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# Minding Civilisation and Humanity in 1867: A Case Study in British Imperial Culture and Victorian Anti-Slavery

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*As this analysis of press debate in 1867 finds, Victorian opposition to slavery defies any simple classification as universal humanitarianism or imperial reform. British anti-slavery sentiment, in very different contexts, might claim the mantle of Christendom, the empire or human civilisation. By considering such a porous area of international and colonial policy in public discussion, this article highlights some surprising common-alities between Bernard Porter's 'absent-mindedness' thesis and its critics. In doing so the piece suggests some possible directions for the new imperial history, as British historians reject an impenetrable national story and yet appreciate the sheer breadth of Victorian narrow-mindedness about the wider world.*

Historians have eagerly debated how far Britain's empire shaped the politics and culture of its metropole, not least in the pages of this journal. Something more can be added by considering how 'imperial' ambitions blended with ideas about humanity, civilisation and the wider world. The history of British anti-slavery provides fruitful evidence for a reconsideration of those questions, precisely because efforts to suppress global slave trades did not respect the boundaries of national, international or imperial politics. Considering how Britons imagined their imperial and international respon-sibilities to anti-slavery might contribute to two veins of historical inquiry: This approach promises new insights about humanitarianism in nineteenth-century Britain, as well as the nature of anti-slavery sentiment and the influence of 'imperial-ism' on the metropole, while offering twice as many opportunities to offend eminent scholars.

Such grand aspirations are only as good as the empirical research on which they are founded. In this case, anti-slavery culture will be examined through three episodes during the year 1867. This period saw the slave-trade suppression policies of the

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British state turn from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, amid discussion about the legacies of slavery in the British West Indies and the United States. Such a narrow case study provides the opportunity to examine a wide range of Victorian encounters with 'slavery' and 1867 was representative of variety even if it was unusually busy and significant. For this purpose, the focus is not on the high politics of policy but popular discussion of the wider world, as regards slavery and the slave trade. Before studying debates regarding old and new slaveries, it is helpful to review the awkward silences surrounding anti-slavery imperialism and the contentious debates about 'absent-minded imperialists', both of which the present investigation promises to address.

## Histories of Anti-Slavery and Empire

Until very recently, the field of British slavery and abolition research—thanks to the importance of comparative studies—has been strangely disconnected from both British and imperial narratives.[1] A broad distaste for the slave trade in particular and slave-holding more generally has seemed, after British emancipation, to be a humanitarian or philanthropic sentiment which held no great respect for red lines on a map. The diplomatic and military campaign to suppress the Atlantic slave trade was both 'alchemical' and 'emergency' humanitarianism, presented either as an immediate relief to the hellish sufferings of slaves crammed aboard ships or as a vital first step in unleashing the progress of commerce, Christianity and civilisation.[2] While government action tended to treat the suppression of intercontinental slave trades as a sphere for British responsibility, but not internal institutions of other countries, early Victorian readers often imagined cultural influence over those Europeans and Americans still tolerating slavery.[3]

Scholars have been remarkably industrious in reconsidering Britain's histories of slavery and empire in recent decades. However, the relationship between imperial culture and anti-slavery after the abolitions of the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1834–38) has remained under-studied. Recent interpretations of this broader context, from very different authors, have tried to balance the roles of anti-slavery as sincere restraint of imperial cruelty and also self-serving excuse for the swaggering, bigoted imperial attitudes of later-Victorian conquest.[4] Reconciling these two perspectives has proved no easier for specialists researching British anti-slavery. Arguably, the first professional historian of British anti-slavery was a living embodiment of both views: writing in 1933, Sir Reginald Coupland, Beit Professor of Imperial History at Oxford, saw anti-slavery as a model of the trusteeship principle which he hoped would renew and uphold British rule over India and other twentieth-century colonies. He identified anti-slavery as humanitarian reform of colonial excess, but was himself an imperial enthusiast who derived inspiration and confidence from the virtuous abolitionists' triumph.[5] This dual identity—of philanthropic restraint and imperial chauvinism—re-emerges throughout later literature.

The period after the 1838 termination of apprenticeship presents a disparate, seemingly unconnected array of anti-slavery policies; some, such as the Niger expedition of 1840, the Lagos interventions of 1851 and 1861 or David Livingstone's anti-slavery

jeremiads, can be viewed as part of a teleological march towards formal territorial empire, while others, such as endless wrangles with France, America, Portugal and Brazil over slave-trade suppression or the enthusiastic sympathy with the slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the plantations of the Old South, belong more obviously to the realm of 'foreign affairs'. After 1874, anti-slavery rhetoric infused the expansionist campaigns that annexed British Central Africa, the Ugandan protectorate and northern and southern Nigerian, but also dominated outrage against the cynical toleration of slavery in Zanzibar or the 'Chinese slavery' of the Transvaal; this leaves anti-slavery ideas in a highly ambiguous relationship with imperial expansion and exploitation.[6] In a short piece, studying the year 1867, it is impossible to make final conclusions about the discontinuities and sympathies between such varied projects, but the broader framework might be uncovered. 'Anti-slavery culture' can be explored as a diverse range of views, either reactionary or radical, diverging in both details and ideals, but sharing a common moral and legal rejection of human ownership.[7]

The speaker meeting—sometimes attached to a breakfast or banquet for invited guests—was a mainstay of Victorian popular culture, not just for those who went along to hear celebrated authors, famous politicians, fugitive American slaves or touring scientific lecturers. Beyond the immediate audience of a few hundred people, these meetings were reported (with varying degrees of accuracy and detail) by journalists and then dissected in editorials and readers' letters. It is notoriously difficult to know how far readers subscribed to the views they read in the press, but studying the self-conscious speeches and press commentary on them at least allows a glimpse at which meanings were contested and which uncontested.[8] In 1867, British anti-slavery discussions focused on three different contexts for slavery, two old and passing, one new and thriving. By considering the press treatment of Jamaica, America and East Africa during that year, it will be possible to see how popular discussion of a global phenomenon interacted with ideas about imperial rule.

