GENERAL EDITORS

Seymour Drescher, University Professor, Department of History, University of Pittsburgh

It may be said that the question of how the technology, languages, institutions, and even pastimes of Western Europe came to dominate global civilization—even came to create that civilization—is the greatest historical question of modern times. Yet scholars have paid relatively little attention to this veritable monumental phenomenon. This new series is designed to offer a forum for debate and bring new research to light.

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To my beloved children Oona, Rose, Sofia & Isaac
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PREFACE

The adventure of this research project began in 2005 when Bouda Etemad, my dissertation coadviser, drew my attention to the issue of “reparations.” These are requests, mainly for money, that have been made by communities or governments that today claim to have been scarred by the slave trade and/or slavery. Descendants of slaves and governments affected by the trade are putting the spotlight on the present-day consequences of these practices, which affected Africa and the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. They ascribe their underdevelopment and the discrimination they face to the slave trade and slavery, and are demanding reparations from the businesses and states that profited from these institutions.

The issue of reparations for slaves and their descendants, which has been present ever since the abolition process began in the eighteenth century, became more visible in the early 2000s. In 2001 slavery and the slave trade were declared “crimes against humanity” under the Taubira law in France and at the United Nations World Conference against Racism held in Durban that year. Though the issue of monetary reparations was naturally discussed, both in France and in Durban, in the end it was expunged from the official documents in favor of primarily moral and symbolic acknowledgment.

In 2003 the question reemerged on the world stage when Haiti’s president Jean-Bertrand Aristide asked France for reparations for the indemnity Haiti had paid to its former “home country” in 1825 in exchange for recognition of the independence it had won in 1804. This episode puts the subject in a new light. Measured by the yardstick of Haiti’s request, present-day reparations seem to be an aftereffect of a phenomenon that was present more than a century before. These twenty-first-century demands for money echo a nineteenth-century practice that has been little known until now even though it was present in all abolition processes in the Americas, namely as indemnities granted to planters after slavery was
ended. Paradoxically, at that time it was not the slaves but the masters who were compensated after the liberation of their human property.

Once my surprise had given way to incomprehension, it became clear that the aim of this book should be to explain this strange role reversal between the indemnity recipients and slavery’s victims. The premise that guided the beginning of the research was that there must be some rational explanation for this strange way of settling accounts, some logic that dictated this practice, which, to our twenty-first-century eyes, seemingly has none. The goal was to change our perspective in order to understand the motivations and constraints guiding the nineteenth-century politicians who were faced with the issue of slavery and its abolition—all for the purpose of answering the first, vital question that came to mind: Why?

I am greatly indebted to a number of people for their help in completing this project over the past few years; their assistance has been easy to appreciate but difficult to repay. This book could never have come into being without the collaboration of my two dissertation co-advisers. I offer my warmest thanks to Professor Bouda Etemad for his kindness, his scientific and personal support, and the friendship he has shown over the past twenty years. He got me off to a good start ten years ago and has seen me through to the end of this long endeavor. I am profoundly grateful to him for having given me an opportunity, trusting me, and allowing me to push my limits by finishing this project. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Olivier Grenouilleau for his many rereadings of the French manuscript, countless pieces of advice, wealth of recommendations, and willingness to spend long hours on the telephone despite some terrible connections. He played a very large part in the successful completion of this book. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professors Seymour Drescher, Pieter C. Emmer, Aline Helg, and François Vallotton, who graciously agreed to serve on my dissertation committee despite their busy schedules and, in some cases, the need to travel long distances.

I would also like to thank Andree Everson for her outstanding work in translating the original French manuscript into English and to mention that unless otherwise noted, all translations of quoted material are hers. For their work in rereading the chapters of the manuscript, I gratefully acknowledge my colleagues and friends Sandra Bott, Hadrien Bucelin, Antoine Chollet, Pierre Eichenberger, Jean Peut-Etre M’Pelé, Anne Pittet, Delphine Rivier, and Janick Schaufelbuehl. Full credit is also due to the computer center staff, especially Manuel Girardin, for extricating me from some seemingly impossible situations. Thank you to Jacques de Cauna for his invitations to Bordeaux and the fascinating discussions we had about
the society and history of Saint-Domingue. And finally I would like to
express my appreciation to the many people I have not named here who
cheered me with a smile or a kind word during the moments of serious
doubt that sometimes cropped up during the course of this research.

