56), vol. 3, 449. "A grosser fraud . . .," Adams remarks, diary, August 7, 1843, Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. 11, 406.
3. "strong doubts of a compromise . . ." and "I told him I distrusted them . . .," Adams remarks, diary, May 13, 1843, May 8, 1843, Adams, *Memoirs*, 11: 374-75, 374. "Texas . . .," Tappan remarks quoting Adams, diary, May 31, 1843, Tappan Papers, LC, roll 1.
4. "distrusted the sincerity . . .," Adams remarks, May 31, 1843, *ibid.*, 11: 380.
5. "You will be able to communicate . . .," Tappan remarks quoting Adams, May 31, 1843, Tappan Papers, LC, roll 1.
6. "from the statements of Mr. Tappan . . ." and "The policy of the British Government . . .," Adams remarks, diary, Adams, *Memoirs*, 11: 406-07.
7. The exact date of Fox's visit to the State Department is unknown. Fox to Upshur, Aug. 7, 1843, Notes from the British Legation, M50, roll 21, refers only to "our conversation of a few days since."
8. "British West Indian Colonies . . .," Fox to Upshur, Aug. 7, 1843, Notes from the British Legation, M50, roll 21. Mary E. Thomas, *Jamaica and Voluntary Laborers from Africa, 1840-1865* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1974), 18-64, omits mention of Fox's proposal yet valuably explains that the Peel Ministry (Conservative) began active promotion of recruitment for the West Indies in February 1843. Fox's instructions were probably written in the spring of 1843 and intended for presentation to Daniel Webster, who resigned from the State Department in May. Thomas notes also that during the preceding Melbourne Ministry (Whig) the British Colonial Office had disapproved of recruitment in the United States because "such a procedure could be very embarrassing to diplomatic relations between Britain and the United States." (22-23).
9. "Considering how that class . . .," Fox to Upshur, Aug. 7, 1843, Notes from the British Legation, roll 21. "Her Majesty's Government . . .," "In case of its becoming necessary . . .," "to be informed whether . . .," and "it is to that Government . . .," Fox to Upshur, Aug. 9, 1843, *ibid.*, M50, roll 21. Although Fox submitted separately dated notes for the topics of the emigration agreement and Liberia, similar to his note of August 7 (see note 1 above) his Liberia note of August 9 began "I recently had the honor to state to you verbally . . ."
10. "The operation is one of some delicacy," Fox to Upshur, Aug. 7, 1843, *ibid.*, roll 21.
11. "I have bestowed upon it . . .," "this Government would not . . .," "In the slave holding . . .," "the bear possibility . . .," "a single slave . . .," and "even, therefore, if . . .," Upshur to Fox, Aug. 12, 1843, Notes to Foreign Legations in the United States, Great Britain, M99, roll 35. Emphasis in the original.

12. “authority of our Government . . .,” “its objects were . . .,” “Those authorities are . . .,” “It is just beginning to exert . . .,” “peculiar interest,” and “this Government will be . . .,” Upshur to Fox, Sept. 25, 1843, *ibid.*, roll 35. Upshur also stated that the U.S. Government would be “very unwilling” to see Liberia “despoiled of its territory, rightfully acquired, or improperly restrained in the exercise of its necessary rights and powers as an independent settlement,” but stopped far short guaranteeing Liberian independence. “American Government takes a deep interest . . .,” Webster to Edward Everett, Mar. 24, 1843, Diplomatic Instructions, Great Britain, M77, roll 74. Also in *PDW*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 289-90. Maryland Representative John P. Kennedy led calls in Congress for strengthening ties with Liberia; *HR*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., serial 428, no. 283 (Feb. 28, 1843). *Niles*, July 27, 1843 reprinted recent articles from the New York *Journal of Commerce* and Baltimore *American* also urged stronger ties. Katherine Harris, “The United States, Liberia, and their Foreign Relations to 1847,” Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1982, 252-59, shows how leading proslavery proponents like South Carolina Representative Robert Barnwell Rhett led opposition. Liberia. P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 240-42, emphasizes that the American Colonization Society’s struggle to maintain its existence and the U.S. Government’s refusal to claim sovereignty over Liberia prompted the society to order its colony to declare independence in 1846.

13. “Lord Aberdeen had given . . .,” *Niles* July 22, 1843. “No legitimate means . . .” and “British government were determined . . .,” *ibid.*, August 5, 1843.

14. “vital importance to the South . . .,” “long and loud cheering,” and “Texas much be annexed . . .,” Calhoun remarks, Charleston, South Carolina, Mar. 17, 1837, *PJC*, vol. 13, 498. “interests of the two countries . . .” and “serve his country’s interest best . . .,” Upshur remarks, quoted by Isaac Van Zandt, Van Zandt to Anson Jones, Aug. 12, 1843, in Jones, *Memoranda and Official Correspondence Relating to the Republic of Texas, Its History and Annexation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1859), 243-44. “Mr. J. Quincy Adams had assured him . . .,” *Niles*, August 5, 1843.

15. “prevent the possibility . . .,” Fox to Upshur, Aug. 7, 1843, Notes from the British Legation, M50, roll 21. “The act for the abolition of slavery . . .,” *Niles*, July 22, 1843.

16. “Pressed by an unrelenting enemy . . .” and “It is an important thing . . .,” Fox to Murphy, Aug. 8, 1843, Diplomatic Instructions, Texas, M77, roll 161.

17. “Mr. Upshur, I think . . .” and “The Secretary is fully alive . . .,” Van Zandt to Jones, in Jones, *Memoranda and Official Correspondence Relating to the Republic of Texas, Its History and Annexation*, 243-44.

18. “In the great staples . . .,” “Experience has shown . . .,” and “No other adequate motive can be found . . .,” Fox to Murphy, Aug. 8, 1843, Diplomatic Instructions, Texas, M77, roll 161. Existing literature of Texas annexation nowhere mentions Fox’s proposal, Upshur’s rejection, or the lessons Upshur drew from the exchange. Not surprisingly, that literature also finds Upshur’s actions open to a dizzying array of interpretations. Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 17, for example, evaluating Upshur’s instructions to Murphy in light of reports of the Tappan Committee’s efforts in London, concludes “Upshur’s immediate acceptance of an unverified report and his hasty course of action on the basis of it seem strange for a secretary of state.” Bolder than most, Merk’s words nevertheless are consistent with most scholarship that concludes Upshur’s subsequent actions motivated largely by ulterior motives. The leading examples of that scholarship are listed in note 1 above. Yet, significantly, even studies that take Upshur at his word presume his concerns unfounded. Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of*

Texas (New York: MacMillan, 1911), 121; Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur*, 192-93; and Sam W. Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security," in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, ed. Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, 115-45 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 118-19, are good examples. In recent years, it should be noted however, scholars of Texas annexation have come to see compelling reason to take Upshur at his word; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 385-98, and especially Haynes, 118-19. Still, while noting that "Great Britain had abolished slavery . . . ten years earlier, a decision which, as even Her Majesty's government conceded, had been an economic disaster. This had given rise to the fear among Southern slaveholders that Her Majesty's government was now seeking to undermine the institution throughout the Western Hemisphere in an attempt to restore the colonies' economic competitiveness," Haynes reduces Upshur's concerns to a conspiracy theory little substantiated in fact. (118, 135) Likewise, while remarking promisingly that "nothing was unnatural about President Tyler's and his southern advisors' far-from-cynical beliefs about Englishmen's far-from-fictional speculations about securing the far-from-preposterous object of an independent, emancipated Texas Republic," Freehling finds "this apprehension represented a recurrent nightmare among southern extremists, who ever worried that the southern mainstream would neither notice nor combat Anglo-American silent drift towards antislavery." (356) Fox's proposal, Upshur's response, and the lessons Upshur drew from it provide a basis to develop the promise of these recent studies while questioning their conclusions.

19. "many of her most important measures," "The diplomacy of England . . .," "It is of little consequence . . .," Upshur to Murphy, Aug 8, 1843, Diplomatic Instructions, Texas, M77, roll 161. Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-1860" *Diplomatic History* 12 (Winter 1988): 19-37, valuably locates Upshur's concerns of British encroachment in Texas within a broader pattern of Anglo-American commercial rivalry before the Civil War. That rivalry, Brauer emphasizes, was unequal. Britain's greater industrial capacity permitted it to dictate terms to Latin Americans in ways that disadvantaged infuriated American merchants and policy-makers who found themselves with no effective recourse. These themes touch on the immensely important yet equally controversial concepts of "informal imperialism" and "imperialism of free trade," neither framework of which this study finds necessary to incorporate. Alan K. Manchester, *British Preëminence in Brazil, It's Rise and Decline; A Study in European Expansion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933; reprint, New York, Octagon Books, 1972), 186-253; and Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade*, ix-xii, 27-241, demonstrate how Britain's terms to Brazilians was largely dictated by its desire to suppress the transatlantic slave trade that fed Brazil's burgeoning sugar and coffee plantations with fresh supplies of African captives that competed with British West Indian producers. In significant ways, therefore, British informal imperialism can be seen to have been dictated by British antislavery objectives that resulted from the economic disadvantages Britain incurred by abolishing the British slave trade and later from the decision to abolish slavery in the British West Indies. For the topic of informal imperialism as it is more conventionally understood, especially in relation to the oft-employed social science models of Dependency, Hegemony, and World Systems (also not incorporated in this study), see John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade" *Economic History Review* 2d series (1953): 1-15; Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961); the Brauer article cited above; Ernest R. May, "Robinson and Gallagher and American Imperialism," in *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis, 226-28 (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976); and the articles titled "World Systems" and "Dependency" by Thomas J. McCormick and Louis A. Perez, Jr., respectively, in *Explaining the History of American*

Foreign Relations, eds. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, 89-98 and 99-110 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

20. “few calamities could befall . . .,” “if Texas were in that condition . . .,” “the distance of that country . . .,” and “It is not difficult to see . . .,” Upshur to Murphy, Aug. 8, 1843, Diplomatic Instructions, Texas, M77, roll 161.

21. “give to England . . .” and “Thus the manufacturing States . . .,” Upshur to Murphy, Aug. 8, 1843, *ibid.*, roll 161. “I am sanguine in the belief . . .,” Upshur to Tucker, Oct. 10, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM. Emphasis in the original.

THE UPSHUR INQUIRY

On July 5, 1843, two weeks before he learned of Lewis Tappan's efforts to gain British intervention in Texas, Abel P. Upshur received word of troubling developments in the Caribbean. From Robert Monroe Harrison, U.S. Consul in Kingston, Jamaica, came news that "the notorious Turnbull, late British Consul at the Havana who the Captain General shipped off from that Island for malpractices, is now here at the head of an English Portuguese Commission for re-captured Africans." The reference was to David Turnbull, a British abolitionist who had recently been declared *persona non grata* in Cuba. Charged with fomenting slave rebellion in the island, an accusation with considerable basis in fact, Turnbull now found himself in charge of African captives rescued by the British Navy in its campaign against the slave trade. Ostensibly the post held limited capacity for mischief. Yet Harrison saw reason for concern. "I have not the least doubt in my mind that the real object which the Government have in view of sending Turnbull here is that he may agitate and carry out his villainous measures for the insurrection of the slaves on Cuba." With Kingston's antislavery press at his disposal, Turnbull could take advantage of Jamaica's close proximity to the Spanish colony and wage a propaganda campaign far more effectively than from Havana. Cuba will soon "will be deluged with pamphlets," Harrison predicted, as he reported that that the British abolitionist "has already commenced operations."¹

Confident that hopes for slave insurrection in Cuba formed part of an official British objective to overthrow slavery on the island, Harrison expected news of Turnbull's activities would elicit interest in Washington. With memories of St. Domingue vivid in their memory, southerners had often expressed fear of repeated results closer to their shores in the larger colony of Cuba. Turnbull's status as a British officeholder, a fact that suggested his actions were sanctioned by the Peel Ministry in London, also seemed

to Harrison to add weight to the situation. Consequently, acting without instruction, and without knowledge that Upshur had replaced Daniel Webster as Secretary of State, Harrison promised to inform the State Department of “any and every movement here of Mr. Turnbull and his confederates which may have the least tendency to conflict with the interests of my country directly or indirectly.”²

Upshur’s reply helps to measure his changed perceptions of British threats during the summer of 1843. Scholars have argued that Upshur was paranoid or that he harbored ulterior motives for casting British as more threatening to American interests than was actually true. Both arguments imply that Upshur brought to the State Department a mindset that changed little after he entered office. Yet Upshur initially neglected to reply to Harrison’s despatch, and still failed to act even after receiving word in mid-July of Tappan’s activities in London earlier that summer. Not until August 8—within days of receiving the unexpected emigration proposal from British Minister Edward Fox, and the same date of his instructions of William Murphy in Texas—did Upshur respond to Harrison’s despatch.

Urging the consul to “communicate without delay such further information as you may be able to obtain on the subject,” and noting that “it is almost unnecessary to add that the grave importance of this matter demands your constant vigilance,” Upshur suddenly betrayed an air of urgency. As with the instructions to Murphy, Upshur’s response to Harrison is to be understood in light of Fox’s proposal of the previous week. Yet unlike with Murphy, whose post in Texas afforded an excellent position for observing British activities there but was of limited value for understanding British motives, Harrison’s post in Jamaica placed him in position to inform Upshur of matters far more important than the whereabouts of, and rumors about, British abolitionists. While Fox had briefly explained that the need for an emigration agreement resulted from problems with the free labor system in the British West Indies, the minister

purposely did not elaborate on those problems. Quick to grasp that those problems held the key to understanding British antislavery ambitions, Upshur just as quickly turned to Harrison to provide the details Fox omitted.³

Unfortunately the exact details of how and when Upshur turned to Harrison cannot be determined with absolute certainty. Probably Upshur did so on August 8, 1843, the same date of his official response to Harrison's information about Turnbull, but if so his official instructions make no mention of any subject but Turnbull. What is certain is that sometime in mid-September 1843 Harrison received instructions from Upshur to conduct an inquiry on the working of the island's free-labor system. Given the approximate time of transit required of the mail packets then serving Washington and Kingston, which could range from three to eight weeks but averaged six, it seems likely that Upshur submitted those instructions in early August. As that service departed Washington twice a month, moreover, it seems likely the instructions Harrison received in mid-September were submitted as unofficial correspondence enclosed by Upshur along with his official instructions dated August 8. In any event, that unofficial correspondence included six sets of questions, which Harrison was instructed to distribute to knowledgeable persons in the island. Apparently Harrison was also instructed to collect the answers and compile a report as expeditiously as possible. Receiving six sets of answers by October 11, Harrison hastily prepared a report for departure on the mid-month packet to Washington. Later collecting two additional sets of answers, Harrison compiled these into a follow-up report dated October 30 and recorded as having been received at the State Department on December 13. Although it remains uncertain when Upshur received Harrison's first report dated October 11, it seems likely it arrived in Washington by the opening of the first session of the Twenty-eighth Congress during the first week of December. Given the context of Upshur's writing the instructions in August, and considering that Harrison hastily submitted a

partial report rather than waiting to receive all the answers he expected, it seems likely too that Upshur told Harrison of the importance of returning the answers before Congress opened its session in December. As many observers like John Quincy Adams anticipated that Congress' next session would be dominated by the topic of Texas, and as Upshur in fact saw that it was, it seems likely also that Upshur intended his inquiry to assess British motivations for possibly intervening in Texas and that he informed Harrison as much.⁴