This means drawing on a keen and sometimes acrimonious discussion between historians about the precise impact of empire on the people of the British Isles. Since the 1980s, John MacKenzie and many of the contributors to his 'Studies in Imperialism' book series have forged a new field researching Britain's imperial culture, particularly in the nineteenth century.[9] This has complemented the work of historians with a wide variety of theoretical dispositions, who have suggested that the cultural or political influence of colony over metropole was even more significant than its economic contribution to Great Britain. This approach is best captured in the phrase 'imperial Britain', invoked to indicate that the British Isles will be analysed as a centre of empire rather than a proud, damp, independent, closed and hermetically sealed country.[10] In his 2004 book *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, Bernard Porter challenged the conclusions and methods of those arguing that the metropole can be understood only through its relationship to the empire.[11] Since then, Porter has fought a sometimes lonely battle to refine and clarify his challenge to some of the broadest claims about the influence on and importance of empire to everyday life or political anxieties in Great Britain. Posing similar questions, Andrew S. Thompson has helpfully proposed that, given 'how diverse and pluralistic' Britain and the empire both were,

'the effects of empire on the structure of British society, the development of British institutions and the shaping of British identities were complex'.[12]

This focus on complexity is useful in moving the debate away from 'quantity' of imperial influence on Britain and into a consideration of why some areas of British life were less obviously influenced by empire than others. Anti-slavery is a profitable area to test out the debates over imperial culture because it was a tradition which defied easy categorisation as 'imperial' or not, slipping over the borders of nation-states, through the walls of Whitehall departments and between the themed sections of newspapers or periodicals. Porter suggests that slavery may have been discussed a lot, but without 'the imperial *dimension*' highlighted.[13] By exploring the varieties and meanings of anti-slavery ideas in mid-Victorian Britain, the exact relationship between this grand humanitarian sentiment and imperial culture can be fully considered.

## Slavery in the World

The most familiar context of slavery and emancipation, for Victorian Britons, was their own West Indian colonies. In January 1867, more than three decades after emancipation, Thomas Harvey addressed a breakfast held in his honour at the Queen's Hotel in Leeds, touching on this topic. He had returned from a visit to Jamaica to inquire about the truth of the 1865 Morant Bay insurrection and its brutal suppression by Governor Edward Eyre. At a time when critics of the governor and a defence committee of his supporters exchanged threats through the press and the courts, interpreting the meaning and lessons of the rebellion was necessarily controversial. The elderly Quaker, who had visited the island thirty years earlier on a 'benevolent mission' to investigate the abuses perpetuated under post-emancipation apprenticeship, immediately connected the bloody reprisals against black Britons to the legacies of slavery: 'they had still the same cause before them in another phase; they had to see that the coloured races in the dominions of Great Britain had unimpaired justice done to them', he concluded.[14] For Harvey, the anti-slavery struggle promised a more respectful, egalitarian relationship with people of colour, emphasising a common humanity, which he supported through initiatives such as the Negro Education Committee to provide opportunities for self-improvement.[15]

Responding to Harvey at the breakfast, the Liberal MP W. E. Forster proposed that Britons must make sure 'that there are no statutes left that are the remnant of the old slave legislation' in the colonies. He also blamed the governor's abuses and recourse to martial law as legacies of slavery, which provided colonial officials with measures wholly inappropriate to a population of free subjects.[16] In a similar vein, a July article in the *Westminster Review* suggested that the Baptist war of 1831–32 had spurred Britons to effect West Indian emancipation and, similarly, the Morant Bay rising should be seen as a slave insurrection, condemning the abuses of the planters rather than the concerns of the black labourers.[17] Placing recent events in this context, Forster, like Harvey and fellow speaker Charles Savile Roundell, recently secretary to the Royal Commission on Jamaica, drew a wider point about colonial

governance and the moral responsibilities of an anti-slavery nation. The younger men adopted a providential tone, warning of 'that penalty a nation was as sure to have to pay as an individual if it had a great duty imposed upon it by God which duty it did not perform', adverting to the 'most responsible and awful task of training up for civilisation and Christianity hundreds of millions of our fellow-creatures'.[18] Some newspapers desacralised this message, reporting the MP's concern about national reputation rather than God's favour, 'lest we should stand before history as those who had undertaken that which from selfish motives they had neglected to do'.[19] The sentiment, whether cast in religious or secular terms, emphasised the spirit of anti-slavery reformers surviving in imperial duty.

This emphasis on 'civilising' colonised peoples strikes a menacing note for postcolonial readers, particularly when Forster and Roundell framed the duties of philanthropy in the West Indies in a more prescriptive tone than Harvey. All three expressed a similar faith in providing freed people with a better future, beyond simply removing them from slavery, with a common vision of an ordered, moral empire developing in the spirit of old abolitionists such as Wilberforce, Clarkson, Buxton or Sturge. However, their emphasis differed, with Harvey—whether due to his religion, politics or age—contemplating the equal treatment and opportunities of freed people more than their collective 'improvement' as a race.