I am also grateful to the staff members of the Archives Nationales
d’Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence, particularly Anne Chauvel and Jacques
Dion, the National Assembly, the Centre Historique des Archives Nation-
ales in Paris, the British National Archives in Kew, the Bibliothèque Na-
tionale de France in Paris, the Institute of Historical Research in London,
and the Bibliothèque Cantonale Universitaria de Lausanne. Their advice
and availability were invaluable to me on many occasions.

The study was completed thanks to a young researchers grant from
the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), which allowed me to un-
dertake research in the British and French archives. An SNSF postdoc
grant made it possible to have the original French dissertation translated
into English and to continue my research in the United States in Wash-
ington, D.C., and at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. This gave
me the time to completely rework the original text in anticipation of its
publication in English. Finally, I received a joint doctoral program grant
from the Conférence des Recteurs des Universités Suisses that financed
my frequent travel between Lausanne and Paris. The many trips abroad
were some of the highlights of this project, and I have made unforgettable
memories on them.

Such a sustained effort would have been inconceivable without the
unconditional logistical and moral support of my mother, Annick Beau-
vois, and my husband, Christophe Roduit. Last but not least, I dedicate
this book to my four children, Oona, Rose, Sofia, and Isaac. Though twins
Sofia and Isaac were born near the end of the adventure, my daughters
Oona and Rose bore the brunt of the tribulations that come to every doc-
toral candidate in the throes of completing a dissertation, from monoma-
nia to manic-depressive behavior. My daughters know better than anyone
the true cost of this work that far too often robbed them of their mama’s
attention. I thank them for making me the luckiest mother in the world.
COMPENSATION AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR ABOLITION

Since the end of World War II there have been a growing number of requests for compensation for historic wrongs. Such reparations, granted mostly by governments, can be of three types: material (the return of artworks, ancestral remains, etc.), symbolic (apologies, education, commemorative sites and days, etc.), or financial (monetary payments). The “goodwill” of those paying the compensation is explained by the fact that a country’s or company’s “moral image” and respectability are drawing more positive public opinion. Such “moral” notions have become sufficiently important on the international stage that they are an incentive for countries to recognize the wrongs they have committed and ensure that justice is done for the victims.

These requests for reparations echo a practice that was widespread in the nineteenth century yet is now largely unknown. While granting reparations to human-trafficking and slavery victims who come forward is a subject for debate today, compensation was in fact provided in the past, after the abolition of slavery in the Americas. It was intended to indemnify victims who had suffered harm. It was not granted to the slaves, however, but to their owners, who at the time were considered the injured party. Today, paying compensation to the plantation owners seems strange or even shocking, but this phenomenon occurred in many instances during the abolition of slavery in the New World.

Compensation could take many forms. A financial indemnity consisted of a monetary payment to the plantation owners. This type of compensation was visible throughout the abolition processes of Britain, Sweden,
Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and some countries in continental Spanish America. Planters could also be paid in labor provided by the emancipated slave. In these cases abolition occurred gradually, while the ex-slaves were forced to work for their former masters for a certain number of additional years. Both adults (in the British, Danish, and Spanish abolitions, and that of Dutch Guiana) and children (in the northern United States and Latin America) could be subject to this “apprenticeship” period. Finally, a less widespread form of compensation gave the slave owners land. In Puerto Rico, owners received financial compensation for the first three slaves they freed and land grants for any others. In some Latin American countries, the owners of slaves enrolled in the army received this same sort of material compensation.

These three types of indemnity, payable by the government and/or the slaves, could also be combined. British and Danish planters, and those in Surinam, were compensated both financially and through forced labor. Puerto Rican owners of more than three slaves were granted triple compensation in the form of a monetary payment, forced labor, and a land grant.

While some governments did offer compensation, others did not. After Southern plantation owners in the United States lost the Civil War, they received nothing. It follows that in such cases, arguments sufficiently convincing to prevent compensation must have been raised during the abolition process. So indemnification of slave owners was not a foregone conclusion and was sometimes successfully fought. This qualification seems to be confirmed by the variety of compensation granted. Some governments preferred a single form, while others combined several types. Such a wide range of solutions begs an examination of how the idea of indemnification came about and the causes of the various compensation options chosen when slavery was abolished in the New World. How did contemporaries justify granting planters an indemnity? What were the arguments for and against a step that today seems so questionable? Why did some European colonial governments (France, Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain) and sovereign nations in the Americas (Haiti, Spanish American countries, the United States, Brazil) devise systems for compensation while others did not?