Unfortunately the exact details and reasoning of Upshur's inquiry remain unknown as his instructions directing Harrison to conduct the inquiry have been lost. Any understanding of Upshur's inquiry and its significance therefore must be based largely on Harrison's reports submitted in response. Yet those reports have also posed a problem for scholars. The earliest and largest of them—Harrison's despatch of October 11, 1843, that contained six sets of answers (which he lettered "A" through "F") and that filled forty-seven hand-written pages—was not properly filed when received at the State Department. Almost 160 years later it would turn up among the personal papers of Upshur's close friend Nathaniel Beverly Tucker. In the meantime, however, scholars had little evidence at their disposal to suggest that such a document existed, much less that it was missing. That evidence amounted to nothing more than the peculiar lettering Harrison employed in submitting the two sets of answers in his follow-up report of October 30, 1843. Lettering those answers "G" and "H"—nomenclature that makes little sense until compared with the six sets of answers in his report of October 11, lettered "A" through "F"—Harrison made no mention of his earlier report. As a result, scholars who have had access to Harrison's follow-up report, properly filed in the State Department and later collected in the National Archives, have little suspected that there existed a far larger and more valuable report dated two weeks earlier. Accordingly, scholars have been denied more than just the immensely valuable information that

report contained. They have possessed little knowledge of Upshur's inquiry, its close relation to Fox's proposal, or how both greatly influenced Upshur's understanding of British antislavery ambitions. Most fully described in his instructions to Murphy of August 8, 1843, Upshur's understanding of the economic motivations underlying British antislavery ambitions makes a great deal more sense in light of this knowledge.⁵

Nothing better illustrates the purpose of Upshur's inquiry than the wording of its questions, long lost along with Harrison's report of October 11, 1843. It remains impossible to establish whether the questions respondents in Jamaica were asked to answer (included in Harrison's first despatch but not his follow-up report of October 30, 1843) were the same as those Upshur submitted to Harrison (in the instructions that remain lost). Nevertheless the questions respondents answered reveal an unmistakable pattern of logic almost certainly attributable to Upshur, but just as clearly influenced by Fox's proposal. Upshur's surprise by Fox's proposal resulted largely from his belief—a belief shared widely among Washington officeholders—that the Great Experiment was proving an economic success, not the failure Fox suggested. As with many Americans, Upshur's understanding of the results of British slave emancipation reflected the same “five grand points” Joseph John Gurney presented so memorably to John C. Calhoun and other Washington officeholders in May 1840. Soon afterward made available to the American reading public in the Quaker minister's *Familiar Letters to Henry Clay of Kentucky, Describing a Winter in the West Indies*, Gurney's five points unmistakably focused on economic considerations:

1. The liberated negroes are working well on the estates of their old masters.
2. The staple articles, with proper management, are produced at less expense under freedom than they had formerly been under slavery.
3. Landed and other real property has risen, and continues to rise, in value.
4. There is a corresponding improvement in the comforts of the labouring people, which is plainly evinced, among other circumstances, by the vast increase of imports.

5. There is an equal progress in the morals of the community, both black and white.⁶

Arranged as an inductive argument meant to demonstrate the superiority of free labor over slavery, Gurney's points emphasized especially the economic superiority of free labor over slavery. If Gurney was right—if the British West Indian producers and Britain in general had benefited economically by the conversion to free labor—there would seem no reason to believe Britain possessed economic motivation to combat slavery elsewhere. As such, British antislavery ambitions could be taken less seriously than perhaps they might be otherwise, as British designs against slavery that were based principally on motivations of moral suasion were something entirely different than antislavery ambitions driven by economic incentive.

It was in this light that Fox's proposal struck Upshur as immensely significant. Beyond disproving Gurney's economic arguments, Fox's proposal suggested the possibility that recent allegations of British designs against slavery in Texas and Cuba were true and that it was just as possible that British policies were driven by economic incentive. Not to take any chances, Upshur informed Murphy as much in his instructions of August 8, 1843, urging the consul to consider possible British intervention in Texas "part of a general plan by which England would seek to abolish domestic slavery throughout the entire continent and islands of America" because "her colonies of the East and West Indies are unable to compete with the slave labor of the United States, Texas, and Brazil." Yet because Upshur possessed little more evidence of this thesis than Fox's proposal—compelling evidence in itself but by no means sufficient to satisfy Upshur, a career lawyer and longtime judge—he was left to conclude that the economic underpinnings of British antislavery ambitions might be best understood by questioning Gurney's "five grand points" and especially their logic of free labor's superiority over slavery. Accordingly, when Harrison distributed Upshur's questions to

respondents in Jamaica, five of the six sets bore the unmistakable imprint of Gurney's points. An additional set of questions asked respondents to provide their opinion of the situation in St. Domingue:

1. What has been the effect of emancipation on the price of real estate; exemplify by instances under your own observation; and by some of the most striking you've heard of.
2. What has been the effect of the annual product of the island? State particularly the relative products in sugar and coffee with such remarks you may deem interesting.
3. What is the moral condition of the negroes? What relation do they bear to the whites? What feelings exist between them? Are assassinations more frequent; and if so what is the cause.
4. In the Debates of the [Jamaica] Chamber of Deputies, the increasing laziness of the negroes was proved by citing the diminishing products of sugar and coffee. The speakers, however, on the other side said that although sugar and coffee had diminished and real estate had fallen in value yet that the *whole amount* of products must have increased, because the *imports* had regularly increased ever since the emancipation. Can this be true?
5. What is the condition of the negroes in St. Domingo? Are they advanced or retrograding in industry and civilization? How do they stand by comparison with our slaves?
6. Does emancipation have the effect of immediately separating the blacks and the whites? Or do they remain in about the same proportion to each other in any given district, after as before emancipation?⁷

Initiated to illuminate the problems in the British West Indies that led to Fox's proposal, Upshur's inquiry held the promise of illuminating far more. Upshur sought to determine the economic bases of British antislavery designs. Yet in following Gurney's pattern of logic, the answers he collected in return would go far in assessing Gurney's larger objective. The British minister hoped to convince Southerners that their future would prove brighter if they turned to free labor. Yet even in the face of Gurney's insistence the free labor had proven superior to slavery in the British West Indies. Southerners such as John C. Calhoun and Henry Clay had proven resistant to calls to follow the British example. By questioning the credibility of Gurney's points and the economic problems that plagued the Great Experiment, Upshur's inquiry held the

prospect of cementing Southerners' confidence in slavery's future in ways that a proslavery proponent like Upshur jumped at the chance to explore.

All that remained was to determine the credibility of the answers collected from the Caribbean, and for that assurance Upshur insisted on distributing his questions to a diverse group of respondents. Altogether Harrison collected eight sets of answers, nine if his own observations are included. But in large measure the credibility of Upshur's inquiry relied on the credibility of Consul Harrison himself. As Lewis Tappan was reminded during his visit to London in the summer of 1843, the consul's credibility had long drawn censure from abolitionists.

* * *

Lewis Tappan returned from Britain the same week British Minister Fox presented his proposal for an emigration agreement to the Tyler Administration. Previously resistant to politicizing the antislavery movement for fear of corrupting its moral earnestness, Tappan now agreed with John Quincy Adams that the movement could no longer depend on Britain and must themselves craft a bulwark of liberty from the electorate of the American North. Nevertheless old habits died hard. Although he returned from London determined to turn to politics (he would support the Liberty Party in 1844 and later supported the party's Free Soil and Republican successors), Tappan remained confident that southern slaveholders might yet abandon their commitment to slavery for what he was convinced was the greater moral and monetary virtues of free labor. "The slave-holders are beginning to find out that emancipation has taken place in the West Indies and that amidst unavoidable difficulties, it works well," he remarked as late as March 1843. "They are realizing too that slavery compared with the requited labor is a losing business—a ruinous affair."⁸

Hopeful of fostering that message, Tappan also returned from London with a caution for readers of *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac*. Referring to the British

abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, Tappan informed readers that “during his late visit to England, the venerable Clarkson told him that he possessed full proof that the United States Consul, at Kingston, Jamaica, was in the habit of sending to the United States fabricated and false information concerning the working of emancipation in the British West Indies.” Tappan provided no further details. Readers learned nothing further regarding the falsehoods in question, the source of the allegations against the consul, or even the consul’s name. Readers were only advised further to “look out for his paragraphs.”⁹

To readers of *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac*, a publication of Tappan’s American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society edited by Tappan himself, the U.S. Consul in Jamaica needed no introduction. Colonel Robert Monroe Harrison, consul in Kingston since 1831, had drawn the attention of James A. Thome and Joseph A. Kimball during their visit to the island in 1837-38. Describing Harrison as a “true hearted Virginian, both in his generosity and his prejudices in favor of slavery,” Kimball and Thome also reported in their *Emancipation in the West Indies* that the consul was a “near relation of General W. H. Harrison of Ohio,” the successful Whig candidate for President in 1840. “He talked of abolition just as a Virginian of an aristocratic family might be expected to talk,” the abolitionists noted while adding that “he gave us a sad account of the working of the apprenticeship. Things, he said, were going ruinously in Jamaica. The English government were mad for abolishing slavery. It would be the ruin of the colonies, without doubt.” While in *Emancipation in the West Indies* Thome and Kimball had agreed that circumstances in Jamaica were bleak, they differed fundamentally from the consul in identifying the reasons for the island’s plight. Whereas Tappan’s reporters laid responsibility on the landowners, pointing to Apprenticeship as a source of discontent, Harrison thought otherwise. The “negroes of Jamaica were the most degraded and ignorant of all negroes he had ever seen,” Thome and Kimball reported of their conversation with the consul, noting further that Harrison emphasized that “he had

traveled in all our Southern states, and the American negroes, even those of South Carolina and Georgia, were as much superior to the negroes of Jamaica as Henry Clay was superior to him.” While this observation did not necessarily undermine their thesis that the American South should embrace immediate emancipation, the authors nevertheless made it a point to question Harrison’s credibility. “His opinions had much less weight with us after we learned (as we did from the best authority),” they reported, “that he had never been a half dozen miles into the country during a ten years’ residence in Kingston.”¹⁰

* * *

Sixty-seven years of age in 1837, Harrison, whose sons served as Vice Consuls and traveled throughout the island extensively for their aged father, was born in Fairfax County, Virginia, on April 16, 1770. “Left an orphan in childhood” and to “shift for myself throughout life,” Harrison’s “aristocratic family” defies definitive determination. Based on claims by Harrison himself, members of his immediate family, newspaper reports of the day, and even Thome and Kimball, he was a close relation—probably first cousins—to General (and later President) William Henry Harrison. While definitive proof remains elusive, a remarkable range of circumstantial evidence suggests that Colonel Harrison was in fact the son of Robert Hanson Harrison, an Alexandria attorney in 1770, as well as the legal counsel and close friend of George Washington, although the relationship was likely extralegal and never acknowledged by the elder Harrison. Born to a wealthy family of Charles, County, Maryland, Robert Hanson Harrison served on the local Committee of Correspondence, co-authored the Virginia Resolves, and served in the Continental Army from 1776 to 1781 as Washington’s principal Military Secretary. Later serving as Chief Judge of the General Court of Maryland, Harrison received appointment from President Washington to the inaugural Supreme Court, an offer he was traveling to accept in person when he met an untimely death at forty-five years of

age in April 1790. “Without leaving behind him any male heir in any children lawfully begotten,” Robert Hanson Harrison bequeathed to two daughters forty-seven slaves and 675 acres of Charles County, Maryland’s best tobacco lands. Similarly, the parents of Robert Monroe Harrison, orphaned in Fairfax County, Virginia in 1770, appear to have generated no official records. Yet unofficial records of the extralegal relationship abound, as readers of the Kingston, Jamaica *Royal Gazette* learned in May 1828: “Mr. Harrison is the son of the Military Secretary of the late George Washington.”¹¹

Robert Monroe Harrison went on to distinguish himself in his own right, yet early in life received two opportunities that suggest he was not left to shift for himself. The first opportunity went badly awry. Receiving passage to England, where he was to complete his formal education, Harrison instead discovered his ship boarded by the British Navy and himself impressed into its service. Later, after returning to the United States, he received a further opportunity when he was appointed to the U.S. Navy by President Washington. After rising in rank from Ship’s Master to Lieutenant and distinguishing himself during the Quasi War, Harrison left naval service and America in 1801 to pursue business interests in Europe. Jailed in Napoleon’s France for suspicion of smuggling, Harrison later married in Sweden, fought Napoleon’s armies in Russia, and upon hearing news of the War of 1812 was captured by British forces while attempting to return to the United States. Imprisoned for the war’s duration and then transported to the Danish West Indies, Harrison remained on St. Thomas to help the many American prisoners transported to the island gain passage home. In 1816 his efforts secured him appointment as consul to the island, beginning a career in the U.S. Consulate Service that would last until his death in 1858. From obscure beginnings and extensive travels, Harrison attained the rare distinction of serving every American administration from George Washington to James Buchanan.¹²

At the time of his death at eighty-eight years of age, Harrison had held the position of Consul in Kingston, Jamaica, for twenty-seven years. Gaining the post as reward for exceptional service at numerous consulates in the West Indies during the 1820s—and especially for his service as special agent to investigate British trade regulations for Secretary of State Henry Clay in 1827-1828—Harrison requested appointment to Kingston in 1831 in expectation the post would prove lucrative. Long the jewel of the British West Indies, the island of Jamaica had been closed to American shipping since the end of the American Revolutionary War. Yet, by means of indirect trade through nearby European possessions, American merchants had long continued to supply the British West Indies. Harrison, who proved remarkably adept at identifying which ports stood to gain most by the indirect trade and gaining appointment there, understood better than anyone that the lifting of the Navigation Laws in 1830 would concentrate the long-scattered indirect trade and channel it directly to Kingston in large volume. The anticipated consular fees promised a windfall.¹³

Yet Harrison soon discovered American trade to the West Indies stood no chance of fulfilling the promise he hoped. Arriving in Kingston in April 1831, he found the island still smoldering from the recent Baptist War, the slave insurrection that so affected British public opinion. Discovering also that the colonial government in Jamaica had yet to receive instructions from London to receive foreign consuls, Harrison departed for Pensacola. For much of the next year he served as military secretary to the Territorial Governor of Florida, a post that granted him the title of colonel and the chance, as he later recalled to Thome and Kimball, to travel in the Deep South and assess the character of American slaves.¹⁴

Returning to Kingston in 1832, Harrison soon realized that the promise of Jamaica's direct trade would never materialize. Inequitable trade regulations discriminated against American shipping, denying him fees instead collected by his counterparts from