These humanitarians, of course, were united by more than divided them. Another body of authors and campaigners thought that Morant Bay offered lessons about black inferiority rather than about British duties. Most of the national newspaper coverage of the Leeds breakfast focused not on Harvey, but on Forster. The MP was an unlikely—if reluctant—defender of Eyre, at a time when the conservative press denounced as 'philo-humanitarians' those who, at exactly this time, had finally brought charges against the governor.[20] A newspaper such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* omitted the connections speakers had drawn between Jamaican government and slave-holding and focused on Forster's disapproval of the prosecution.[21] Eyre's defenders, seeking to vindicate their man and denigrate the black Britons he massacred, said there was no connection between a Jamaican rebellion and anti-slavery issues.[22] Supportive newspapers reported that the governor never 'had the slightest sympathy with negro slavery'. Rather, they mocked the quixotic activities of abolitionists after emancipation, quoting Thomas Carlyle's infamous 'Essay on the Nigger Question' to claim sympathy for 'yellow-coloured free labourers in Lancashire' who were 'dying of hunger' while 'Quashee has already victuals and clothing'.[23] During the controversy, Eyre's defenders such as the Earl of Wilton claimed that 'after so many years of emancipation from slavery, with every inducement held out to industry and frugality, the negroes, instead of raising themselves in the scale of civilisation' had 'rushed back at one fell swoop into the darkest excesses of barbarism, not one jot advanced from the primitive position of their race'.[24] This was not a pro-slavery argument as such, but rather a suggestion that, having relieved the immediate suffering of the enslaved, it was hopeless and dangerous to follow this with 'alchemical' humanitarian hopes of offering black people the trusts and privileges—however limited—of metropolitan proletarians.

Discussion of the Jamaican insurrection in 1867—whether focused on Harvey's breakfast or a wider debate—presented stark differences over race and the proper relationship with colonial subjects, as has been noted. However, it also offers a sidelight on Victorian thinking about what the nation's commonly accepted anti-slavery mission should mean in practice; West-Indian emancipation might have removed the sins and cruelties of slave-holding, but discussion of its consequences for Jamaican society could promote alternately Harvey's interest in equality, Forster's concern for improvement or Wilton's contempt for racial others. Freedom might mean either opportunities for civilisation or confirmation that it remained confined to whites. While the colonial setting naturally emphasised an imperial dimension, commentators of very different stripes shared a broader perspective on human progress as a whole, seeing Eyre and his victims in terms of a struggle between civilisation and barbarity, though they would not agree on which was which.

The conflict in Jamaica and British debates about it coincided with the conclusion of the American Civil War and concern for the plight of freed people there, as contemporaries (and subsequent historians) noted. An 1867 tour of Britain by the New-England abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison revealed different interpretations of his country's emancipation and its implications. At a London breakfast in July, between 300 and 400 guests ate and listened, among them the agitator George Thompson, Frederick Chesson of the Aborigines' Protection Society, intellectuals such as John Stuart Mill, A. V. Dicey, T. H. Green, Herbert Spencer and Thomas Henry Huxley, together with a pride of peers and a mob of MPs. One newspaper noted that 'ladies were very numerous, and there were probably more persons "of colour," both ladies and gentlemen, than has ever been the case before at a single meeting in London'.[25]

Besides its diverse audience, press reports picked up on the gathering's interest in the international or global scope of American emancipation. The hall itself was festooned with the flags of both Britain and the United States, under the gaze of a large, prominently placed portrait of the martyred President Abraham Lincoln.[26] Such symbolism complemented the lessons drawn by provincial reports, which might celebrate Garrison's visit as healing recent rifts with the US federal government during and after the American Civil War.[27] The Liberal leader Earl Russell gave a speech praising the two nations as 'the same race, having our birth from the same ancestors, having the same origin, the same Christian religion', while his apology for failing to understand the anti-slavery meaning of the American conflict in its first years drew some measure of surprise.[28] Reports in newspapers such as the *York Herald* loftily celebrated that 'two nations united, as it were, to recount their achievements in the cause of emancipation, and to encourage one another in the great work that lies before them of accomplishing the social regeneration of mankind'.[29] Radical MP John Bright, the principal speaker at the London breakfast, demonstrated the Anglo-American connection by reminding Britons that they had established slavery in their former colony. However, he could also puff British patriotism, since 'the freedom which now overspreads his [Garrison's] noble nation first sprang into life amongst our common ancestors' in the 'English commonwealth'.[30]

In celebrating tardy American emulation of British emancipation, Bright and fellow speakers could propose a shared transatlantic purpose for the United Kingdom and the United States. During a later stop in Garrison's tour, the Leeds abolitionist Wilson Armistead similarly rejoiced that 'the two freest and most highly-favoured countries of the world may now go hand in hand, emulating and animating each other'.[31] One report welcomed the opportunity for 'England and America to meet round the table to join hands and felicitate one another on the good work they have achieved, and take fresh breath ere they start to win new conquests in the interests of mankind'.[32] This cast Anglo-American relations in a special light, not only sharing a historic connection, a common language and much shared culture, but occupying a special place in the hierarchy of humanity.

At the same time as its affirming the purported partnership with the United States, Britons could find in American emancipation some vindication—after uncertain progress in recent decades—of their anti-slavery sacrifices. Bright insisted that 'it is a triumph which has pronounced the irreversible doom of slavery in all countries and for all times'.[33] He saw the American conflict over slavery as 'light against darkness, freedom against bondage, good against evil, and, if you like, heaven against hell'.[34] The Duke of Argyll presented the formal address to Garrison and placed anti-slavery as part of a broader, humanitarian impulse in civilisation since 'Providence interposes to prevent the permanent triumph of evil. It interposes, not visibly or by the thunderbolt, but by inspiring and sustaining high moral effort and heroic lives.'[35] Similar sentiments came from Lord Russell, who seconded a motion of praise with the observation that even 'if many evils beset mankind' then 'the Almighty God has implanted in some breasts that spark of indignation against wrong'.[36] Therefore, anti-slavery sentiment could be placed in the broader context of progress and humanitarianism, as a Glasgow meeting praised the visitor as 'one of the greatest living benefactors of the human family'[37] and English reports suggested that 'the world would sink into barbarism and slavery, but for the zeal and indomitable energy of men of the type and character of Mr. Garrison'.[38] The duke's address praised not only 'the redemption of the negro race from slavery' but also 'that which is a higher object than the redemption of any single race, the vindication of the universal principles of humanity and justice'.[39]