Quite surprisingly, the existing secondary literature contains scarcely any answers to these questions. Even when it does address the compensation issue, some aspects are covered more thoroughly than others. The approach usually taken is primarily “technical” in nature: the focus is on the amount of the payments (in absolute figures or relative terms), how it was paid, the granters, and the recipients. Most of these studies concentrate on the final phase of the process once compensation had been
accepted in principle and the amount determined. The overall issue has never been systematically examined in its totality, from the germ of the idea of indemnification to its goals, from proponents’ and opponents’ arguments and the difficulties encountered throughout the process to their resolution. So a huge piece of the puzzle is missing. This relative neglect comes from the fact that other areas have attracted more interest from specialists, and from the complex nature of the subject. Most historians generally focus on the causes of abolition, its major figures, or abolitionist societies. The topic of compensation also suffers from a lack of visibility and is not easily understood. Its existence is not immediately obvious to a researcher interested in the abolition of slavery, and it sometimes even seems purely anecdotal.

In order to identify compensation as one of the essential components of emancipation, as I will attempt to show, we must learn more about the specific details of each case. Obviously, our problem here is only one of the many factors in an instance of abolition, which itself is part of the much broader issue of slavery, with its many aspects (economic, moral, political, cultural, etc.) at various levels (local, regional, national, and international). Having to read on these many levels sometimes tends to cloud the issue and make the world-history phenomenon known as compensation difficult to assimilate and fully understand.

Despite such challenges, this study aims to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted phenomenon of compensation to planters by examining its goals and what was at stake. The hypothesis underlying the research is that the compensation issue is of major importance to an understanding of the various instances of emancipation in the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—even though it has been neglected by historians who did not consider it so. Its omnipresence in the processes of abolition and the many forms it took are both indications that lead one to suggest that compensation was one of the driving forces behind emancipation. Furthermore, focusing our attention on this issue may enable us to broaden the scope of the “reasons” for abolition favored to date by specialists, who invoke mainly legal or economic factors to explain compensation for plantation owners. However, while the expropriation of the slave owners’ human property and the other losses likely to arise from emancipation are the main explanations cited for this phenomenon, other elements—social and political factors, for example—should also be considered in order to gain an understanding of the complex issues of emancipation.

This research establishes that contemporaries of slavery’s end, far from considering only the rights of slaveholders, thought of an indemnity as a way to reconcile economic, social (even ethical), and political aims, in
the sense that life in the colonial “city” was being reorganized along new lines. Compensation brings together categories that were usually distinct and so falls squarely under the concept of “moral economy,” having the public good—in the broad sense of the term—as its objective, and combining the “just” and the “useful” into a single action. This makes it possible to understand both why there was such a variety of abolition processes and the similarities between them.

The originality of the method used here lies both in the choice of comparison as a means of investigation and in the selection of parliamentary debates as sources. Since the work involved retracing the history and development of the phenomenon of compensation—itself closely enmeshed with slavery and the various instances of abolition—over several decades and on a continental scale, the use of comparison emerged as the obvious choice. The tiny state of Vermont in the northern United States began the abolition process in 1777 by freeing about twenty slaves. At the opposite end of the process—speaking geographically, chronologically, and numerically—Brazil was the last, bringing up the rear in 1888 by freeing over 1.5 million people. Between these two dates, about thirty instances of national emancipation freed over 7.5 million slaves out of an American population of 25 million in 1800 and 59 million in 1850.