South America whose merchants benefited by the lucrative trade to Jamaica. More foreboding, news soon arrived that Parliament was set to approve a Slavery Abolition Act. "I for my own part can perceive nothing in it but the ultimate ruin of the colonies," Harrison reported upon first news of the legislation. "Our trade to this Island has fallen off greatly indeed," he reported several months later, "and will be more so when the New 'Act of the British Government' goes into operation for the emancipation of the Slaves." The reasons why struck him as obvious. "Few of the owners of estates can expect to receive any part of the twenty millions compensation," he noted, "as their property is mostly mortgaged . . . the estates and property will deteriorate rapidly in value and ultimately be good for nothing." As a result, he expected the "white inhabitants will for the most part leave the island; and like St. Domingo, there will be nothing produced."¹⁵

As prospects for an American consul were already meager and likely to become more so, Harrison looked to leave Kingston. Time and again in following years he requested appointment to another post, only to receive no response from Washington. Always uncommonly informative in his despatches, and as a consul logically attentive to the most minute details of political economy, Harrison's increasing financial plight over time led him to build a stronger case in an attempt to secure a better post. In many ways his reports matched Thome and Kimball's assessment of the island, and like the abolitionists too, he held little promise for Apprenticeship's end. "Sufficient time has not yet passed for me to say at present how this Grand experiment, as it is called by the English is likely to work," he noted the week after the Abolition Act was fully implemented on the island. "But from all the information which I can obtain from the country there's not the least probability of Sugar or any of the other staple articles which require much labour being hereafter cultivated to any extent." Similar reports continued, twice, sometimes three times a month afterward. Nevertheless, during the

first eight years after passage of the British Slavery Abolition Act, Harrison's despatches detailing the results of its implementation elicited no interest in Washington.¹⁶

Harrison's standing changed dramatically after the 1840 presidential election. The reasons for the change owed less to personal appeals from Harrison's son—William Henry Harrison, named after the President-elect—than a “true statement of the free labor system” the consul submitted in March 1841 that summarized for the incoming Whig administration eight years of neglected observations. The statement totaled sixteen paragraphs, but without question paragraph ten elicited the most interest: “England has ruined her own colonies, and like an unchaste female wishes to see other countries, where slavery exists, in a similar state.” Offering an interpretation of British antislavery policies based on a view of the Great Experiment's results completely opposite of that related by Gurney and understood by Calhoun and fellow Southerners, Harrison then explained: “her Government will stir heaven and earth to accomplish it, and in the event of any war with the United States . . . she can with the aid of Hayti (who will go hand in hand with her) steam upward of 200,000 on blacks on shore into our slave holding states, by means of their steam vessels of war, etc., in a very short time.”¹⁷

Submitted in March, Harrison's statement arrived in Washington on May 11, 1841, just as the latest packets from Britain arrived with the most recent edition of *Fraser's Magazine* and its calls for a “War with America a Blessing to Mankind.” Harrison's statement therefore figured into the war scare that riveted the national capital during the spring of 1841, prompting the creation of a Home Squadron to protect American shores from British steamships bearing battalions of West Indian freed slaves. Harrison's statement also arrived in Washington five weeks after his cousin died in office. John Tyler's promotion to the Presidency soon propelled Abel Upshur into Washington policy-making circles, where the States-Rights theorist and former Virginia judge soon found himself tasked with assessing British policies and their underlying motivation.¹⁸

Appointed Secretary of the Navy in the fall of 1841, Upshur quickly gained an appreciation of British naval power that the Home Squadron was created to counter. If the numbers of ships in the Royal Navy was impressive, more worrisome was Britain's recent application of technological advances. "The application of steam power to vessels of war," he understood, was "destined to change the whole system of maritime war." By December 1841 he was certain it had already done so. "In the recent operations of the British squadron on the coast of Syria," he noted "troops were transported a distance of two thousand miles over the ocean and were engaged in battle in Asia Minor on the sixteenth day after leaving England." Worse still, "steamboats of light draught . . . may invade us at almost any point through our shallow rivers, and thus expose half our country to hostile attacks." Like congressional reports that had called for creation of a Home Squadron the previous summer, Upshur's understanding of the usefulness of Britain's steam-driven river gunboats acknowledged the scenario highlighted in Harrison's reports and publicized in *Fraser's Magazine*. "The effects of these incursions would be terrible everywhere, but in the southern portion of our country they might and probably would be disastrous in the extreme." Underlining the need to "meet the enemy upon the ocean" rather than "suffer him to land upon our shores," Upshur recognized that existing American forces fell woefully short of measuring up to the task. To close the gap he proposed a program of construction to match half the strength of the British Navy, but soon discovered that critics had the stronger argument. To match half the strength of the Royal Navy, John Quincy Adams calculated, would require the U.S. Government to "build three times the whole number of their present vessels of war, besides at least forty steamers." As it also required prodigious spending and called for an expansion of the federal budget at the exact moment Tyler's vetoes of Whig fiscal policies demanded federal retrenchment, Adams concluded Upshur's naval program fairly reduced itself to "senseless babbling."¹⁹

Upshur's dilemma—and the war scare of 1841—were solved by the Treaty of Washington of 1842. Upshur, at least, thought this dilemma solved as he entered the State Department the following summer. Learning in quick succession of Turnbull's plots, Tappan's committee, and Fox's proposal, Upshur found himself once again in need of assessing British policies. Well aware of British capabilities, what he most needed now was an assessment of British motivation, specifically British Conservatives' understanding of the Great Experiment, its problems, and their significance. Now familiar with Harrison, his long record in Jamaica, and especially his eagerness to assist in just such an assessment, Upshur logically turned to his Consul in Kingston. It was no coincidence, of course, that Lewis Tappan warned readers of the *American Anti-Slavery Almanac* at almost that precise moment to watch out for the consul's paragraphs. Tappan's actions in London had helped precipitate Upshur's inquiry. His hopes for the South would fade with it.

* * *

"I herewith have the honour to enclose you the answers from persons to the interrogations you recently sent me," Harrison wrote Upshur on October 11, 1843. A brief yet significant revelation that provides the only surviving confirmation of Upshur's authorship of the questions Harrison answered and of the approximate date those questions departed from Washington and arrived in Kingston. Given the date of Harrison's despatch and the remarkably consistent time of commute for the Washington-Kingston packet service of the day—six weeks with rare deviation—the date of departure of Upshur's questions from Washington can fairly be established as early as mid-August. From this context it can be further be determined that Harrison must have received Upshur's instructions, distributed his questions, collected respondents' answers, and compiled his report within two weeks' time. Nevertheless he assured Upshur the answers suffered nothing from the haste. "Much pains have been

taken to make them as perfect as possible,” the consul noted, making sure to draw attention to the credibility of the respondents he selected. “As all parties are gentlemen of acknowledged abilities and high standing in this Colony,” he emphasized, “I myself consider their opinions. . . as one of the best and most faithful reports of the working of the Free Labour system, and consequent results therefrom, that has ever been written.”²⁰

Harrison collected answers from eight respondents. Although he elaborated upon their abilities and standing, he provided no names. Free to identify themselves or remain anonymous, only two respondents signed their answers—James Miller, a planter from Malvernhill estate in the parish of Manchester along the island’s southwestern shore, and W.F. Whitehouse, a planting attorney and notable enthusiast of agricultural improvement who later authored *Agricola’s Letters and Essays on Sugar Farming in Jamaica*. “As it would on many accounts be improper to mention the names of the parties,” Harrison explained, “I have designated each with letters of the alphabet in the cursory review which have taken of the whole of their productions.” As a result Miller and Whitehouse became Respondents C and D, respectively, while Her Majesty’s Royal Consul to the island, otherwise not identified, was assigned letter F. Respondent A, a former member of the British House of Commons who had since come to Jamaica to oversee his estate, served as Custos of his parish and a member of the colony’s House of Assembly. All eight respondents owned estates or otherwise possessed extensive knowledge of the island’s agricultural affairs, yet two planters in particular won Harrison’s respect. “One of the most industrious and assuredly among those who are considered the best informed men” on the island, Respondent E included with the answers he returned to Harrison two official documents, one prepared for the French Government about the ending of Apprenticeship, the other for British Parliament reporting trade figures for the island from 1800 to 1828. But Harrison’s greatest esteem was reserved for the oldest of the respondents, a native of the West Indies who “belongs

to one of the most ancient and illustrious families of France . . . a chevalier of the order of Saint Louis.” A former planter in Santo Domingo who during the 1790s lost his estate to revolution, and later a planter in Jamaica ruined by slave emancipation, respondent G, like Harrison, had suffered monetary disappointments yet remained on the island. “He now has a small coffee property,” Harrison reported.²¹

Although Harrison thought highly of his groups of respondents, he by no means approved of their answers in their entirety. Respondent B received a typical description. “A first-rate practical planter” in whose answers “every confidence may be placed,” Respondent B, noted Harrison, “is laboring under a delusion as regards negro friendship or gratitude.” Other respondents’ motives came under closer scrutiny, Whitehouse (Respondent D) in particular. Like the others, Whitehouse detailed a story of economic decline in Jamaica since the enactment of slave emancipation. Yet unlike the others, who generally highlighted shortcomings on the part of the freed slaves, Whitehouse undertook to place the blame for the problems since emancipation on the former slaveowners. “He not only lays the blame on the unfortunate whites (who are the victims of this insane measure) but even accuses them of being the causes of the negro’s laziness . . . that the loss in value the real Estate and decrease in crops is not to be [attributed to] emancipation, but to the manner in which is [was] carried into effect.” Further, Whitehouse earned Harrison’s ire by pursuing his answers far beyond what Harrison believed was appropriate, a decision that ironically may have made Whitehouse’s answers the most valuable of all. “While he at the same time goes on [to explain] in what measure the proprietors have erred,” Harrison explained, Whitehouse proceeded to provide direction to “America . . . and the other slave-holding states how, and in what manner, they are to proceed under similar circumstances. The names of these powers are not mentioned by him; but as all Englishmen seem to think that Emancipation of the [slaves] will sooner or later take place . . .” The sentence ends abruptly. Unfortunately

the document suffered poor preservation, leaving Harrison's explanation lost to historians. Elsewhere in his reports, however, Harrison elaborated on Whitehouse's presumption that the world's remaining slavery-based export economies would follow Britain's lead in committing to free labor.²²

"I am induced to make some observations," Harrison explained of Whitehouse's answers, "because formerly in all his writings he showed himself a strong advocate of every ruinous measure . . . that emanated from the Government and the Anti-slavery society." Insisting that the problems of British slave emancipation were unique to its particular circumstances, Whitehouse emphasized that those problems were the result of poor planning. Future emancipators would benefit from anticipating the event of slave emancipation in ways that British West Indians did not. "The proposition for emancipating the slaves was so startling . . . none of us knew how to act; we had made no preparation nor arranged any practical plan for carrying out this measure . . . Parties now contemplating such a change have our experience as a guide, and being able to look forward to the result with a degree of certainty, may make the necessary arrangements for carrying the measure into effect without inflicting any material injury." Those plans included especially fixed wage scales to suppress fluctuations in labor costs during the transition to free labor and a longer period of Apprenticeship to educate the freed slaves of the social obligations of a responsible work force. Ironically, then, as Lewis Tappan and other American abolitionists decried the evils of Apprenticeship in favor of policies of immediate abolition, British proponents of abolition in the United States urged the adoption of a longer period of Apprenticeship as a selling point for emancipation.²³

Yet while Whitehouse cast himself as a battle-tested philanthropist and prophet of social revolution, Harrison perceived duplicitous self-interest in his answers. Applauding other respondents whose answers "would not be found agreeable to the British Government, the Anti-slavery society, or those paying their court to them by distorting

facts to suit their own interests,” Harrison drew attention to the source of Whitehouse’s interests. “Some of those who were the loudest in their excoriations against the British Government in the first instance, who are completely ruined by the emancipation, are the greatest sycophants of the Anti-slavery society, and the loudest in their praise of the measures of that body, as well the government at all public meetings which are held from time to time for the purpose of abusing slave holding states, and more especially the United States.” To Harrison, Whitehouse was like the Aesopian fox that lost its tail. Having befallen misfortune, Britain now urged others to experience the same. “It has been generally said that a bad woman is always rejoiced at seeing others reduced to her own level,” Harrison observed with a metaphor of his own making. “As the persons to whom I allude have lost everything through the impolitic measures of the English Government, they desire nothing so much as to see every other slave holding state similarly situated.” Nor did Harrison mince words in identifying the object of British disdain. “Actuated by the most inveterate jealousy towards the U. States and Cuba,” British observers like Whitehouse, Harrison cautioned, were especially envious of “the latter” as it was “daily augmenting in riches and importance while this once flourishing colony, through the pseudo-philanthropy of the Government of England has sunk to rise no more.”²⁴

On the whole, however, Harrison believed the respondents supplied their answers in good faith, and even Whitehouse’s arguments, he understood, were useful for the purposes of Upshur’s inquiry. It was just important for the credibility of the inquiry to distinguish fact from interpretation. “As I am aware that you require nothing more than the naked statement of facts in answer to your interrogations,” he informed Upshur, “I have felt it my duty to undeceive you as regards the correctness of several of those of [Whitehouse’s] answers; but with these exceptions it may be considered a pretty fair expose of the working of the Free labour system.”²⁵

* * *

Provided six sets of questions, the eight respondents replied with remarkable consistency in the broad outlines of their answers. There was a clear consensus especially on the economic questions and on St. Domingue. In contrast to Gurney, whose “five grand points” pointed to the economic superiority of free labor over slavery, each respondent agreed that the key indicators of economic performance—real estate values and production levels—portrayed the Great Experiment in a far different light than Gurney wished the case. With St. Domingue they were only slightly less unanimous. With the exception of one respondent who felt obliged to respond with hearsay, each respondent cited ignorance of the subject. It was only with the answers to the social questions that a diversity of opinion emerged, but even then the answers were sure to pique the interest of proslavery proponents in the United States.