If these rhetorical claims to share in the glory of American emancipation seem desperate, then Garrison's visit provided more tangible opportunities for Britons to pledge themselves to a common humanitarian project. The visitor used his celebrity to promote subscriptions for the relief of emancipated African Americans, coordinated by the Freedmen's Aid Society.[40] The Birmingham branch met to celebrate its distribution of clothing and other aid as 'the plain duty, as a matter of humanity, which starving men everywhere presented to those who admitted the good Samaritan as a model of Christian conduct'.[41] In Leicester, speakers from the American and British national aid societies reminded the audience that those 'set at liberty were brought under the notice and left to the care of their fellowmen all over the world'. The efforts would 'help forward the education of those people as well as to relieve their immediate wants' by attempting 'to feed, to clothe, and to alleviate the distress

of these poor people'. They assured local donors that the money was well spent and not—as some rumours suggested—frittered away by the Freedmen's Aid workers.[42] With these appeals, philanthropists hoped to rouse British sympathy for distant suffering.

Despite Garrison's encouragement, the response was probably limited by domestic concern about depressed industry and scepticism over responsibility for American suffering.[43] The *Yorkshire Post* judged that the strongest appeal would link aid to African Americans with the legacy of the county's former MP William Wilberforce, by casting British anti-slavery as yielding 'mighty beneficent consequences to the coloured races' while it 'doomed slavery to extinction throughout the world'.[44] Partisans struggled in vain to prove that the challenge of American emancipation was not 'purely American' but 'of a nature calculated to rouse the best feelings of every nationality' through '[h]eaven, humanity, Christianity'. There was more mileage in trying to prove that, since Great Britain had established slavery in the thirteen colonies, 'goaded America to liberate' slaves, 'memorialised her and pleaded with Heaven that this iniquity should come to an end' and benefited from cheap, slave-grown cotton, there was a direct patriotic obligation to assist. By these measures, Britain's imperial legacy or economic dependency could create moral responsibilities for slavery on the soil of a foreign, independent nation.[45] However, for the most part it did not, and, speaking in Leicester, the African-American abolitionist the Rev. Sella Martin mocked the response that '"Oh, we were very sorry for you when you were in bondage, but we won't help you now you are set free"'.[46] Yet this was precisely the sentiment the majority of Britons had shown towards freed people in their own West Indian colonies. The years after British emancipation had already proved that sympathy for freed people after slavery was sorely limited, with challenges to anti-slavery expectations met with racial contempt more often than humanitarian aid.[47]

Celebrated in these ways, anti-slavery sentiment could be a particular example of Anglo-American civilisation or humanitarian progress, but the discussion of emancipation also unleashed a broader impulse for improving the prospects of people of African descent. The philanthropic London-based magazine the *Freed-man* noted that 'the death-blow given to slavery by its downfall in America, is a fresh call to missionary effort, above all for Africa, the chief sufferer from that accursed system'.[48] Bright celebrated that Garrison's name 'is venerated in this country and in Europe' and one day 'will become significant only of good to millions of men who will dwell on the now almost-unknown continent of Africa'. In this sense, he imagined that the anti-slavery traditions he and Garrison championed would frame and shape the civilisation of African peoples. This sense of superiority was, in 1867, hardly tied to any particular plan for extending the boundaries of empire, and, given his visceral dislike of military and government expenditure, Bright certainly not advocate European occupation and colonisation of Africa. However, he certainly imagined its commercial and cultural integration within a civilised globe, at the helm of which he placed the United States and Britain.[49] These were the sorts of issues occupying the British abolitionists who headed to an August international anti-slavery

conference in Paris later in the year.[50] Garrison himself used the tour to lecture Britons that 'the barbarisms of Slavery still continue' and '[w]hilst a single slave anywhere remains, the labour for emancipation must be perseveringly continued', while his Victorian hosts agreed on the need to 'stimulate the friends of the cause to further efforts for the final extinction of Slavery and the slave trade, and for the protection of the Freedmen'.[51]

By contrast, criticism of this sentiment reveals as much about British notions of humanity, civilisation and empire as the gushing praise Garrison attracted. The *Pall Mall Gazette* tartly remarked that 'the accident of having been right does not make a fanatic less a fanatic' and found his suggestion that Britain and America 'would gloriously lead the way to the world's advancement' was pompous and crass.[52] *The Times* gave a more measured retort, though equally aware of its past criticism of Garrison.[53] An editorial warned that 'visionary projects' should be judged by their ends and not merely 'passionate yearnings'. Far from casting their eyes afar, 'seeking new worlds to conquer, Mr. Garrison and his friends would do well to civilize that which they have already won'. Developing this theme, the newspaper suggested that 'we have not yet succeeded in making the West Indian Negro a virtuous, an useful, or a contented member of society'.[54] By returning to the question of 'civilising' racial inferiors, *The Times* could oppose interpretations of anti-slavery as part of some progressive, revolutionary tide, instead emphasising a search for stability and cautious racial governance of freed people in the sugar colonies or the reconstructed south. Far from redoubling efforts to attack global slavery, the conservative press suggested that over-indulgent optimism ignored the struggles for racial mastery they read into imperial or American affairs.