The spatial and temporal scope of the topic suggested that I should undertake specific case studies for more detailed analysis. The relative number of slaves and the amount of compensation paid in actual monetary figures were used as selection criteria. I chose to examine the American continents, where the plantation system prevailed and slave labor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place (Abolition Dates)</th>
<th>Slave Population</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Domingue (1793–94)</td>
<td>465.4</td>
<td>523.8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>British colonies (1834)</td>
<td>666.7</td>
<td>842.7</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French colonies (1848)</td>
<td>214.1</td>
<td>272.0</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch colonies (1863)</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish colonies (1847)</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern United States (1865)</td>
<td>3,954.1</td>
<td>9,103.3</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish colonies (1870–80)</td>
<td>412.3</td>
<td>1,979.8</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil (1871–88)</td>
<td>1,510.8</td>
<td>9,553.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish colony (1846)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern United States (1777–1804)</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>1,922.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental Spanish America (1811–69)</td>
<td>225.0</td>
<td>14,000.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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</table>

Note: The years shown are those closest to the dates of emancipation.
predominated. The concentration of the slave population in colonies in the Americas allowed me to refine this initial selection. Just before abolition began, over two-thirds of the population in Saint-Domingue and the British, French, Dutch, and Danish colonies consisted of slaves. There is a clear break between these and a second group of colonies in which slaves made up less than half of the population. So the “model” cases were selected from the first group.

The French and British cases could then be differentiated by the amount of the monetary payment. The two instances of French abolition in 1794 and 1848, and the British instance in 1833, are also the three largest over time. The choice of the abolitionist movements in France and Great Britain as subjects is all the more justified because these countries were two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Compensation (Millions of £)</th>
<th>Apprenticeship (Year)</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British colonies (1834)</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4–6 (4–4)</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French colonies (1848)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Domingue/Haiti (1793–94)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico (1873)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba (1880)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 (6)</td>
<td>Gradual (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands Antilles (1863)</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinam (1863)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish colonies (1847)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>12 (1)</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern United States</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Gradual (18–28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1777–1804)</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia (1862)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern United States</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1865)</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish colony (1846)</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil (1888)</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Gradual (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America (1811–69)</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Gradual (14–25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- A hyphen (-) indicates that data do not exist for the case in point.
- Compensation data have been converted to pounds sterling using the following exchange rates: £1 = 25.23 francs (1848), 12.11 guilders (1860), $4.87 (1862), and 25.225 pesetas (1870).
- The numbers in the “Apprenticeship” column indicate the years of forced labor stipulated by the abolition laws. The numbers in parentheses indicate the actual duration of the apprenticeship period.
- The “Form” column indicates the form of abolition implemented in the relevant colony. The numbers in parentheses indicate the age at which children yet to be born were to be “freed” from forced labor.
of the largest slave-trading and pro-slavery powers. Consequently, their decision as to how slavery would be abolished influenced later emancipations inspired by their successes and failures. The French and British cases were also selected for more in-depth treatment through the use of primary sources; others were examined using secondary literature.

The parliamentary debates were chosen as the basis for this research because of the very characteristic course of action taken by the abolitionists and the presence of a large proportion of abolition stakeholders in parliaments. As Drescher emphasizes, the choice of parliamentary debates as a source of investigation has the advantage of providing a relatively balanced view of the arguments and counterarguments on the issue. Slavery supporters rubbed shoulders with abolitionists in the houses of the legislature, where they took turns stating their positions on the motions put forward. The alternating speeches show the positions of each side much more symmetrically than other information sources such as the petitions, pamphlets, and newspaper articles put out mainly by abolitionist circles. So debates in Great Britain’s House of Lords and House of Commons, and in France’s National Convention, Chamber of Peers, Chamber of Deputies, or National Assembly, depending on the time period being considered, are at the heart of this research.

I also analyzed the minutes and reports from parliamentary committees assigned by the government to study the issue of abolishing slavery. These records are available at the Senate House Library (SHL) and the Institute of Historical Research (IHR) in London, and also in the Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer (ANOM) in Aix-en-Provence. The same is true of the documents issued by the British and French committees that the parliaments made responsible for distributing payments to the recipients, which are available at the National Archives in Kew, ANOM, and the Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (CHAN) in Paris. In addition to the parliamentary debates, I also consulted many works published by slavery supporters and opponents. Once an author was found to have taken a position on compensation, all of that author’s works were examined. In this way, I obtained a selection of works from the catalogues of the SHL, IHR, ANOM, BNF, CHAN, and the Bibliothèque Administrative in Paris, as well as the Bibliothèque Cantonale Universitaire (BCU) in Lausanne.