All respondents concurred that the effect of slave emancipation had greatly reduced the value of real estate in Jamaica. Estimates varied. Most respondents were aware of devaluations ranging from one-half to one-quarter of estates’ pre-emancipation worth. Other examples suggested these figures much too conservative. “My own estate would now perhaps in the gross fetch £3,000,” Respondent B reported. “In 1807 I refused £34,000 for it. It had then 230 slaves. Staunton Harcourt, a sugar estate formerly worth say £7 or 8,000 was lately sold for £750 with works and great house.” Devaluations of this extent were certain to undermine the estate system. “Emancipation has greatly diminished the value of real estate and rendered it difficult to raise money on Estates by mortgage,” Respondent A explained. “It has rendered it impossible to sell Estates at any fair value with reference to the value prior to the emancipation” and “has made it difficult to find purchasers on almost any terms. Two good Estates in this district with all the requisite machinery, one of them with a steam Engine in addition to a Water wheel. . . were repeatedly advertised for sale” and “have subsequently been put up for

sale at the Auction Mart London without effect.” As estate values declined into what seemed irreparable ruin, market pressures brought fragmentation and profound implications for the hope of the ultimate success of the Great Experiment. Respondent F reported: as “emancipation has destroyed the real value of Estates. . . others have been obliged to divide their lands into small lots in order to obtain a more ready sale; by which means a great number of emancipated negroes have become possessors of the soil which they formerly cultivated as slaves.” The decline of the estate system therefore redounded to the advantage of the freed persons, permitting them to become freeholders. Unfortunately signs had already appeared that the freed slaves’ good fortune had redounded “without any advantage to the Colony,” lamented Respondent F, “for naturally inclined to idleness and inertia the mass of the free negroes have done nothing to ameliorate their acquisitions.”²⁶

The issue of the freed slaves’ commitment to work for the advantage of the Colony, a consideration so prominent in Gurney’s “five grand points” and therefore into Upshur’s inquiry, figured largely into the explanations of the precipitous devaluation of Jamaica’s real estate. One respondent, however, drew attention away from the act of emancipation and its implications in a way certain to interest Southern slaveholders. While “there can be no question but Real property has depreciated since Emancipation and there is no doubt but the depreciation . . . may fairly be attributed in some measure to it,” Respondent E nevertheless emphasized “several other causes.” Noting that property values are a function of security, he noted the importance of “the agitation of slave abolition up to 1823” and the subsequent policies of the British government which had “tended to create distrust as to the security of Colonial property of all descriptions.” Important too was “the frequent discussion relative to duties” which “have from time to time very naturally paralised the energies of the sugar Planter” whose profits relied on the generous protection the Sugar Duties afforded. For similar reasons the devaluation

of some estates was inevitable. In times past, when higher sugar prices encouraged expansion of the estate system, mountainous and remote lands had been developed that subsequently proved “too laborious and even under the most favourable circumstances will not yield a commensurate return for the capital invested.” As that capital invested included slaves, it emerged important also that Jamaican slaveowners received only £44.15.2¼ for every £100 of the value of their slaves by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Even that figure did not accurately reflect slaveowners’ losses, Respondent E emphasized, because the value of their slaves in 1833 had greatly diminished as a result of the looming prospect of the Abolition Act’s passage.²⁷

Still, most respondents attributed the declining real estate values principally to their answer to Upshur’s second question. All respondents agreed that production had diminished greatly since emancipation, with estimates suggesting a decrease to fifty percent of previous levels. Figures supplied by Respondent A reminded readers that the decline was far greater when considered from 1820, when sugar exports still averaged 120,000 hogsheads annually five years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The abolition of the British slave trade and the postwar rebirth of Britain’s slavery-based competitors took its toll, lowering exports to 83,000 hogsheads on the eve of emancipation. By 1837, the year before Apprenticeship ended, only 56,300 hogsheads went abroad, while two years later the figure declined to 44,800.²⁸

There was also a solid consensus to explain the decline in production. “The want of continuous labor on sugar and coffee Estates when most required,” explained Respondent H, “has had the most serious effect on the products of the Island and can be fully proved on reference to the Customs.” Unlike the freed slaves of Antigua and Barbadoes, where high population densities and little arable land dictated that freed people work for their former masters at reasonable wages, the freed people in Jamaica benefited from a low population density, the availability of land, and planters’ ill-advised

efforts to offset those circumstances. In an attempt to tie the former slaves to the plantations they had always worked, the planters devised a policy of charging rents at high rates for the right to stay in the dwellings they had always inhabited. The rent policy backfired, as scores of irate freed slaves moved away from the plantations rather than submit, thereby lending further bargaining power to those who remained. “Being perfectly free in their actions the negroes of the Mountains commenced their attacks on the rights of the whites by refusing to pay them rents in their cottages,” reported Respondent F. “They then exacted the most exorbitant wages; at length little by little they have abandoned the dwellings of their ancient masters as they have become possessed of lands of their own, which they now barely cultivate without any other ambition.”²⁹

The logic of Gurney’s five points quickly began to emerge in the responses to the pointed questions of Upshur’s inquiry. All respondents agreed that the “high rate of wages, which is nearly double what is given in Barbadoes and Antigua,” spelled doom for Jamaican production. They also agreed that the problems of production were inextricably tied to consideration of Upshur’s remaining questions, directing respondents to evaluate the freed slaves’ moral improvement, to consider whether they were lazy, to explain why if imports had increased exports had fallen, and to relate if freed persons after emancipation remained in the vicinity of their previous location of enslavement. The gist of each of these questions was directed in question of the central theme of Gurney’s five points. Arguing that a free-labor system would prove prosperous both materially and morally if the freed persons committed to the advancement of the established society, the respondents’ answers ironically went far to prove Gurney right in his rationale. Unfortunately for Gurney’s purpose, however, they also went far to demonstrate that Jamaican freed persons fell far short of a commitment to the advancement of the island’s established society. Furthermore, it was this failure that

would most draw the attention of John C. Calhoun and other proslavery ideologues in American South. Accustomed to justifying slavery solely on racist grounds, southern slaveholders would discern in the Jamaican model of abolition liberal rationale for their proslavery defense.³⁰

The respondents split about evenly in answering the broad question of whether the morals of the freed persons had improved or worsened. Yet there was a strong consensus on individual points at issue. All agreed that assassinations were rare. All also agreed that crimes of property were on the increase, that younger generations were heedless of arguments of moral propriety, and that in general the older generations had become more respectable in their behavior. There was widespread agreement too that racial barriers had rapidly broken down. Knowing the importance of this point to Upshur, Harrison stated the matter most forcibly: “amalgamation is constantly in [practice] among those who have been living . . . for years together . . . When the Mayor of this City at the age of sixty-nine marries an old sambo woman of Saint Domingo with whom he had lived for thirty-four years, no one will be surprised that younger heads should do the same when they have such an example.” The issue of intermarriage also exemplified how respondents answering individual questions similarly could differ in their overall assessment. Respondent D, for example, witnessed the same characteristics as Harrison, only to arrive at a favorable assessment: “the different classes are fast amalgamating and complexional distinctions are dying away. Great numbers of planters are marrying their former housekeepers . . . people are received into society according to their education and respectability and not according to the colour of their skins.” For similar reasons, Harrison disagreed with most respondents in their assessment of the relations between blacks and whites since emancipation. Several respondents observed “there is a friendly feeling between all colours.” In response, the less-receptive Harrison concluded the respondents deluded or duplicitous and favored instead the assessment of

Respondent H: “The morality of the negroes does not appear to have improved since emancipation; and evince a disposition equally addicted to crime as ever existed in time of slavery. As to the feelings for their original owners there are none but what self interest prompts.”³¹

The issue of the freed persons’ laziness also brought telling disagreement. Chastising the former slaves for what he considered moral lapses, Respondent A drew attention to the freed slaves’ practice of Myalism, by which they combined Christian worship with pagan rites, and to their refusal to educate their children “in habits of industry.” Not surprisingly, he concluded “the debates in the House of Commons . . . showing the laziness and bad working of the negro labourers is perfectly correct.” Explaining that “it is impossible to obtain from them that regular and continuous labour which is necessary for the proper and successful cultivation of sugar and coffee plantations, or to obtain a fair day’s labor, notwithstanding high money payments,” he emphasized especially that “they frequently hold back at the time their services are most wanted; and it is easy for any class by so doing to damage the whole work of a sugar plantation during crop time or to cause great loss in Coffee plantations by not picking the tree clean.” In contrast, Whitehouse maintained his argument that shortcomings on the part of the freed persons were usually attributable to their employers. “It depends on how the parties are engaged to work whether they work industriously or lazily. When hired by the day, and without any specific task being assigned them, they in general work very lazily; when however they are employed at jobs [by] only the acre, or by specified task they work very industriously.” In further contrast, Respondent B, who offered a cheery assessment of the freed slaves’ morals and the island’s race relations, objected to the notion that the freed persons lacked in industry. “The negroes are not lazier than other folks. You would not expect Sir Robert Peel or the Duke of Wellington to go and dig for two shillings a day, except a reverse of fortune and hunger and want

compelled them. The negroes work according to their needs and enjoy their otium when they have earned it.”³²

While the respondents disagreed as to how to interpret the freed persons’ prerogatives to labor according to their own wishes, all agreed that it was a “very fallacious criterion” to conclude that because the island’s imports had risen its exports must have also. Exports, they agreed, had diminished in direct proportion to the island’s production. “The very supposition that our exports . . . are also on the rise is absurd,” remarked Respondent G. “Witness the fallen state of our trade now nearly annihilated. In by gone days I have seen the harbour of this town covered with upwards of five hundred square sail at one and same time; and now it almost empty of any ships.” Explaining that those ships “now proceed to Cuba and other slave Colonies to fill up,” Respondent G also emphasized that reports to the contrary were the work of abolitionists who wished “to puzzle John Bull and persuade him that the ‘grand experiment’ is doing wonderfully well.” Among the respondent’s there was little agreement, however, to explain the increase in imports, which were acknowledged to have increased. Explanations ranged from unabashed speculation to a legitimate demand created by the freed persons’ irresponsible spending.³³

Respondents also disagreed as to the effect emancipation had on separating the freed slaves from their former masters. The disagreement, however, was principally one of timing. All agreed that freed slaves sought land to purchase for themselves. Explaining that they “generally remain on Estates and cultivate land until they are compelled to pay rent,” Respondent B emphasized that “emancipation does not immediately separate the Whites and Blacks.” In contrast, Respondent G found the freed persons far less loyal to their former masters. the properties of their former masters as fast as their acquired means will permit them to purchase land,” he explained. “They congregate together and form little villages most rapidly towards the

lowlands and as near the Markets as possible; many plantations have none or but a few of their ancient slaves remaining on them, while others are already entirely deserted.”

Respondent H agreed: “As soon as the circumstances of the negro will admit of purchasing land he invariably does so but in general as near his former home as possible and there locates himself.” More than spatial distance, it was the distance between the interests of the freed slaves and planters that proved the most significant consideration. “It is only when absolute want compel him that he will offer his services,” continued Respondent H, “and then where the highest wages are given without any considerations as to individuals. I consider them equally the same number in each Parish as formerly and it is only a few of the former unsettled race that seem inclined to wander about.”³⁴

Yet for all their disagreements over social issues, the respondents could agree on one thing: the Great Experiment was in trouble precisely because of social issues. Whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with the freed slaves’ prerogatives to disassociate themselves from their former plantations, the consequences of their self-determination was clear. “Cultivation goes on but not to the extent as formerly,” James Miller explained. “Many of the labourers have left the properties on which they were located, purchased land, and made small settlements in the neighborhood (to avoid paying rent) where they cultivate provisions which produce in great abundance and render them quite independent of labouring for others.” Only “the love of money . . . induces them to take jobs such as cleaning Coffee [trees]. Slowly but surely Jamaica was developing into a two economy society, one economy market-oriented and based upon the old estate system, the other a self-sufficient economy of yeomen who wanted as little to do with the market and the old estate system as possible. In one sense, then, British slave emancipation proved an unequivocal success. “Should the question be put whether the slaves are happier under the change than before I will answer undoubtedly,”

Respondent G grumbled, “but at the expense of the landholders, whose interests have been most inhumanely and cruelly sacrificed.”³⁵

But the failings of British slave emancipation did not stop with the interests of the Jamaican planters. Britain had enacted slave emancipation as the Great Experiment, a noble effort, they conceived, to demonstrate to the world the economic and moral superiority of free labor and enlightened tenets of natural-rights philosophy. As Joseph John Gurney well knew, the Great Experiment had to produce to succeed. It must produce to be profitable to the Mother Country. Above all, it had to compete with slave colonies. But “to compete with the slave colonies the average price of the labourers’ work should not exceed 6 [shilling] per day,” and the wages Jamaica freed persons held out for well exceeded that threshold. As a result, as Respondent G also understood, “the grand experiment here proves itself a complete failure considered in a commercial point of view, the island and the free system being no longer profitable to the Mother Country.” Even Respondent B agreed: “Reason and justice are in favor of emancipation; but in countries hitherto cultivated by slaves, Emancipation is ruin to those who have embarked their property in the soil; except the population is excessive, and the peasantry are driven to labour by want.”³⁶

* * *

When he received Harrison’s first report in late November 1843, Upshur could not have mistaken the reasons for Fox’s proposal. A program of immigration such as the British government proposed promising to alter the demographics of Jamaica’s labor market to the advantage of the island’s planters, the key to stimulating production in the British West Indies. Yet the possibility existed that the problems of the free labor experiment had become irreparable. The experience of Harrison’s eleven years in Kingston led him to believe as much. “It is preposterous to suppose for a moment that the Colony can ever be made to produce,” he remarked, quick to point to the

implications. “As the English people are already taxed beyond endurance, they will not willingly suffer their burden to be increased merely for the purpose of allowing the Island to be kept possession of under such circumstances,” Harrison explained, predicting that “it will therefore be ultimately abandoned, and become like San Domingo.”³⁷

As it turned out, Harrison’s prediction proved remarkably accurate. Although the fate of Jamaica nowhere approached that of St. Domingue, the Great Experiment eventually fell victim to the exhausted patience of British taxpayers and their campaign for reform of Britain’s system of agricultural tariffs. Denied protection from the slave production of Cuba and Brazil after repeal of the Sugar Duties in the late 1840s, Jamaica experienced a slow but certain economic decline. By the mid-twentieth century, when Eric Williams set out to understand why Britain had crippled the British West Indies, Jamaica’s economy—like that of St. Domingue—stood a mere shadow of its eighteenth-century prosperity.

To Upshur, however, Harrison’s prediction was neither pertinent nor useful. To presume Britain would abandon the Great Experiment was to overlook its incentives for reversing its misfortune. With compelling reasons to focus on these incentives, Upshur dismissed the idea that Britain would abandon its experiment. One reason was simple expedience. As scholars have long recognized, proponents of Texas annexation stood to benefit by portraying British policies as a threat to American slavery interests. With undeniable truth to this logic, it made little sense to presume Britain would abandon the experiment without pursuing every reasonable recourse to save it.

To expedience Upshur added conviction. By his position in Tyler’s cabinet, Upshur benefited by knowledge available to few others. First Duff Green’s reports, then Fox’s proposal, and now Upshur’s own inquiry revealed Britain earnestness in its antislavery objectives. The realization the Britain possessed both economic and moral reasons for pursuing the abolition of slavery worldwide now also brought Anglo-American relations

over the past decade into a new focus for Upshur. It was evident that Britain's options for saving the Great Experiment had grown few in number, and it was clear as well that American policies were in large part responsible for Britain's woes. First by defeating the Convention of London, then by rejecting the British request for an immigration agreement, the United States had figured prominently in frustrating the most ready means for saving the Great Experiment. If Britain was to overcome those frustrations, it must now act more aggressively, an eventuality not lost on Upshur.

Nor was it lost on John C. Calhoun and fellow proslavery ideologues in the American South. Always prepared to defend slavery, especially its racist foundations, they would soon revise their estimation of the Great Experiment and the value of their own institutions. By implication they would revise their commitment to the American Union as well.