Garrison's visit naturally exposed a complex mixture of British views about American emancipation. While some could champion an example of Anglo-American superiority, or vague expectations of future civilising projects, or the promise of transnational aid for freed people, critics remained worried about maintaining racial, social and economic hierarchies without the institution of slavery to control black subjects. Again, otherwise divergent responses shared a focus on racial development and civilisation, whether optimistically, for those praising humanitarian progress as part of a wider civilising impulse, or pessimistically, for those doubting African capacities.

By 1867, it was common for Britons to announce that the North's Civil War victory 'sounded the death knell of slavery, not only in the United States, but around the civilised world'.[55] Moves against slavery elsewhere seemed to confirm that other western countries had followed Britain in this endeavour. As early as January, the provincial press suggested that 'Brazil and Cuba, the only remaining slave-holding countries in Christendom, are making significant and pleasing progress towards delivering themselves from this incumbus and curse'. These signs of enlightenment from Spain were particularly remarkable, since it was 'the most tyrranous [*sic*] of all European Governments'.[56] 'Sooner or later, what has occurred everywhere must have occurred in the Spanish colonies' even, since 'slavery is getting out of date', the *London Journal* suggested.[57] Meanwhile, newspapers reported moves towards gradual emancipation in Brazil as evidence that '[t]he last formidable stronghold of

slavery remaining in Christendom has virtually fallen before the irresistable [*sic*] advance of the great movement for universal freedom and equal rights'.[58]

The main result of these developments appeared to be a dramatic diminution in the number of slaves covertly ferried across the Atlantic. There were two principal interpretations for these developments. One proposed that 'the immediate agent in the work was the squadron', which had, fitfully and slowly, undermined the reliability of profits.[59] Others, long sceptical of the naval campaign's effectiveness, suggested the gradual progress of opinion in slave-holding nations of the Americas was the real reason. Nursing a longstanding grudge against the West African squadron's mission to suppress the slave trade, the *Standard* suggested that it had always been an expensive way 'of making "the middle passage" still more uncomfortable to the enslaved negroes'. An 1867 editorial concluded that '[i]t is too much the custom of England to burden herself with duties that belong not specially to her, but to all civilisation'.[60] This sentiment, like the pessimism of *The Times* and *Pall Mall Gazette* over American abolitionism, thought that Britons accorded themselves too much responsibility for processes which would be addressed, ultimately, only by moral progress.

For those more optimistic about British agency in the suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, evidence abounded that attention should be directed elsewhere. Since the slave trade was reported as being confined to the east coast of Africa, anti-slavery advocates and the press began to discuss the similarities and differences of the slave trade there.[61] The *Leisure Hour* suggested that two events, the return of Sir Samuel Baker from his expedition to find the source of the Niles the previous year and the disappearance of the missionary David Livingstone had, together, 'given to East African travel an interest far beyond that of mere geographical exploration'. Both incidents featured new reports of East and Central Africa, in which slavery figured prominently.[62] Specialist journals such as the abolitionists' *Anti-Slavery Reporter* began to reprint, from Indian press sources, accounts of the scale of the slave trades. One report, reprinted in October, suggested that the slave trade could be suppressed only if 'men who are conversant with history and with all the difficulties that have attended the civilization of the present enlightened portion of the world' and who 'see the absurdity of expecting the transformation of a rude and uncultivated race into a civilized state in just a few years'.[63] It is logical by surprising that the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, influenced by Quaker pacifism, would indulge such proposals for 'civilising' African communities rather than relying on the military interposition of the navy's east coast cruisers. Less priggishly, periodicals still carried dramatic tales of naval engagements by sailors, now stationed with the suppressive squadron in East Africa, but these often provided little reflection on the humanitarianism—rather than the heroics—involved.[64] However, pity and pride could still be evoked from freeing hundreds of slaves, even when an author refused 'to describe the scenes that met the disgusted eye and the not less nauseous stenches that assailed the sensitive nose of your humble servant'.[65]

While some aspects of the Atlantic campaign—such as naval operations—translated from west to east coasts in popular press coverage, the internal affairs of African communities and states loomed larger than before. This was largely thanks to the travels of

explorers or missionaries such as David Livingstone, who emphasised the far-flung consequences of slave raids to supply coastal export trades.[66] This focus of his mission attracted as much comment in 1867, when he was falsely reported dead, as it would in 1873–74, when identical reports proved correct. On the latter occasion, Livingstone's fellow missionary and literary executor the Rev. Horace Waller would mastermind the editing of the martyr's final journals to be more useful for favoured anti-slavery causes.[67] In January 1867, he showed an early talent for manipulating Livingstone's legacy for anti-slavery and missionary ends, concluding a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* with the news that '[w]e receive the saddest accounts of the increase of the slave trade at Zanzibar'.[68]

Despite the disavowals of Waller and others, further 'news' of David Livingstone's death reached Britain at the end of June 1867, via India.[69] 'In the Doctor, the negro has lost one of his best friends', suggested *Chambers's*, but 'there are other experienced Englishmen who still look after his interests, beside his naval guardians' of the slave-trade squadron.[70] In appropriating anti-slavery rhetoric for missionary ends—alongside a gospel of commerce, Christianity and civilisation—Livingstone offered a national mission which could be more palatable to those who tired of naval expenditure and suspected that maritime interception was pointless. Whether promoting individual schemes for private gain, trusting in the informal influence of missionary efforts or looking for new theatres of action for the anti-slavery state, aspirations for the 'civilisation' of Africa could accommodate a wide variety of opinions.