While using parliamentary sources to study the abolition process is not a new idea, the originality of our process lies in its systematic approach. Abolition-related arguments by House of Commons and Chamber of Deputies members were methodically inventoried and tabulated by topic. The tables were then used for a statistical study of the main questions raised during the parliamentary debates concerning the abolition of,
first, the slave trade then slavery itself.\textsuperscript{14} The analysis easily adapted to the chronology of abolition, addressing the initial process of abolishing the slave trade then the later suppression of slavery itself. So for Great Britain, the statistical treatment of the arguments set forth in the House of Commons was divided into segments, lasting from 1788 to 1807 and from 1823 to 1833; and for the Chamber of Deputies in France from 1790 to 1818 then from 1831 to 1845.\textsuperscript{15}

This methodology enabled me to construct a four-part study in which analysis of the arguments made by British and French members of parliament lets the contemporaries of abolition speak again. A study of the origins and positions of those for and against compensation will be covered in the first chapter. Next the debate between indemnification’s proponents and opponents will be explained before being put back into context and discussed in terms of its scope and what was at stake. To this end, the various arguments advanced during the parliamentary debates will be grouped into three main categories: legal (chapter 2), economic (chapter 3), and political (chapter 4). The goal is to understand how the issue of compensation was raised and subsequently became a pressing concern for participants in the abolition process. This analysis will make it possible to explain and measure compensation’s influence on the far-reaching and complex issue of abolition in the New World.\textsuperscript{16}

Notes

1. Concerning the contemporary issue of reparations for historic wrongs, see Bouda Etémad, Crimes et réparations [Crimes and reparation] (Brussels: André Versaille, 2008).
2. To my knowledge, six studies exist—four dissertations and two articles—that address this topic specifically. Half of them concern British compensation, the other half French compensation. See Kathleen M. Butler, The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823–1843 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Nicholas Draper, “‘Possessing Slaves’: Ownership, Compensation and British Metropolitan Society at the Time of Emancipation, 1834–1840” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 2008), published in 2010 as The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Cécile Ernatus, “L’indemnité coloniale en Guadeloupe, Guyane et Martinique entre 1848 et 1860: monnaie de pierre, monnaie de sable, monnaie de sang” [Colonial compensation in Guadeloupe, Guiana, and Martinique between 1848 and 1860: stone money, sand money, blood money] (Ph.D. diss., Université Paris X, 2004); Ronald E. P. Wastell, “The History of Slave Compensation, 1838–1845” (Ph.D. diss., University of London [King’s College], 1932). The subject of compensation also comes up in the following works, in the broader context of the abolition of slavery, treated either from a comparative standpoint or in monograph form: David Baronov, The Abolition of Slavery in Brazil: The “Liberation” of Africans through the Emancipation of Capital (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000);
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3. Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau made this observation concerning the slave trade in “Pour une étude du milieu maritime nantais entre les fins XVIIIe et XIXe siècles” [Concerning a study of Nantes's shipping circles between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries], *Enquêtes et documents* no. 17 (1990): 55.


6. Sources for Table 0.1:

- The number of slaves in the British colonies was taken from Barry W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University
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The figures for the total population of the British colonies (1830), and the slave and total populations of the Danish colonies (1835) and Dutch colonies (1830/1832) were taken from Stanley L. Engerman and Barry W. Higman, “The Demographic Structure of the Caribbean Slave Societies in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in General History of the Caribbean, 3:50–51.


- Spanish colonies, Puerto Rico (1860), and Cuba (1862): Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, Empire and Antislavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (1833–1874) (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 16, 208n31.

- Brazil (1872): Baronov, Abolition of Slavery in Brazil, 157.

- Swedish colony (1846): The number of slaves on Saint-Barthélemy has been estimated at slightly more than 500 in 1846, at 531 according to Augustin Cochin, L’abolition de l’esclavage [The abolition of slavery] (Fort-de-France and Paris: Ed. Emile Désormeaux, 1979 [1861]), 393; and at 518 by Victor Schoelcher, Histoire de l’esclavage pendant les deux dernières années [History of slavery during the last two years] (Paris: Pagnerre, 1847), 534. The total population of this colony in 1836 is given by Stanley L. Engerman and Barry W. Higman, 51.