NOTES

1. "the notorious Turnbull . . .," "I have not the least doubt . . .," "will be deluged . . .," and "has already commenced operations," Harrison to Secretary of State, June 14, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, roll 8. (Harrison, unaware who had succeeded Daniel Webster in the State Department, addressed the despatch simply "Secretary of State.") David R. Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain, and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 133-80, and especially Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 3-26 and 131-57, valuably recount Turnbull's tenure in Cuba and the recurrent suspicions, both accurate and exaggerated, that surrounded his actions.

2. "any and every movement . . .," Harrison to Secretary of State, June 14, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, roll 8. As the Murray and Paquette volumes cited above recount, mystery still surrounds Turnbull's actions and objectives. Yet while it seems clear that he in fact wished to foment insurrection in Cuba and took measures to do so, his actions were his own and at no time received official sanction.

3. "communicate without delay . . ." and "it is almost unnecessary . . .," Upshur to Harrison, Aug. 8, 1843, Instructions to Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, Records of the U.S. Consulate, Kingston, Jamaica, RG84, MLR 26. (Note: after 1834 the U.S. State Department changed its filing system and kept records of consular instructions only on file with records of individual consulates. The records of the Kingston consulate are not on microfilm.) As explained below, the exact date of Upshur's response to Harrison cannot be determined for certain but circumstances suggest August 8 as the likely date.

4. Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, contains Harrison's first report. The follow-up report is found in Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8.

5. Wilkins, "Window on Freedom," 143, notes that "apparently . . . Upshur sent Harrison a list of questions dealing with the effect of the free labor system on the former slave colony. Harrison's detailed response on October 30, 1843 . . . actually sent two responses to Upshur's questions." Wilkins' remarks represent the extent that Upshur's inquiry receives consideration in existing scholarship.

6. Gurney's points and their presentation in Washington and subsequent publication receive are more fully addressed in Chapter 1.

7. "part of a general plan . . .," Upshur to Murphy, Aug. 8, 1843, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, Texas, M77, roll 161. Upshur's questions, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM. Emphasis in the original. The reference in question four to "the Debates in the Chamber of Deputies" reflects Harrison's input, as Upshur almost certainly remained unaware of those debates. Harrison's input was undoubtedly limited to modification of Upshur's questions. The wording "our slaves" in the fifth set of questions, for example, is almost certainly attributable to Upshur.

Although the fact has remained unknown, Upshur's questions (or at least the questions as Harrison put to respondents) have previously been available to scholars. There was just no way of knowing the questions were Upshur's. This circumstance resulted from Harrison's submitting a third report containing answers to Upshur's inquiry. Dated May 4, 1844, this report summarized the inquiry's finding for Upshur's successor in the State Department, John C. Calhoun. Taken almost word for word from the answers of one particular respondent (respondent "G," whose answers were included in Harrison's follow-up despatch of October 30, 1843, available in the National Archives), the summary submitted to Calhoun differs principally in that Harrison inserted the questions before the relevant answers. Submitted to Calhoun, Harrison's summary was later collected in *PJC*, 18: 429-35. It is indicative of the confusion that has existed in historical understanding of Upshur's inquiry that the editors of *PJC* note that "the author of the interrogatories to which Harrison replied has not been identified." Of course the answers were not Harrison's own and the questions were Upshur's, but until Harrison's report of October 11, 1843 came to light these connections were subject only to conjecture.

8. "The slave-holders are beginning . . .," Tappan to John Scoble, Mar. 1, 1843, in Tappan, *A Side-Light on Anglo-American Relations, 1839-1858*, 113-21.

9. "during his late visit to England . . ." and "look out for his paragraphs," Tappan remarks, *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac, for 1844, being bissextile or leap year; and until July 4th, the sixty-eighth of the independence of the United States*, David L. Child, comp. (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1844): 18. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 407; Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 119; and Wilkins, "Window on Freedom," 142-43, note Tappan's remarks about the Kingston consul.

10. "a true hearted Virginian . . .," "near relation of General W.H. Harrison . . .," "He talked of abolition . . .," "negroes of Jamaica . . .," and "His opinions had much less weight with us . . .," Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 347-48. Thome and

Kimball did not identify their authority. Harrison, appointed to Jamaica in 1831, had been in residence in Kingston only five years at the time of Thome and Kimball's tour.

11. "Left an orphan . . ." and "shift for myself . . .," Harrison to Henry Clay (private), May 17, 1841, Robert Monroe Harrison file, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administrations of Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, and John Tyler, 1837-1845, NA, microfilm publication M687, roll 14. Also in *PHC*, vol. 9. Among the newspaper reports that claimed a familial relation between Robert Monroe Harrison and William Henry Harrison was an obituary notice, "Death of the United States Consul at Kingston, Jamaica—One of Washington's Contemporaries," *New York Times*, June 17, 1858. "without leaving behind him . . .," and the acreage of Harrison's estate, Charles County (Maryland) Deed Book N#4, 462. Harrison's slave holdings are recorded in Probate Inventory, Col. Robert Hanson Harrison, Charles County Inventories 1788-1791, Gunston Hall Plantation, Mason Neck, Virginia [online at www.gunstonhall.org/probate/HRRSH90.PDF]. "Mr. Harrison is the son . . .," Kingston, Jamaica *Royal Gazette* and reprinted in the Charleston, S.C. *Courier* (n.d.; ca. July 1828). I am indebted to Mrs. Charles C. (Ruby) Dyson of the Historical Society of Charles County, Maryland for her assistance in researching Harrison records in Maryland. Research of records in Fairfax County, Virginia revealed no documents—official or otherwise—pertaining to Robert Monroe Harrison. George T. Ness Jr., "A Lost Man of Maryland," *The Maryland Historical Magazine* 35 (December 1840), 315-36, recounts the life and career of Robert Hanson Harrison. I am indebted to Mr. Derrick Phillips of Surrey, England, who eagerly and frequently shared genealogical materials and other information that supports his belief of his relation to Robert Hanson Harrison and Robert Monroe Harrison. While several genealogical databases suggest no relation between Robert Hanson, Robert Monroe or even William Henry Harrison, Mr. Phillips has marshaled considerable evidence, both from circumstance and writings of the day. Among the materials he shared was an extract of an article published in the Charleston (S.C.) *Courier* cited above. Besides Robert Monroe Harrison's family name, the time and place of his birth, and other evidence presented below, the circumstances of Robert Monroe Harrison's marriage also suggest his relation to Robert Hanson Harrison. Robert Monroe Harrison met Margaret (his wife of fifty years and whose surname remains unverified) while in Sweden in about 1806-1807. Harrison's obituary the *New York Times* (cited above) reports Margaret to have been a "ward of Count Fersen [*sic*; Fersen], Swedish Minister of State, afterwards stoned to death by the populace of Stockholm." During the American Revolutionary War, Count Hans Axel von Fersen served as military secretary on the commanding staff of the French Army, from which position he almost certainly became acquainted with Colonel Robert Hanson Harrison, military secretary to American Commanding General Washington. H. Arnold Barton, *Count Hans Axel von Fersen: Aristocrat in the Age of Revolution* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975) details Fersen's service in America and the circumstances by which he may have had one or more "wards." I am grateful for Prof. Barton's efforts while on research leave in Sweden to research Margaret Harrison's ties to Count Fersen, who never married. He found none but suggested Margaret's parentage, like her husband's, was likely not documented.

12. Numerous official records indicate Harrison first received a commission in the U.S. Navy on July 13, 1799, as does Harrison to James Monroe, Nov. 27, 1814, Robert Monroe Harrison file, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Madison, 1809-1817, NA, microfilm publication M438, roll 4, and numerous sources (including the obituary cited above and Harrison to James M. McCulloch, Apr. 7, 1829, Robert Monroe Harrison file, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of Andrew Jackson, NA, microfilm publication M639, roll 8) claim Harrison served in the U.S. Navy during Washington's administration. He resigned his commission in

the U.S. Navy on July 8, 1801. In Sweden he married Margaret in 1806-1807 (see note 50 above). In September 1812 he “participated” in the battle of Borodino against French forces (*New York Times*, June 17, 1858). Appointed U.S. Consul in St. Thomas in 1816, he received appointments also St. Bartholomew (1821), St. Christopher and Antigua (1823), again to St. Bartholomew (1828), and finally to Kingston, Jamaica (1831). From May 1827 to May 1828 he served as Special Agent to the Adams Administration.

13. Fred A. Dellamura, “The Harrison Report and Its Role in the British-American Controversy over the West India Carrying Trade, 1827-1828” (M.A. Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1972), illuminates Harrison’s early consular career. Harrison’s despatches, many of which are conveniently published in *PHC*, vols. 4-7, are also valuable. I am grateful to Mr. Dellamura for sharing his thesis.

14. Dated from Pensacola, Harrison to James H. McCulloch [Customs Collector, Baltimore], Aug. 22, 1831, relates the consul’s first months assigned as consul to Kingston.

15. “I for my own part . . .” and “few of the owners of estates . . .,” Harrison to Louis McLane, July 24, 1833, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 2.”our trade to this island . . .” and “White inhabitants . . .,” Harrison to McLane, Nov. 14, 1833, *ibid.*, roll 3.

16. “Sufficient time has not yet passed . . .,” Harrison to John Forsyth, Aug. 8, 1838, *ibid.*, roll 5. Harrison reported a thriving trade dominated by South American merchants on February 4, 1833; *ibid.*, roll 2. Between 1834 and 1841 Harrison submitted dozens of detailed despatches (Despatches of U.S. Consuls in Kingston, Jamaica, T31, rolls 3-7) as well as letters of application and recommendation (M639, roll 8, see note 51 above). Wilkins, “Window on Freedom,” 107-65, devotes a chapter to Harrison’s many despatches yet overestimates the influence of his reports before 1841.

17. “England has ruined . . .” and “her Government will stir . . .,” Harrison to Daniel Webster, Mar. 22, 1841, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica,” T31, roll 7. Emphasis in original.

18. Congressional reports during the debates for creation of the Home Squadron cited reports of 10,000 West Indian troops ready to sail in an invasion force to American shores. While Harrison reported numerous troop movements throughout the spring of 1841, his reports nowhere mention a figure of 10,000 troops. The figure was probably taken from the article in *Fraser’s Magazine*, which called for a “force of ten thousand men” from Jamaica to invade the Carolina coast. *Fraser’s Magazine*, 136 (April 1841): 499.

19. “the application of steam power . . .,” “steamboats of light draught,” “The effects of these incursions . . .,” and “meet the enemy . . .,” Upshur remarks, “Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy,” Dec. 7, 1841, *CG*, 27 Cong., 2 sess, App., 16-23. “build three times . . .,” and “senseless babbling,” Adams remarks, Braintree, Massachusetts, *Niles*, Nov. 12, 1842. Upshur entered Tyler’s cabinet in October 1841 upon the resignation of Secretary of the Navy George E. Badger. Badger, along with the rest of Tyler’s cabinet except Secretary of State Webster, resigned the previous month to protest Tyler’s vetoes of Whig banking and tariff programs.

20. “I herewith have the honour . . .,” “Much pains have been taken . . .,” and “As all parties . . .,” Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 1. The nearly unfailling practice of the Kingston consulate’s recording the date of receipt of instructions from

Washington and the State Department's noting the date of receipt of despatches from Kingston provides means for assessing the time of the Kingston-Washington transit.

21. "As it would on many accounts . . ." and "One of the most industrious . . .," Harrison remarks, *ibid.*, 1, 5. "belongs to one of the most ancient . . ." and "He now has a small coffee property," Harrison remarks, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8. Harrison also included Respondent G's answers in a third report submitted the following spring to Upshur's successor in the State Department, John C. Calhoun; *PJC*, 18: 429-35. Whitehouse, *Agricola's Letters and Essays on Sugar Farming in Jamaica* (London: Simmonds & Ward, 1845), and Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838-1865: An Economic History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 48-49, relate Whitehouse's advocacy of agricultural improvements. Respondent B is described in the following paragraph. Harrison provided no description of Respondent H.

22. "A first-rate practical planter," "every confidence may be placed," "is laboring under a delusion . . .," "He not only lays the blame . . .," "While he at the same time . . .," Harrison remarks, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 2. Emphasis in original. Interpolations owe to the physical condition of the manuscript, which in the first dozen of its forty-seven pages has suffered infestation.

23. "I am induced to make . . ." Harrison remarks, *ibid.*, 3. The proposition for emancipating the slaves . . .," Whitehouse (Respondent D) remarks, *ibid.*, 16. Tappan's views opposing Apprenticeship are more fully addressed in Chapter 1.

24. "would not be found agreeable . . .," "Some of those who were the loudest . . .," "It has been generally said . . .," "As the persons to whom I allude . . .," "Actuated by the most inveterate jealousy . . .," "the latter," "daily augmenting in riches . . .," Harrison remarks, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8.

25. "As I am aware . . ." Harrison remarks, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, Oct. 11, 1843, 5.

26. "My own estate would now perhaps . . ." and "In 1807 I refused," remarks of Respondent B, *ibid.*, 11. "Emancipation has greatly diminished . . ." and "It has rendered it impossible . . .," remarks of Respondent A, *ibid.*, 8. "emancipation has destroyed . . ." and "without any advantage to the Colony . . .," remarks of Respondent F, *ibid.*, 46.

27. "there can be no question . . .," "several other causes," "the agitation of slave abolition . . .," "tended to create distrust . . .," "the frequent discussion relative to the duties," "have from time to time . . ." and "too laborious . . .," remarks of Respondent E, *ibid.*, 24-25. Respondent E elaborated on the calculation of the rate of forty-four percent compensation: "According to the compensation Commissioners, by their return dated 7 July 1835, Jamaica became entitled in reference to an intercolonial apportionment of £20,000,000 to a proportion of £6,161,927 for 311,692 slaves per Registration while their relative value was £13,951,139." *ibid.*, 25.

28. Remarks of Respondent A, *ibid.*, 8-9.

29. "The want of continuous labor . . .," remarks of Respondent H, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8. "Being perfectly free

. . .” and “They then exacted . . .,” remarks of Respondent F, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 47.

30. “high rate of wages . . .,” Remarks of Respondent A, *ibid.*, 8.

31. “amalgamation is constantly . . .,” Harrison remarks, *ibid.*, 3-4. Interpolation owes to the physical condition of the manuscript. “the different classes . . .,” remarks of Whitehouse (Respondent D), *ibid.*, 20-21. “there is a friendly feeling . . .,” *ibid.*, 12. “The morality of the negroes . . .,” remarks of Respondent H, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8.

32. “in habits of industry,” “the debates in the House of Commons . . .,” “they frequently hold back . . .,” remarks of Respondent A, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 10-11. “It depends on how the parties are engaged . . .,” Whitehouse remarks (Respondent D), *ibid.*, 22. “The negroes are not lazier . . .,” Remarks of Respondent B, *ibid.*, 12.

33. “very fallacious criterion,” remarks of Respondent E, *ibid.*, 29. “The very supposition . . .,” “Witness the fallen state . . .,” “now proceed to Cuba . . .,” and “to puzzle John Bull . . .,” remarks of Respondent G, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8.