If there were broad differences over the circumstances and methods by which Britain could quicken the progress of civilisation and suppression of the slave trade, there was broad agreement in the public discussions that the two were linked. The annual publication of parliamentary blue books, detailing the Foreign Office's operation against the slave trade, was not 'deplorably dry' like other Parliamentary Papers. Hence, a report on them permitted one magazine to paint a picture of how 'slave-catchers surround villages before daybreak, knock the very old men and women and the very young children on the head, and then drive the rest of the inhabitants in a herd for deportation'.[71] A host of publications similarly lectured readers that the numbers and condition of African populations were diminished by the slave trade and 'devastating wars'.[72] On the simplest level, these graphic descriptions had conjured the same sentiment and sympathy found in abolitionist rhetoric since the late eighteenth century.[73] However, they had a prescriptive message too, because these stories confirmed Livingstone's suggestions that wars and raids to capture slaves undermined all efforts for religious or economic development.

Similarly, Samuel Baker's reports suggested that the peoples of the White Nile were terrorised by despotic slave traders whose raids destroyed any settled commerce and prevented European travellers from bringing home reports of this slaving to the pages of middle-market publications. The *Leisure Hour* recounted an adventure to the kingdom of Kamrasi at Magongo, near the shore of Lake Victoria, where Baker's story took a heroic turn. When ten Africans from a neighbouring community advanced, he put an English ensign on the pole of his tent and 'I declared the country to be under the British flag, and that I would hang the leader at Khartum

[*sic*] should one slave or head of cattle be stolen from Kamrasi's country'.[74] Besides describing specific cases of daring, these reports fuelled new public discussion of the role of the Ottoman Empire as a principal receiving place for slaves from the Sudan region. A joint meeting of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and the Comité Français d'Émancipation with the viceroy of Egypt, Ismael Pasha, placed slave-trade suppression in terms of the Pasha's desire 'to extirpate from the institutions of Egypt whatever is antagonistic to that civilisation in the way of which your Highness is conducting your people with so much intelligence and energy'. The pasha, for his part, was happy to accept their praise, but argued that the abolition of slavery would come organically from the suppression of the slave trade, and not vice versa. He blamed European-flagged vessels for the maritime traffic.[75]

This stance did not impress those sections of the press embracing a new Turkophobic or Islamophobic tenor to coverage of East or Central Africa. The *Examiner* noticed that Garrison's visit to Britain coincided with that of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Aziz. A reporter noted tartly that, on the same day that citizens of Edinburgh 'presented the freedom of their city to the man who has contributed more than any other now living to abolish slavery in the West', Londoners 'presented the freedom of the City to one who is not only the greatest master of slaves in the East, but the individual whose will, more than that of any other in the world, contributes to the maintenance of the system'. The publication reminded readers of Turkish officials' 'complicity' in light of 'that painful account of the slave trade on the White Nile in the first chapter of Sir Samuel Baker's book which not long since everybody was reading and praising'.[76] In this way, popular discussions compared or connected debates about slavery in very different corners of the globe.

But—as if to illustrate the confusion in British public debate—the same newspaper had carried a piece one month earlier, which concluded that '[s]lavery is a word that has many meanings. We should be glad to abolish it in all its meanings. But what is called the slave trade down the Nile is chiefly the supply of domestic servants to the houses and harems of Constantinople.'[77] This was a common refrain. The 1865 Select Committee on West Africa, two years earlier, had made extensive references to 'domestic slavery' within African communities being kind, gentle and natural compared to the interracial transatlantic trade. How far or how quickly the Victorian standards of 'civilisation' or Christendom could be applied to the Ottomans was open to debate, as contradictory articles within the same publication suggest.[78] The purported end of western slaveries within 'Christendom' allowed 'Islamic' slaveries to be vilified as peculiarly oriental deviations from civilisation and progress, though apologists and relativists remained vocal.[79]

More broadly, domestic slaveries around the world were seen as transitory historical artefacts of an early stage in human development, whereas export slave trades, involving different races, were perverse disruptions of civilisation. An article in *Bow Bells* considered that, while 'slavery is associated very much with colour, we have some difficulty conceiving of the times when white men were slaves', but ancient Britain was 'precisely to the ancient nations what Africa has been in modern times', being a source of 'barbarian' slave labour.[80] Some accounts even considered the central

Asian slave trade, which Russia purported to suppress, noting that it was far crueller because the victims 'are not negroes, occupying the lowest place in the human race'. In this case, the author showed disdain for Muslims, because 'indolent, enervated Orientals may still regard with bitter resentment and rancour the efforts of Europe in the cause of humanity'.[81]

## Silent or Absent?

The fact that anti-slavery sentiment straddled imperial and foreign contexts is instructive, since much of the debate over 'imperial culture' turns on the differences between the two. Scholars have disagreed over the semantic questions of whether the term 'imperial' requires formal domination of a place or people, or whether it represents a state of mind accompanying other, informal, relationships of power and hierarchy.[82] Whatever words we prefer to use to distinguish between a general sense of prejudice and a specific claim of ownership, the intimate connection between them is the real point of interest. In discussing slaveries and slave trades in different parts of the world, Britons drew upon a shifting vocabulary of 'civilisation', 'Christendom' or 'race' to diagnose or prescribe the proper obligations of the British people or nation. Where, when and how metropolitan Britons were responsible for ending suffering and promoting development overseas was not simply a question of discovering national or imperial complicity, since these definitions were constantly debated.[83] But, whatever the preferred language, the striking similarity—among both radicals and reactionaries—comes in a preference for placing peoples and communities in hierarchical relationships.

As a humanitarian sentiment, anti-slavery ideas could generate both 'alchemical' projects of development and the 'reactive' relief of suffering. With varying degrees of success, different segments of Victorian society could propose a national duty, based on anti-slavery pride, to tend to the evils of the world. In 1867, at least, there was plenty of debate over where Britain's national, imperial or civilising mission would lead. Just as missionary enterprise led to expansionist or anti-colonial outcomes in different contexts, so the exact relationship of empire and anti-slavery was open for debate.[84] If Victorian commentators could agree that slavery was evil, they could not always agree on how, when and where to combat it. In Jamaica, legacies of slavery could be judged central or irrelevant to the insurrection, while there could be appeals for the development of freed people in America, and in East or Central Africa accounts of foreign, external slave trades loomed large in differing recipes for British agency and intervention.