- Southern states of the United States (1860): According to the 1860 census, for which the data can be consulted at http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1860.htm. The total population present in the Southern states alone is broken out.


7. This initial choice is also justified by the fact that there was no abolition process as such outside of the Americas. While the need for emancipation was discussed in the context of the New World colonies, elsewhere the issue came up differently and later. When Africa and Asia were colonized, the need to eliminate slavery was acknowledged by all of the Western nations. So it was not the subject of parliamentary debates as was the case with the American territories.

8. The French cases occurred in two installments: an initial instance in 1793 and 1794, then a second in 1848. Drescher considers that even though each instance of abolition has its own history, those of the South in the United States and the British and French cases are the most significant, from both quantitative and qualitative standpoints. See Seymour Drescher, “British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation,” American Historical Review 96, no. 3 (June 1991): 710. While some emancipations did occur before the British and French cases, their relative scope must be taken into account. The slave populations they affected were only negligible (in both absolute and relative terms) compared to the selected cases. The average proportion of the slave population in the northern United States was only 2.1 percent (Kolchin, Une institution très particulière, 296, table 3). In continental Spanish America, Venezuela had the highest proportion of slaves. Its slave population came to 10 percent of the total population in 1810 and less than 1 percent at the time of the final abolition in 1854 (Charles Lancha, Histoire de l’Amérique hispanique de Bolivar à nos jours [History of Spanish America from Bolivar to our times] (Paris: L’Harmattan), 2003, 27,
The 500 slaves present in the Swedish colony of Saint-Barthélemy and the 26,900 freed in the Danish colonies in 1846 and 1847, represent 428 times and 8 times fewer, respectively, than the 214,100 French slaves in 1848. Therefore, the North American, Latin American, Danish, and Swedish emancipations have been set aside, even though some of them were earlier than the cases that were selected in the end.

9. Sources for Table 0.2:
   - Saint-Domingue/Haiti: Compensation in Saint-Domingue, as set by the French edict of 17 April 1825, was £6 million (150 million French francs). It was reduced to £3.6 million (90 million French francs) in 1838.
   - Danish colonies: On page 323 of “Disintegration of the Caribbean Slave Systems,” Knight mentions compensation of over 5 million French francs, but does not give an exact number.
   - Swedish colony: The amount of the Swedish indemnity was £10,000 (250,000 French francs), Schoelcher, Histoire de l’esclavage, 534.

10. Translator’s note: Since the discussion in this book refers to a number of different parliaments, the word is capitalized only when referring specifically to the British Parliament.


12. However, it was impossible to make this an exhaustive inventory due to the huge number of titles on slavery. With regard to the French abolition process, two master’s theses in contemporary history, defended at the Université de Bretagne-Sud and directed by Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, provide exhaustive lists of all of the French publications about the slave trade, slavery, and the colonies between 1814 and 1849, that is, from the Restoration to the 1849 Law on Compensation. The first of these theses, by Elodie Le Garrec, is entitled Le débat sur l’abolition de la traite des Noirs en France (1814–1831): Un reflet de l’évolution politique, économique et culturelle de la France [The debate on abolition of the negro trade in France (1814–1831): A reflection on France’s political, economic, and cultural evolution]. The second, by Audrey Le Galudec, is Le débat pour l’abolition de l’esclavage en France (1831–1849): Un reflet de l’évolution politique, économique et culturelle de la France [The debate on the abolition of slavery in France (1831–1849): A reflection on France’s political, economic, and cultural evolution].


14. See appendix A.

15. The main justification for this choice lies in the amount of time separating abolition of the slave trade from the final freeing of the slaves. The process of abolishing the slave trade in the Americas extended from the last quarter of the eighteenth century to the 1860s, or nearly a century. The fight against the slave trade lasted nineteen years in Great Britain (1788–1807) and forty-two years in France (1790–1831). The time between the prohibition of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery was twenty-six years in
Great Britain (1807–33) and seventeen years in France (1831–48). So abolition usually moved forward in two stages that were separated in time. The interval between the stages of the process prompted us to consider them separately.