34. “generally remain on Estates . . .” and “emancipation does not immediately . . .,” remarks of Respondent B, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 13. “The labourers are quitting . . .” and “They congregate together . . .,” remarks of Respondent G, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8. “As soon as the circumstances . . .” and “It is only when . . .,” remarks of Respondent H, *ibid.*

35. “Cultivation goes on . . .,” “Many of the labourers . . .,” and “the love of money . . .,” Miller remarks (Respondent C), Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 14. Emphasis in original. Interpolation owes to physical condition of manuscript. “Should the question be put . . .,” remarks of Respondent G, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8. Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Economy, 1830-1865* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), especially 101-21, illuminates “the two economies in the two Jamaicas” (101). Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), illustrates the costs of the freed slaves’ choice for individual autonomy over their society’s best interests.

36. “to compete with the slave colonies . . .” and “the grand experiment . . .,” remarks of Respondent G, *ibid.* “Reason and justice are in favor of emancipation . . .,” remarks of Respondent B, Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, 13.

37. “It is preposterous . . .” and “As the English people . . .,” Harrison remarks, *ibid.*, 7.

Abel P. Upshur looked forward to the opening of the Twenty-eighth U.S. Congress. Elected in the fall of 1842, just as John Tyler broke with the Whig party, the new Congress at first glance seemed to offer little relief for the administration's political beleaguerment. Nevertheless the new Secretary of State expected to annex Texas during the upcoming session. Writing on December 4, 1843, he disclosed his hopes to his Williamsburg neighbor, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker. "You will perceive that Congress was convened today," Upshur wrote his longtime friend, a political scientist at the College of William & Mary, the South's bellwether institution of proslavery thought, who together with Upshur numbered among the South's leading states' rights ideologues. While completing *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States*, Upshur had often sought Tucker's clarification of technicalities of law. Now he requested further assistance. "Suppose it should so happen that Texas should agree to come into the Union, & that a treaty should be made," he asked Tucker "what form should it take?" A treaty that terminated the sovereignty of a republic must somehow account for the will of its people, Upshur thought. The responsibility was one he preferred handled by a scholar of the law. "I must ask you to draft the preamble of a treaty, & the clauses transferring the territory," he wrote Tucker, anticipating that the long-unresolved issue of Texas' annexation, now nearly a decade old, was soon to be resolved. "It is not yet certain that I shall need it," Upshur wrote of his anticipated treaty, "but the possibilities are that I shall, & that too, within the present month. This, however, is *entre nous*."¹

When Upshur accepted appointment to the State Department in the summer of 1843, the annexation of Texas numbered among his principal objectives. It also represented his principal problem. Since Texans revolted against Mexican rule in 1836, annexation of the Lone Star republic had been looked upon by most white southerners as desirable. Many

annexationists even maintained that the United States held rightful claim to Texas dating from the Louisiana Purchase, a claim that had been betrayed, they argued, by the antislavery northerner John Quincy Adams in his negotiation of the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819. Not by coincidence, as annexationists were themselves intently aware, their hopes of bringing Texas into the Union remained unfulfilled largely as a result of Whig hesitance, not just the opposition of northern antislavery advocates such as Adams—which was considerable and unremitting—but more significantly by the opposition of southern Whigs who aided Adams by putting party above sectional interests.

Since receiving appointment as Secretary of State, however, Upshur had witnessed a series of developments that held the possibility of casting the Texas issue in a new light. First news of Lewis Tappan's mission to London, then Robert Monroe Harrison's report of abolitionist intrigues in the West Indies, and finally the Peel Ministry's immigration proposal had pointed to the strong possibility of British interference in Texas, a possibility he intended his inquiry to Jamaica to demonstrate beyond doubt. Expecting that it would, Upshur betrayed his confidence even before he received answers from the West Indies. "I wish to talk with you about the annexation of Texas," Upshur wrote Tucker in October 1843, almost six weeks before he received Harrison's first report in later November "That is the question of the day," Upshur emphasized. "In my view of it, the future of the country lay upon it. The Union will not last ten years without it, & the preservation of peace among the nations will be impossible."²

Upshur's confidence in his ability to demonstrate that British policies represented a threat to American interests in Texas owed to his recent discovery, which he expected to validate as soon as he received the results of his inquiry to Jamaica, that economic incentive underlay British antislavery policies. "I am sanguine in the belief that I can make the question so clear that even the Yankees will go for annexation," he confided to Tucker. "They are you know, an 'uncommon moral and religious people,' & greatly

opposed to the sin of slavery, since they ceased to carry on the slave trade; but there is one point on which you may be sure of them, & that is their interest.” Quick to draw attention to economic considerations, Upshur expressed confidence, similar to his instructions to Thomas Murphy in early August, that British objectives constituted a threat to northern interests. “As I can show them that the annexation of Texas will be for the good of their commerce & manufactures,” Upshur expected “I shall probably have their support.” If he won northerners’ support of annexation, Upshur knew he could count on southern Whigs. By implication he would have strengthened unity in the South, always an objective of proslavery ideologues. “If I can succeed in this matter,” he told Tucker, “it will be something in which to retire to private life.”³

Tucker soon saw for himself the evidence upon which Upshur based his understanding of British antislavery incentives. Soon after receiving Harrison’s first report from Jamaica, Upshur lent it to Tucker, presumably for his edification and apparently without recording in State Department ledgers the report’s arrival. When and how Tucker received the report remains a mystery. Perhaps Upshur sent it from Washington, enclosed with his letter of December 4, 1843 as he requested Tucker’s assistance with a treaty of annexation. Perhaps Upshur later delivered it in person. In any event, Tucker almost certainly received Harrison’s report before February 28, 1844, when an explosion aboard the USS *Princeton* killed several members of Tyler’s cabinet, including the Secretary of State. As Upshur’s death necessitated his replacement in the State Department, a vacancy filled by John C. Calhoun, the tragedy profoundly influenced the course of Texas annexation. It also left Tucker, shaken by his friend’s sudden and unexpected death, with an official State Department document in hand.⁴

Ultimately, considerations of how or when Tucker received Harrison’s report loom less important than the reasons why. Clearly Upshur wished to enlighten Tucker as to the Great Experiment’s shortcomings, an objective that takes on additional meaning in

light of Tucker's prior proslavery arguments. Never one to emphasize economic matters, Tucker focused on considerations of morality and politics, so much so that his social and political emphases led him to de-emphasize economic considerations to the point of denying them altogether. Believing the South had no economic interest in maintaining slavery, Tucker anticipated non-viability arguments of the early twentieth century by insisting that slavery was more costly than free labor, even unprofitable. In these arguments, Tucker exemplified southern slaveholders' receptiveness of Joseph John Gurney's mission to Washington in May 1840. As Gurney's arguments—and the understanding of British antislavery motives associated with them—now appeared misleading, however, Upshur undoubtedly hoped Tucker would rethink his economic assumptions. Certainly the parallels between Jamaica and the American South, especially regarding considerations of demography and the immense amount of arable land available to freed slaves, seemed to imply that the South stood every chance of befalling the Great Experiment's fate should southerners embrace abolition.⁵

The extent to which Harrison's report influenced Tucker remains unclear. Receiving the report just as he was completing his best remembered proslavery tract, "An Essay on the Moral and Political Effect of the Relation between the Caucasian Master and the Negro Slave," Tucker omitted any mention of the Great Experiment in the article published in two parts in the *Southern Literary Messenger* the following spring and summer. Perhaps the knowledge in Harrison's report figured into Tucker's increasing radicalism, as he emerged as a leading disunionist until his death in 1851.⁶

One result of Harrison's report can be established beyond all doubt: Tucker kept the document among his own personal papers. Upon learning of Upshur's death, Tucker apparently decided against bringing it to the attention of Upshur's successor or otherwise returning it to the State Department. As a result, its existence—as well as all meaningful evidence of Upshur's inquiry—remained unknown to State Department

records, later methodically catalogued in the National Archives, as well as to scholars of American foreign relations who frequent those records. Instead, Harrison's first report was included among long-neglected miscellany of the Tucker-Coleman Collection at the College of William and Mary, where it failed to attract the notice of scholars in search of Upshur's designs for annexing Texas. Consequently, Harrison's forty-seven page report, deemed by its author "the best and most faithful report of the working of the free labor system and consequent results therefrom," remained lost and unknown to scholars for almost 160 years.⁷

Although the influence of Upshur's inquiry still eludes precise determination, its discovery sheds light on a significant development in antebellum America. Scholars have long recognized Texas annexation as a turning point in the sectional crisis that eventually led to secession and civil war. Yet crucial determinants of the annexation and later sectional crisis have eluded scholars attention. These determinants in part owed to changes in southern slaveholders' understanding of the results of the Great Experiment. In August 1843, when British Minister Edward Fox presented the Peel Ministry's proposal for an immigration agreement, prevailing opinion in Washington of the experiment's results closely resembled Gurney's message of May 1840. Within twelve months, however, key policymakers and journalists in the American South had acquired a new understanding of the free-labor experiment and consequently of Britain's antislavery motivations. It can be no coincidence that the American sectional crisis deepened in the twenty-four months after the Peel Ministry's immigration proposal of August 1843, nor that southern slaveholders, always earnest in their defense of their peculiar institution, resolved to take their defense to the radical lengths of disunion and civil war.⁸

Judged by its original purpose, Upshur's inquiry into the working of the free labor system of the British West Indies must be considered a failure. Impressed by the implications of Fox's proposal, especially its confirmation that Britain was "suffering severely" by its commitment to the Great Experiment, Upshur immediately set sight on accumulating the necessary votes to garner Texas' annexation to the Union. Like most southern slaveholders, Upshur at this time wished to see Texas come into the Union. Indeed, he had advocated annexation since the republic's independence in 1836. The problem was—and had always been—Whig opposition in Congress, especially the resistance of southern Whigs who heeded the call of northern colleagues to put the concerns of their party above purely sectional interests. When they put party above section, however, southern Whigs did so in the presumption that Texas and southern slavery interests stood in no immediate danger from foreign threats, particularly from British antislavery policies. This sense of security had been based in part in the confidence, given vivid support by Joseph John Gurney's mission to Washington in May 1840, that the Great Experiment was succeeding. Therefore, southern slaveholders believed, Britain therefore lacked economic incentive to further antislavery objectives elsewhere, and that Britain would especially hesitate before alienating its chief supplier of cotton.⁹

Fox's proposal exploded this rationale. Even if it pointed to no immediate threat, it suggested the possibility. Where economic incentive was involved, there could always be said to exist the possibility of conflict. In the case of Great Britain and the circumstances of its commitment to free labor, that possibility seemed all the more tenable. In any event, Fox's proposal provided grounds for southern Whigs to reconsider their previous understanding of slavery's security. A legitimate threat need not be demonstrated, only its logic, which previously had been missing. Upshur's instructions to Texas dated August 8, 1843 went to considerable lengths to develop just such an argument, also

encouraging Murphy to vigilance in collecting evidence for its further elaboration. Those instructions, however, were based largely on Duff Green's arguments. Prior to Fox's proposal even Upshur had not been persuaded by Green's argument's of a British economic crisis with close ties to the free labor experiment in the West Indies. In any event, no matter how persuasive Green's arguments might be in light of Fox's proposal, their association with Green was sure to render them suspect to southern Whigs, the officeholders Upshur most needed to win over in support of Texas annexation. A former Jacksonian Democrat who had estranged himself from his former party by his support of South Carolina's Nullification movement, Green, of course, was anathema to most Whigs by his previous close association with Jackson.

Upshur's inquiry therefore offered the opportunity to demonstrate the economic logic of British threats to Texas separate from any and all association with Green. Harrison's credibility had also been called into question, especially by abolitionists who discerned in the *Virginian* an undeniable proslavery bias. But the answers Upshur sought were not Harrison's. Designed to collect empirical evidence gained from respected authorities in the West Indies with first-hand knowledge of the previous system of slavery as well as the working of the subsequent free-labor experiment, the inquiry collected five sets of answers from British citizens, two from French observers, and an eighth from the British consul. The answers were also expedited in their delivery to Washington, presumably so Upshur could have them at his disposal as the first session of the Twenty-eighth Congress opened in early December 1843.

In early October, anticipating Harrison's answers, Upshur even expressed confidence that he would soon "make the question so clear that even the Yankees will go for annexation." More than Lewis Tappan's proposal to the Peel Ministry in June, more than Fox's proposal, more even more than Lord Aberdeen's assertion in December 1843 "that Great Britain desires, and is constantly exerting herself to procure the general

abolition of slavery throughout the world,” it was Lord Brougham’s assertion, made in Parliament in August 1843, that for Upshur highlighted the crux of British threats to Texas. Advocating a bill to forbid British subjects from purchasing slaves in foreign lands, Brougham argued that “having abolished slavery, and thereby raised the price of labor in her colonies,” England “was bound as an act of justice to her Colonial subjects to abolish slavery everywhere.” In October, soon after arrival of word in Washington of Brougham’s further expressed wish that his government actively promote abolition in Texas, Upshur received Murphy’s reply to his instructions of August 8, 1843. “It is most unquestionably the desire of Great Britain to abolish slavery in Texas,” Murphy reported, drawing attention also to “President Houston, with all the members of his cabinet, and some few influential individual fanatics” who “are also desirous of the abolition of slavery.” It mattered little that Murphy also reported that “neither Great Britain, nor President Houston, nor his cabinet, have even dared to aver such to be their views . . . knowing that 99 out of 100 of the people would rise up against them.” Prepared to welcome proslavery Texans into the Union, but little prepared to chance their ability to counter British threats, Upshur drew his attention to the motives behind British threats. The Upshur inquiry was intended to disclose the failure of the Great Experiment as the roots of those motives. Although scholars later drew attention to Aberdeen’s comments of December 1843, for Upshur, at least, Aberdeen’s validation of British antislavery objectives was both anticlimactic and unrevealing of the motivation that underlay those objectives.¹⁰

If Upshur’s efforts fell short of convincing Yankees to go for annexation, he nevertheless made considerable headway before his sudden and unexpected death by the explosion aboard the USS *Princeton* in late February 1844. Scheduled to receive Harrison’s first report of October 11 in early December, Upshur unfortunately left little record of his results of lobbying Congress before his death. Fastidious in his service on the Virginia bench and in his reform of the Navy Department, Upshur almost certainly

lined up votes before initiating formal negotiations with envoys from the Republic of Texas. The very existence of formal negotiations suggests his confidence in Senate support, as fellow officeholders later confirmed. In the days immediately after Upshur's death, Senator George McDuffie urged John C. Calhoun to accept appointment as Upshur's successor, informing Calhoun that "the Texas question is in such a state that in ten days after your arrival the Treaty of annexation would be signed, and from poor Upshur's count 40 senators would vote for it." Even as late as April 13, *Niles National Register* predicted that the treaty could expect the support of forty senators—considerably more than the two-thirds majority needed out of a full Senate contingent of fifty-one—including all twenty-six senators from slaveholding states.¹¹