As Antoinette Burton suggests, historians should be 'untangling—and hopefully retangling in productive ways—empire, nation, race, colony, and globe'.[85] In fact, in later statements of his thesis, Porter suggests that it was precisely the silencing or blurring of 'the imperial' which should attract future research.[86] If the debates over 'absent-mindedness' or 'imperial culture' have grown fierce, that ferocity masks a shared dissatisfaction with binary distinctions. Catherine Hall identifies 'the plurality of ways in which Britons thought about or denied their Empire in the nineteenth

century'. While this sometimes required 'determined refusal to tell an imperial story', in other cases, as our case study of anti-slavery suggests, the imperial fitted into a broader global chauvinism, where superiority mattered as much as ownership.[87] Far from being closed to external influences, metropolitan British culture was scatter-brained—or, very often, scatter-gunned—in its chauvinism, allowing for the 'silencing' Hall describes.

Just as a binary of freedom and slavery has ceased to hold much water for histories of anti-slavery sentiment, which prefer to focus on degrees and kinds of freedom, so a binary of imperial and national needs to be replaced by a wider study of domineering attitudes.[88] This is an area of common ground between the new imperial history, MacKenzie's 'studies in imperialism' and critics such as Porter. Many Victorian newspapers placed reprints of 'foreign and colonial' stories together in the same section, and there is much to gain by considering the interconnections of such categories. A recent return to contingency and pluralism in political histories of British expansion, moreover, highlights that colonies annexed during the 'new imperialism' of the later nineteenth century began their life—in popular culture—as barbaric or exotic foreign climes.[89] As historians become less persuaded by a teleological rise of biological racialism, Victorians' diverse conflations of race, creed and nation are more apparent. Porter is right to emphasise the importance of 'civilisation' to imperial culture, though it is more closely linked to amorphous notions of 'race' than he suggests.[90] In the foregoing case study of 1867, similar ideas about Anglo-Saxon unity, Christian mission and humanitarian civilisation span anti-slavery ruminations on a current colony (Jamaica), a former colony (the United States), other empires (of Spain, Brazil and the Ottomans) and future British possessions (in Sudan and Central Africa).

It is possible that—focusing anti-slavery culture in the mid-Victorian period—this article finds unrepresentative evidence of civilisational perspectives and global connections. Certainly, a humanitarian topic naturally lent itself to this breadth of vision, as debates constantly hinged on where and when the nation was responsible for confronting suffering. However, work by James Belich, Duncan Bell, Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson on notions of a 'British world' has similarly revealed the binaries between the civilised 'settler colonies' and the empire of colour, or the Anglo-American partnerships which persisted beyond formal independence.[91] Shifting from an 'Anglo-world' to civilisational haughtiness or racialised whiteness or Christian solidarity, Victorian Britons might have overlooked their empire, on occasion, in their fascination with obligations or opportunities in other parts of the globe. As Alan Lester suggests, 'discursive assemblages' of humanity, civilisation or protection were portable and could be 'redeployed, to be reinserted out of abstraction and into other specific time-spaces where they take these different forms'.[92]

An 'imperial turn' will succeed by revisiting old interests in European or Anglo-American cosmopolitanism, alongside a new awareness of the ways racial, class and gender identities blurred or merged together. As Stuart Hall proposes, identities are best understood as 'the product of the marking of difference and exclusion' not 'the sign of an identical, natural-constituted unity'.[93] While differences of coloniser and colonised constituted one of these exclusions, Christians and non-Christian, whites

and non-whites or civilisers and barbarians could play similar roles. While, therefore, it is striking how far Victorian popular culture actively 'silenced' empire or affected 'absent-mindedness', this was reflected in attention to a far grander, civilisational, scale of superiority, hierarchy or dominance. Far from reifying the nation-state, this approach to British history may recover the broad-minded scale of Britons' small-minded chauvinism, reading across empires, races, cultures and the columns of their newspapers, literature and periodicals.

## Acknowledgements

## Notes

[1] As noted by Midgley, 'British Abolition, 124.

[2] On varieties of humanitarianism, see Alan Lester and Rob Skinner's introduction to this issue and also Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*.

[3] Huzzey, 'Moral Geography' and *Freedom Burning*, 36–39.

[4] Colley, *Britons*, 361–68; Ferguson, *Empire*, 117–33; Levine, *British Empire*, 21–23; Porter, 'Trusteeship', 204–05.

[5] Coupland, *British Anti-Slavery Movement*; Roberts, 'British Empire in Tropical Africa', 467–69.

[6] Grant, *Civilised Savagery*; Hamilton and Salmon, eds, *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire*; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*; Law, 'Abolition and Imperialism', 150–74; Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*; Quirk, *Anti-Slavery Project*; Sherwood, *After Abolition*.

[7] Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 14.

[8] Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, 115–16; Meisel, *Public Speech*.

[9] See, for example, MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* and '"Comfort" and Conviction'.

[10] Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*.

[11] Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*. The title is probably ill-chosen, given that its author does not intend to endorse Seeley's argument that the empire was an accident; rather, Porter suggests that Britons, particularly ordinary Britons, were remarkably ignorant and untouched by the empire in many areas of life.

[12] Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 4–5.

[13] Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 112, see also 105, 110, 162, 316. Emphasis in original.

[14] *Leeds Mercury*, 10 Jan. 1867, 4.