Although Upshur's treaty counted sufficient votes for passage as late as April 1844, the support of Whigs soon eroded. Often cited as a principal reason for the treaty's eventual defeat, Calhoun's famous missive to British Minister Thomas Pakenham, dated April 18, was unlikely to deter southern Whigs. More likely they were influenced by Henry Clay's announced opposition to the treaty. The party's presidential candidate, and a southern Whig himself, the Kentuckian's opposition forced colleagues to rethink their votes. Yet even then, however, had southern Whigs followed Clay's lead it would have meant choosing party over section in the face of an uncertain British threat. Ultimately what influenced Whigs to oppose the treaty was its association, soon alleged by the Tyler Administration's enemies during senate debates, with Duff Green, fueling speculation that the treaty was a conspiracy and political ploy of the Tyler Administration. It was particularly telling that the allegations were made by Thomas Hart Benton, a senator from slaveholding Missouri and a supporter of Martin Van Buren, a hopeful for the Democratic nomination for president. The New Yorker Van Buren had joined Clay and northern Whigs in announcing his opposition to annexation, and as Van Buren's opposition was seconded by so prominent a Democrat as Benton, the result was to assert

Whig loyalties to party over sectional concerns that smacked of conspiracy. No one suffered more by Benton's allegations than Upshur, who of course was not present to defend himself. Tucker, privy to Harrison's answers to Upshur's inquiry, might have attempted to rescue his friend's reputation, but as Tucker was himself an avowed disunionist very much estranged from the mainstream of the Democratic and Whig parties, he doubtless saw the futility of any such attempt. In any event, southern Whigs in the Senate continued to oppose annexation, first by voting overwhelmingly against Upshur's treaty (14 to 1) and then later against the joint resolution that brought Texas into the Union (12-3). In the House southern Whigs also weighed in against annexation by a vote of 18-9. In the end Texas annexation was achieved by majority vote split almost perfectly along party lines and despite Upshur's hopes for sectional solidarity.¹²

If Upshur's inquiry failed in its original objective, it nevertheless proved successful in drawing southern slaveholders' attention to Britain's risk in committing to the Great Experiment. If not the exact details, the substance of Harrison's three replies to Upshur's inquiry soon became widely understood in the American South. Before Fox's proposal, southern slaveholders like John C. Calhoun contented themselves with the idea of the Great Experiment's success. It reassured them of their republican virtue by permitting them to say they had foregone the greater profits of free labor. It reassured them too of British intentions by conveying the impression of British economic mastery, the opposite of desperation that might prompt aggressive antislavery policies. In a seeming irony, the acceptance of the Great Experiment's success provided solace that in turn permitted southern Whigs to think in terms of party alignment rather than sectional loyalty.

After August 1843, southern slaveholders revised their estimate of their society's role in world affairs. Disclosing what Britain had wished to keep hidden, Fox's proposal led to Upshur's inquiry, which provided details that soon emerged as staples of southern

proslavery thought. Yet by divulging free labor's weaknesses, southern slaveholders soon came to realize that weak neighbors make for dangerous neighbors.

* * *

Even as late as August 1843, John C. Calhoun remained convinced that Joseph John Gurney had been right. Abel Upshur, having recently received Fox's proposal, dispatched instructions to Murphy and dispatched his inquiry to Jamaica, immediately turned his attention to Calhoun. Seeking the advice of the slaveholding South's staunchest defender, Upshur approached Calhoun with presumptions in mind gained recently by virtue of his holding the office of Secretary of State. "There can be no doubt," Upshur informed Calhoun, "that England is determined to abolish slavery throughout the American continent & islands, if she can. It is worse than childish to suppose that she mediates this great movement simply from an impulse of philanthropy. We must look for a stronger motive for such an attempt on the part of a great & wise nation." In his search for that motive, Upshur struck upon ideas that made no sense by Gurney's rendition of the results of the Great Experiment. "I think there is a crisis in her affairs," Upshur emphasized, which prompted the need "to destroy all competition with the labour of her colonies" and revealed, even more menacingly, that "at all events, there are no backward steps for her."¹³

Calhoun's response, dated August 27, 1843, stood in stark contrast to the language he would employ as Secretary of State a year later. "You do not, in my opinion, attach too much importance to the designs of Great Britain in Texas," he assured Upshur. "That she is using all her diplomatick arts and influence to abolish slavery there, with the intention of abolishing it in the United States, there can no longer be a doubt." Yet Calhoun's understanding of British motivation differed from Upshur's in a fundamental way. While Upshur's understanding of British antislavery motivation drew attention to a post-emancipation crisis, Calhoun's understanding of British policies remained similar

to his Opium War speech of March 1840: “no nation, in ancient, or modern time, ever pursued dominion & commercial monopoly more perseveringly & vehemently than she has. She unites in herself the ambition of Rome and the avarice of Carthage.” Whereas Upshur portrayed Britain dangerous because it was desperate, Calhoun cast Britain as an evil, all-powerful empire. This distinction was not lost on Upshur, who saw in Fox’s proposal far more desperation than avarice. Realizing as well that Calhoun’s “avarice” argument depended upon a conviction of British malevolence which Calhoun himself conceded was not shared widely in the South, Upshur realized that knowledge of the Great Experiment’s shortcomings would prove a far more effective means of stirring vigilance in the South. Both slaveholders agreed, for example, that most southerners were ill-informed of the British threat to Texas. “I am of the impression,” Calhoun urged, “that the question of annexation ought not to be agitated till discussion has prepared the publick mind to realize the danger.” What separated them was the basis of British motives.¹⁴

Within a year, Calhoun had converted to Upshur’s viewpoint. “It is too late in the day to contend that humanity or philanthropy is the great object of the policy of England in attempting to abolish African slavery on this continent,” Calhoun observed in August 1844, not unlike his previous conviction of British motives. What was different now was what followed his observation: “I do not question that humanity may have been one of her leading motives for the abolition of the African slave trade, and that it may have had considerable influence in abolishing slavery in her West India possession, aided, indeed, by the fallacious calculation that the labor of negroes would at least be as profitable, if not more so, in consequence of the measure.” Whereas previously Calhoun had hinged his suspicions of British designs on a belief of British avarice, now he informed William R. King, U.S. Minister to France, that “the labor of her negroes has proved less productive, without affording the consolation of having improved their condition. The experiment has proven to be a costly one.”¹⁵

The difference in Calhoun's interpretation of British motives was directly attributable to his appointment as Secretary of State. Taking office in March 1844, after Upshur's death the previous month, Calhoun found himself privy to the wealth of information collected by Upshur's inquiry. Whether Calhoun ever viewed Harrison's report of October 11, 1843, withheld from State Department files and in the possession of Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, remains unclear. In any event, Harrison submitted numerous follow-up reports, including one specifically addressed to Calhoun in May 1844 that summarized the findings of his larger first despatch. Harrison also submitted occasional clippings from Jamaican newspapers that drew Calhoun's attention to the subject of ruin predominant in the colony's House of Assembly. In the debates reported in the *Kingston Morning Journal* of March 8, 1844, Calhoun learned just how completely the Great Experiment had failed. "It must be our duty to show the British nation that free-grown cannot compete with slave-grown sugar so long as slavery exists" argued one assembly representative, "but that if slavery were abolished all over the world, we would soon go ahead of them."¹⁶

Crucial too, as Calhoun himself later admitted, was his reading of the geographer James MacQueen's article "Africa—Slave Trade—Tropical Colonies," published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in June 1844. In a far-ranging article that sought to promote legitimate commerce in Africa, MacQueen demonstrated the ill effects of the Atlantic slave trade and the Great Experiment's shortcomings on Britain's international position. "If the foreign slave trade be not extinguished, and the cultivation of the Tropical territories of other power opposed and checked by British Tropical cultivation," he argued, "then the interests and the power of such states will rise into a preponderance over those of Great Britain; and the power and influence of the latter will cease to be felt, feared, and respected amongst the civilized and powerful nations of this world."¹⁷

As a result of these influences, Calhoun quickly emerged an expert on the risk Britain incurred with the Great Experiment. In addition to the “one hundred millions of dollars in indemnifying the owners of the emancipated slaves,” he informed William R. King, “it is estimated that the increased price paid since by the people of Great Britain for sugar and other tropical production . . . is equal to half that sum, and that twice that amount has been expended in the suppression of the slave trade—making, together, two hundred and fifty millions of dollars as the cost of the experiment.”¹⁸

“But this is not the worst,” Calhoun hastened to add. “While this costly scheme has had such ruinous effects on the tropical productions of Great Britain, it has given powerful stimulus, followed by a corresponding increase of products, to those countries which have had the good sense to shun her example.” Calhoun now rejected Gurney’s arguments of the Great Experiment’s success, in particular its lessons for the world’s slaveholders. Referring to Britain, “the experiment in her own colonies was made under the most favorable circumstances,” he emphasized. “Very different would be the result of abolition should it be effected by her influence and exertions in the possessions of other countries on this continent, and especially in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil. To form a correct example of what would be the result with them, we must look not to Jamaica, but to St. Domingo, as an example.”¹⁹

As Calhoun and fellow southern slaveholders looked to the Texas annexation crisis and its many potential results, they did so with newfound respect of the viability of their institution of slave labor. Always defensive of their interests in slavery, afterward their interest deepened. If previously these lessons had been limited in their availability to high-ranking officeholders, by fall 1844 the lessons of Upshur’s inquiry had begun to come to the attention of the South’s most influential journalists.

In October 1844 readers of the *Southern Quarterly Review* turned to an anonymous article, “The Annexation of Texas,” that laid bare lessons of the Great Experiment far different from Gurney’s message of May 1840. Published in Columbia, South Carolina, and at the time under the editorship of James D.B. De Bow, the *Southern Quarterly Review* frequently published writings of William Gilmore Simms, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, and other members of the South’s intellectual community. Unfortunately, the author’s identity in this case eludes determination, as does the article’s exact sources. Whether or not the author had access to Harrison’s report of October 11, 1843, the content and tone of the article starkly contrast Gurney’s message of the Great Experiment’s success. “The experiment of the emancipation of the slaves held in the British colonies has not succeeded as Great Britain anticipated,” the author warned. “As an economical experiment, it has resulted in a total failure.”²⁰

Reminding readers of their past attachment to Gurney’s message, the author undertook to explain the significance of the Quaker minister’s error. “Great Britain has taken more than ordinary pains that, as an economical experiment, it should succeed,” the author asserted, emphasizing even Gurney’s recognition that in production, not Smithian arguments of labor efficiency, lay the key to assessing the Great Experiment. “This was the beneficial ‘example’ she proposed to present the world,” the author remarked, quoting the British abolitionist: “‘I explained to our black brethren,’ says Mr. Gurney, in one of his letters to Mr. Clay, ‘who flocked from the country to the meeting, how greatly they would promote the cause of emancipation in other parts of the world by setting an example of patient industry as cultivators of the soil, and by increasing the staple exports of the island.’” Even with urging “the freed persons did not respond as Gurney would have liked,” the author emphasized. As a result, as “the eyes of North America, in particular, were fixed upon Jamaica, watching the pecuniary as well as the

moral result of the great experiment,” those results differed fundamentally from those Gurney would have had southerners believe.²¹

The results seemed to gratify the author, presumably as they appeared to redeem the racist grounds of white southerners’ proslavery ideology. “The results of emancipation to the negro race have happened precisely as one acquainted with them would have predicted,” readers learned. “The Jamaica negroes enjoy themselves more since their emancipation than before. The enjoyment consists of doing no thing. It consists in an unchecked proclivity back again into stupidity, idleness, ad sensuality.” In the end, and in stark contrast to the message of Gurney’s five grand points, the Great Experiment failed, argued the author, because the freed slaves rejected the ideals and interests of their former masters. “Their wants are few and simple,” the author asserted. Rather than commit themselves headlong to the pursuit of material goods above their immediate want, “they dedicate just labor enough to supply these wants but most of the time in frolic and idleness.”²²

In the end, the author summarized the understanding of the Great Experiment and its lessons recently gained by southern slaveholders. “The results of emancipation to the blacks of this country, and to those in Jamaica, furnish no sort of encouragement to the precipitation and haste with which the abolitionists of Great Britain and the United States pursue their plans,” the author remarked. “On the contrary, they are melancholy dissuasives against these fatal errors. They teach patience and soberness, and warn us, with an awful solemnity, to try no more experiments.”²³

NOTES

1. Upshur to Tucker, Dec. 4, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM.
2. Upshur to Tucker, Oct. 10, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Papers, WM. Also in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 234.

3. Upshur to Tucker, Oct. 10, 1843, *ibid*.
4. Although Harrison submitted his first report, collected as Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM, as an official consular despatch, several reasons explain why Tucker might have thought otherwise. The report was not numbered, an omission explained by Harrison's long tenure in Jamaica. After twelve years at his Kingston post, Harrison had long since neglected to number despatches. Second, official despatches usually contain annotation of the their date of receipt at the State Department. Harrison's first report does not, presumably because Upshur wished to conceal the fact that he lent an official document for unofficial reasons. Probably he expected Tucker to return the report, at which time its receipt at the State Department would receive annotation. Finally, probably aware that Upshur had conveyed his inquiry to Harrison by personal correspondence enclosed with official instructions rather than as official instructions, Tucker might have assumed that the answers in reply were unofficial as well.
5. Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 121, emphasizes Tucker's aversion to economic arguments.
6. Tucker, "An Essay on the Moral and Political Effect of the Relation between the Caucasian Master and the Negro Slave" 10 *Southern Literary Messenger*, Part I (June 1844): 329-39, Part II (August 1844): 470-80, nowhere mentions economic considerations.
7. Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 11, 1843, Tucker-Coleman Collection, WM. Tucker's reasons for mistaking the report as an unofficial document (listed in note 4 above) also explain in part why scholars later found few clues to the document's existence.
8. To date no conclusive proof has been located to determine the influence of Harrison's first and second reports (Oct. 11 and Oct 30, 1843, respectively). A third report, however, almost certainly drew the notice of John C. Calhoun. Dated May 4, 1844 and summarizing answers found in the first two reports, it was collected among Calhoun's personal papers and later published in the *Papers of John C. Calhoun*; Harrison to Calhoun, May 4, 1844, *PJC*, 18: 429-35. Harrison to Upshur, Oct. 30, 1843, Despatches from Consuls, Kingston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8, comprises Harrison's second report.
9. "suffering severely," Fox to Upshur, Aug. 8, 1843, M50, roll 21.
10. "that Great Britain desires . . .," Aberdeen to Thomas Pakenham [U.S. Minister to Washington], Dec. 26, 1843, enclosed in Pakenham to Upshur, Feb. 26, 1844, in *PJC*, 19: 53. "having abolished slavery . . .," Brougham remarks, Parliament, quoted by Duff Green, Green to Calhoun, Aug. 2, 1843, *PJC*, 17, 329-31, enclosed (and "not sealed . . . because I wish you to read it) in Green to Upshur, Aug. 3, 1843, Communications from Special Agents, M37, roll 13. Also in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 224-25. "It is most unquestionably . . ." Murphy to Upshur, Sept. 23, 1843, Despatches From U.S. Ministers to Texas, T728, roll 2.
11. "The Texas question is . . .," McDuffie to Calhoun, Mar. 5, 1844, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 17: 815-16. *Niles National Register*, Apr. 13, 1844, analyzed the expected vote. Fifteen Whigs numbered among the twenty-six senators from slaveholding states.

12. U.S. SENATE VOTE FOR THE TREATY OF ANNEXATION, JUNE 8, 1844
VOTE BY PARTY*

DEMOCRAT			WHIG		
FOR	AGAINST	ABSENT	FOR	AGAINST	ABSENT
15	8	1	1	26	0

PARTY VOTE BY SECTION*

		SLAVEHOLDING STATES	NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES
DEMOCRAT	For	10	5
	Against	1	7
	Absent	1	0
WHIG	For	1	0
	Against	14	12
	Absent	0	0

SLAVEHOLDING STATES (1844): Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES (1844): Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

* John B. Francis of Rhode Island, having no affiliation with either national party, is excluded from tables illustrating party voting patterns.

Compiled from *SEJ*, 28 Cong., 1 sess., 6: 312.

U.S. SENATE VOTE TO ADOPT THE JOINT RESOLUTION
FOR TEXAS ANNEXATION, FEB. 27, 1845

VOTE BY PARTY*

DEMOCRAT			WHIG		
FOR	AGAINST	ABSENT	FOR	AGAINST	ABSENT
24	0	0	3	25	0

(Continued next page)

PARTY VOTE BY SECTION*

		SLAVEHOLDING STATES	NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES
DEMOCRAT	For	11	13
	Against	0	0
	Absent	0	0
WHIG	For	3	0
	Against	12	13
	Absent	0	0

* John B. Francis of Rhode Island, with no affiliation with either national party, is excluded from tables illustrating party voting patterns.

Compiled from *CG*, 28 Cong., 2 sess., 362; and *BDAC*.

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTE TO ADOPT THE JOINT
RESOLUTION FOR TEXAS ANNEXATION, JAN. 25, 1845

VOTE BY PARTY*

DEMOCRAT			WHIG		
FOR	AGAINST	ABSENT	FOR	AGAINST	ABSENT
110	28	2	9	67	3

PARTY VOTE BY SECTION*

		SLAVEHOLDING STATES	NON-SLAVEHOLDING STATES
DEMOCRAT	For	8	52
	Against	0	28
	Absent	1	1
WHIG	For	9	0
	Against	18	49
	Absent	2	1

* Farlee (IN), Green (NY), Cranston (RI), and Green (RI), with no affiliation with either national party, are excluded from tables illustrating party voting patterns.

Compiled from *CG*, 28 Cong., 2 sess., 134; *HJ*, 28 Cong., 2 sess., 39: 264; and *BDAC*.

13. All quotes, Upshur to Calhoun, Aug. 14, 1843, *PJC*, 17: 354-57.

14. All quotes, Calhoun to Upshur, Aug. 27, 1843, *PJC*, 17: 381-83.

15. All quotes, Calhoun to King, Aug. 12, 1844, Diplomatic Instructions, France, M77, roll 55. Also in *PJC*, vol. 19, 568-78; and Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 281-88.
16. Remarks of Assembly Representative Whitelace, Jamaica House of Assembly, Feb. 27, 1844, in Kingston *Morning Journal*, Mar. 8, 1844 (enclosed in Harrison to Upshur, Mar. 8, 1844, Despatches from U.S. Consuls, Kinston, Jamaica, T31, roll 8.
17. MacQueen, "Africa—Slave Trade—Tropical Colonies," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 54 (June 1844): 742.
18. Calhoun to King, Aug. 12, 1844, Diplomatic Instructions, France, M77, roll 55.
19. Calhoun to King, Aug. 12, 1844, *ibid.*.
20. "The Annexation of Texas," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 12 (Oct. 1844): 483-520: 507.
21. "The Annexation of Texas," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 12 (Oct. 1844): 483-520: 507.
22. "The Annexation of Texas," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 12 (Oct. 1844): 483-520: 507-08.
23. The Annexation of Texas," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 12 (Oct. 1844): 483-520: 509.

EPILOGUE:
SLAVERY IS KING

On March 4, 1858, South Carolina Senator James Henry Hammond, addressing the U.S. Senate amid the heated debates over the Lecompton Constitution, turned to his northern colleagues and proclaimed with unabashed certainty “no, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton is king.” Drawing upon economic data that supported his contention that cotton formed the backbone of the American and British economies, Hammond conveyed an idea that would come to form the centerpiece of Confederate diplomacy in less than three years’ time. Cotton drove the world’s industrial economies, he boasted, a fact that bestowed its suppliers privileged position enjoyed by no others. Yet just as soon as Hammond voiced his oft-quoted phrase, he acknowledged the speciousness of his claim. It was not cotton that he meant to claim as king—it was cotton grown by slaves. “The greatest strength of the South arises from the harmony of her political and social institutions,” and because of it, Hammond asserted, “the South . . . is satisfied, harmonious, and prosperous.” As he surveyed other societies of the world, in particular that of the free-labor North whose representatives in Washington would not let the South alone, he perceived slavery in the guise of free labor. “In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life,” or what he deemed the “the very mud-sill of society.” No different from other societies in that regard, the North nevertheless presumed itself superior all the while “you meet more beggars in one day, in any single street of the city of New York, than you would meet in a lifetime in the whole South.” The South remained patriarchal, its slaves were black, inferiors “elevated from the condition in which God first created them, by being made our slaves,” and above all it was prosperous.¹

Faced by the claim of New York Senator William Henry Seward that Republicans would soon displace southerners from their position of dominance in the American

republic, Hammond did not doubt it. A political movement headed by leaders who voiced urgency in their cause, the Republican party represented a threat to the South's prosperity and Hammond knew it. Rather than dispute the probability of Republican victory, he exalted the republic they stood to inherit: "do not forget—it can never be forgotten—it is written on the brightest page of human history—that we, the slaveholders of the South, took our country in her infancy, and, after ruling her for sixty out of the seventy years of her existence, we surrendered her." Purposeful, the militaristic depiction of the foreseen transfer of power brought attention to the reasons for contention. Republicans were jealous of slavery's prosperity, Hammond knew, as he emphasized that when he and his slaveholding colleagues surrendered control of the republic they would do so "without a stain upon her honor, boundless in prosperity, incalculable in her strength, the wonder and admiration of the world. Time will show what you will make of her; but no time can diminish our glory or your responsibility."²

Hammond's twin themes of the South's prosperity and its political vulnerability echoed what had emerged a central theme of political thought in the late antebellum South. Looking to other societies of the world, southern slaveholders by contrast liked what they saw in their own institutions. Compared to the capitalists of the free-labor North—and especially those of the free-labor British Caribbean—southern slaveholders enjoyed a combination of a traditional, deep-rooted society with its patriarchal sensibility and, above all, prosperity. When Hammond and fellow slaveholders of the late-antebellum South looked at their society they saw a bright future. They saw prosperity boundless save but for one threat. Republicans could wrest control of the republic, after which time the days of their prosperity would surely be numbered. Until that time, however, Hammond determined to enjoy slavery's privileged status. Slavery was king.

* * *

Antebellum southern slaveholders had not always considered slavery king. Indeed, until confronted by the failure of the Great Experiment, they had taken comfort in thinking the British had profited by converting from slave to free labor. But in acknowledging free labor superior to slavery, of course, southern slaveholders had not the slightest intention of following Britain's example. White southerners' conceptions of their republican liberties and racial harmony based on white supremacy, as well as their livelihood, dictated defense of their peculiar institution. If slavery was inferior to free labor, it nevertheless paid handsomely enough.

Not all white southerners at all times before August 1843 accepted the Great Experiment as a success. From his post in Kingston, Jamaica, Consul Robert Monroe Harrison saw problems from the beginning. Duff Green's visits to London in 1841-1842 brought him a sophisticated understanding of the Great Experiment's failings and the significance of its shortcomings to the British polity. Similarly, James Henry Hammond understood the Great Experiment to be a failure before 1843. While visiting Britain in 1836-1837, Hammond needed only a chance passing of British abolitionists' railings against the evils of Apprenticeship to understand the problems plaguing British West India. He also became attentive to British periodicals. Later, in 1845, in his celebrated "Letter to an English Abolitionist" addressed to Thomas Clarkson, Hammond deflected suggestions that American slaveholders should follow the British example of abolition by pointing to the underachievement of the Great Experiment. "I know of no slaveholder who has visited the West Indies since Slavery was abolished, and published his views of it. All our facts and opinions come through the friends of the experiment," Hammond discerned. "Taking these, even without allowance, to be true as stated, I do not see where abolitionists find cause for exultation. The table of exports, which are the best evidences of the condition of a people, exhibit a woeful falling off." Hammond failed to

clarify the source of his tables, thinking it unnecessary. To validate the import of his point, he cited a source sure to be respected by a British abolitionist. “The truth, deduced from all the facts,” he noted, “was thus pithily stated by the London Quarterly Review, as long ago as 1840: ‘None of the benefits anticipated by mistaken good intentions have been realized, while every evil wished for by knaves and foreseen by the wise has been painfully verified. The wild rashness of fanaticism has made the emancipation of the slaves equivalent to the loss of one-half of the West Indies, and yet put back the chance of negro civilization.’” Later in 1845, Hammond stated his views more frankly: “Emancipation destroyed the West Indies.”³

Yet in each case, and although strictly correct in their reporting, these early observations were made by persons at the time on the barest fringe of influence—in Washington or elsewhere. Harrison’s meager connections left him banished to the increasingly impoverished consulship in Kingston, where he served twenty-seven years before his death in 1858. Little remembered by his own generation, he was later virtually forgotten. Green’s efforts garnered him nothing more than appointments to consular posts in Galveston and the West Indies. Estranged and bitter even after the Civil War, he recounted in his outlandishly self-serving memoirs, *Facts and Suggestions, Biographical, Historical, Financial and Political, Addressed to the People of the United States*, that he enjoyed far greater influence with the Tyler Administration than was the case. Hammond, too, found himself out of favor in South Carolina, the result of a rift with his state’s most respected politician, John C. Calhoun. Hammond therefore stood little chance of exerting any great influence, not that he attempted to share his views of British abolition at any length before 1845—by which time his views were accepted by Calhoun and leading newspaper editors of the South.⁴

Rather than the efforts of Harrison, Green, and Hammond, therefore, it was an official British overture in August 1843 that awakened southern leaders to the true results of the Great Experiment. Far from the portrait of prosperity Joseph John Gurney depicted during his visit to Washington in May 1840, Upshur's inquiry to Harrison in the fall of 1843 revealed the extent of, and reasons for, the experiment's troubles. Impressed by the findings and their implications for British antislavery ambitions, Upshur expedited measures to annex Texas soon after receiving Harrison's report from Jamaica. Upshur also shared the findings with his friend Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, a fire-eating radical with strong ties among proslavery intellectuals, including outspoken editor James D.B. De Bow. Harrison also shared the findings of Upshur's inquiry, bringing them to John C. Calhoun's attention in the spring of 1844. Calhoun had welcomed the experiment's success, especially its implications. Now he abruptly manifested a changed point of view. Whereas in August 1843 Calhoun believed Britain abundantly prosperous and hypocritical in its antislavery policies—pursued, he believed, merely to placate Britain's antislavery lobby—the following summer he revealed his alarm over Britain's economic desperation and the meaning it held for the security of slavery interests worldwide. By the following October, when De Bow's *Southern Quarterly Review* published an article expressing identical concerns, acceptance of the Great Experiment's failure had entered the mainstream of southern political thought.

By 1846 Calhoun and his slaveholding colleagues in Congress had become long acquainted with the failings of the Great Experiment. They were aware too of the lessons its failure held for relations between slavery-based and free-holding polities. In August of that year, as southerners watched, Pennsylvania Representative David Wilmot objected to the extension of slavery into any lands acquired by war with Mexico. Southern leaders received Wilmot's reasoning in the knowledge that slavery's demise

likely could only result by political means. Afterward, as southerners continued to resist calls of territorial exclusion to slavery, they adopted what became known as the Platform of the South in the realization that the free-labor North possessed economic incentive to limit slavery's extension westward. By limiting slavery to the South as the South existed in 1846, northerners could hope to add states in the Midwest, Northwest, and Far West until they far eclipsed the representation of slavery states in Washington. Similarly, the filibustering expeditions of the succeeding decade proceeded in the understanding that the South's bright economic future required ever-increasing radicalism to maintain the region's political equality within the Union.⁵

By 1858, after Calhoun's death, as well as the passing of other former adversaries, Hammond at last found a place in the spotlight. Yet he spoke of the advent of "Black Republicanism" with an unmistakable fatalism. While his declaration that "Slavery is King" resonated through the Senate chambers—as well as in textbooks decades afterward—Hammond betrayed a suspicion that slavery's heyday within the Union was fast approaching its end. If the end was to come, he knew, it was not to be the result of any economic shortcomings. Rather, the end was to come by political—even military—means at the hands of free-labor enemies jealous of slavery's prosperity. Slavery was king and Hammond knew it. But he also knew the king had earnest enemies.

NOTES

1. All quotes, Hammond remarks, U.S. Senate, Mar. 4, 1858, *CG*, 35 Cong., 1 sess, 960-61.
2. All quotes, Hammond remarks, U.S. Senate, Mar, 4, 1858, *ibid*.
3. "I know of no slaveholder . . ." and "The truth, deduced from all the facts . . .," Hammond to Clarkson, Jan. 28, 1845, in Drew Gilpin Faust. *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 168-205, 200. "Emancipation destroyed . . .," Hammond to ?, Aug. 22, 1845, LC, roll 6. Wilkins. "A Window on Freedom," 279-81, draws attention to Hamilton's views, by 1845 widely shared. Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design*

for *Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 186-203, recounts Hammond's visit to Britain, as well as Hammond's friendship with Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, 267, which dated from the time of Hammond's letter to Clarkson.

4. Green, *Facts & Suggestions, Biographical, Historical, Financial and Political, Addressed to the People of the United States* (New York: Richardson, 1866). Hammond incurred Calhoun's displeasure first in 1836 by overstepping what Calhoun considered appropriate bases for the House Gag Rule, then again in 1845 by criticism of what Hammond considered Calhoun's conservative stance in defense of slavery; Faust, *James Henry Hammond*, 171-75, 284-85.

5. Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 38-51, recounts the origins of Calhoun's Platform of the South, emphasizing that rejection of territorial exclusion became the *sine qua non* of southern politics thereafter. Copper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 213-85, also sees the territorial issue as the basis of the South's radical revolution during the 1850s. Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), and "Epilogue to the Missouri Compromise: The South, the Balance of Power, and the Tropics in the 1850s." *Plantation Society* 1 (June 1979): 201-225, 209-10, emphasizes filibustering as an alternative to secession for most southern radicals, which helps to explain why southerners quickly abandoned their dream of a Caribbean empire after secession.

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