[15] *Daily News*, 11 Jan. 1867, 3. On his missions, see Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 318–19, 411, 416.

[16] *Leeds Mercury*, 12 Jan. 1867, 14; *Standard*, 11 Jan. 1867, 6.

[17] *Westminster Review*, July 1867, 225.

[18] *Leeds Mercury*, 12 Jan. 1867, 14, 10 Jan. 1867, 4.

[19] *Standard*, 11 Jan. 1867, 6.

[20] *Hampshire Advertiser*, 12 Jan. 1867, 5.

[21] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 Jan. 1867, 6.

[22] *Leeds Mercury*, 12 Jan. 1867, 14. See also Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 184–85.

[23] *Morning Post*, 21 Feb. 1867, 2.

[24] *Blackburn Standard*, 3 Jan. 1866, 2.

[25] *Manchester Times*, 6 July 1867, 2; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 7 July 1867, 7.

[26]  *Manchester Times*, 6 July 1867, 2

[27]  Ibid., 4.

[28]  Ibid., 2, 4. For criticism of this, see *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 Nov. 1867, 254–56.

[29]  *York Herald*, 6 July 1867, 8.

[30]  *Standard*, 1 July 1867, 3.

[31]  *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 Nov. 1867, 249.

[32]  *York Herald*, 6 July 1867, 8.

[33]  *Manchester Times*, 6 July 1867, 2

[34]  Ibid.

[35]  *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 10 July 1867, 1.

[36]  *Manchester Times*, 6 July 1867, 2

[37]  *Glasgow Herald*, 20 July 1867, 5.

[38]  *York Herald*, 6 July 1867, 8.

[39]  *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 7 July 1867, 7.

[40]  *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 Nov. 1867, 243–50.

[41]  *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 Aug. 1867.

[42]  *Leicester Chronicle*, 16 Feb. 1867, 8

[43]  *York Herald*, 19 Jan. 1867, 8; Bolt, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 48–49; Huzzey, 'Moral Geography'.

[44]  *York Herald*, 19 Jan. 1867, 8.

[45]  Ibid.; *Leicester Chronicle*, 16 Feb. 1867, 8.

[46]  Ibid.

[47]  See Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; Holt, *Problem of Freedom*.

[48]  *Freed-man*, 1 Oct. 1867, 236.

[49]  *Standard,* 1 July 1867, 3.

[50]  British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Special Report*.

[51]  *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 Nov. 1867, 245.

[52]  *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 July 1867, 4, 6 July 1867, 4. See also *Saturday Review*, 2 Nov. 1867, 565.

[53]  For Garrison's references to this, see *Manchester Times*, 6 July 1867, 2. Also noted by *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 6 July 1867, 3.

[54]  *The Times*, 1 July 1867, 8. For reaction, see *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 7 July 1867, 6.

[55]  *Daily News*, 11 Jan. 1867, 3; *Leeds Mercury*, 10 Jan. 1867, 4.

[56]  *Dundee Courier & Argus*, 16 Jan. 1867, 3.

[57]  *London Journal*, 23 Nov. 1867, 333.

[58]  *Newcastle Courant*, 31 May 1867, 6.

[59]  *London Journal*, 23 Nov. 1867, 333.

[60]  *Standard*, 3 April 1867, 4.

[61]  *Examiner*, 3 Aug. 1867, 483.

[62]  *Leisure Hour*, 1 Dec. 1867, 774.

[63]  *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 Oct. 1867, 231–33.

[64]  See for example, *Reynold's Miscellany*, 26 Oct. 1867, 293. On the genre, see Burroughs, 'Eyes on the Prize', 99–115.

[65]  *Argosy*, Sept. 1867, 299–305.

[66]  *Lancaster Gazette*, 26 Jan. 1867, 3.

[67]  Helly, *Livingstone's Legacy*.

[68]  *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 Jan. 1867, 5.

[69]  *Lancaster Gazette*, 29 June 1867, 6

[70]  *Chambers's Journal*, 3 Aug. 1867, 495.

[71]  Ibid., 494–96.

[72]  *Bow Bells*, 4 Sept. 1867 125; *Examiner*, 8 June 1867, 361; *London Review*, 20 July 1867, 78–79; *Chambers's Journal*, 3 Aug. 1867, 494–96.

[73]  Carey, *British Abolitionism*.

[74]  *Leisure Hour*, 1 Dec. 1867, 775, 780.
[75]  *Leeds Mercury*, 2 July 1867, 7.
[76]  *Examiner*, 20 July 1867, 450–51.
[77]  *Examiner*, 22 June 1867, 387.
[78]  Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 60–63.
[79]  Said, *Orientalism*.
[80]  *Bow Bells*, 12 June 1867, 465.
[81]  *Fortnightly*, May 1867, 538.
[82]  See Porter, 'Further Thoughts', 110–11, esp. 114, n. 36; Price, 'One Big Thing', 602–27.
[83]  On responsibilities, see Grant, 'Human Rights'; Huzzey, 'Moral Geography'.
[84]  Porter, *Religion versus Empire?* On interactions of official, humanitarian and settler discourses of colonialism, see Lester, *Imperial Networks*.
[85]  Burton, 'Introduction'. See also Grant, Levine and Trentmann, eds, *Beyond Sovereignty*; Ward, 'Transcending the Nation'.
[86]  Porter, 'Further Thoughts', 112.
[87]  Hall, 'What Did the British World Mean to the British?'.
[88]  Hall and Rose, 'Introduction', 21.
[89]  Darwin, *Empire Project*.
[90]  Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 100
[91]  Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*; Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*.
[92]  Lester, 'Personifying Colonial Governance'; see also Lambert and Howell, 'John Pope Hennessy'.
[93]  Hall, 'Introduction', 14.

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