16. This approach will thus cover the various stages and main aspects of the issue of compensation, except for the local payment of the compensation in the colonies and investment of it once settlement was complete, which is actually an entirely separate subject. Furthermore, this aspect of the issue is explored in part in the doctoral theses cited above. Omitting it is also justified by the geographic dispersal of the necessary material and the considerable number of records that would have to be perused. For example, the documents necessary for such a study would have had to be consulted in the departmental archives of the five relevant French overseas territories and in the nineteen British colonies. So this aspect of the issue was studied exclusively by means of the secondary literature.
Parliament: A Critically Important Stage

Making a systematic inventory of the arguments presented in the House of Commons and the Chamber of Deputies enabled me to list, in order, the topics most often raised by British and French representatives during the processes of abolishing the slave trade and, later, emancipation. The issue of compensation appears on this list as one of the major concerns of members of parliament throughout the abolition process. In fact, it was the topic of discussion that came up the most during the second phase of abolition, having been debated even more in the House of Commons and the Chamber of Deputies than other issues central to the abolition process, such as the economic fallout likely to result from the suppression of slavery and the “morality” of the slave trade or the use of slaves.

This subject’s position at the top of the list shows how central it was to the emancipation issue—all the more so because parliament was frequently the main stage on which abolitionist processes were played out. Efforts to free the slaves spread quickly and generally wound up in the legislature, which approved the end of slavery by passing abolition laws. It was in the British and French parliaments, the Constitutional Convention and Congress of the United States, the Spanish Cortes, and similar institutions in the relevant sovereign countries that the final decision to end slavery and the conditions that favored it was made. Emancipation laws were the product of decades of parliamentary debates fed by information collected by committees charged with studying the issue—with the notable exception of the French abolition from 1793 to 1794.
The influence of each side—proponents and opponents of abolition—in parliament determined how successful efforts to free the slaves would be within that body. So one of the critical factors in the abolition process was ensuring that one’s own side pulled enough weight in parliament and government to block rival objectives. Naturally, the opposing sides were better able to stand up for their opinions if they had a majority in the legislative and executive branches that could help them to either protect or end the slavery system. A powerful colonial lobby would have more resources for blocking abolitionist hopes over the long term than a party with less credibility, while the presence of many abolitionist sympathizers in parliament would guarantee that steps toward emancipation would be taken.

**Representation of Pro-Slavery Interests in Parliament**

Pro-slavery interests were more or less well defended depending on whether or not slavery existed within the nation’s borders. In cases where there was a colony/home-country relationship, pro-slavery interests in the colonies were not always directly represented in parliament, as they would have been in a sovereign country.

In the United States, slavery supporters were represented in accordance with their numbers and wealth. As today, each state sent two senators to Congress, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Senators were elected to six-year terms by the local legislatures. Representatives were elected to two-year terms by the people, with the number of representatives determined by the population of each district. This system of representation meant that each electoral district in a state was represented in proportion to its demographic size and was on an equal footing with the other districts.

There was one particular aspect of the United States system that gave advocates of slavery “artificial” weight in Congress. When the United States of America was created after the Revolutionary War, the southern states set a very specific condition for joining the new union: they demanded that slaves be counted when the number of each state’s seats in the House of Representatives was calculated. Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance, adopted on 13 July 1787 by the Continental Congress, stipulated that one slave was equal to three-fifths of a free man’s vote. This proportion was used by Congress in 1783 to calculate government tax levies.1 So owning five slaves, for example, conferred three additional votes.

This demand is explained by the fact that when the United States was formed, the institution of slavery was economically significant in only five of the original thirteen states.2 At that time, the populations of the northern and southern states were relatively equal, if free men and slaves were counted together. If the same number of members had been elected to
Congress for each state, regardless of population density, slavery advocates would have had a minority in Congress. If only the free population had been represented, the southern states would also have been at a disadvantage, with only 41 percent of the seats instead of half. The three-fifths principle helped balance the northern and southern states somewhat, though the goal of complete equality was never quite achieved, since the southern states had only 45 percent of the seats in Congress in 1790 and 42 percent in 1820.3

The definition of a slave as three-fifths of a free man provided the southern states with an advantage. This unique proportionality principle gave the slave states 2.46 million additional votes in 1860, corresponding to three-fifths of the over 4 million slaves then in the United States according to the census. Such a system of representation enabled the southern states to neutralize the northern states’ abolitionist aims throughout the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. This was the only case in which the slaves were taken into account politically, and the reason was that doing so advanced pro-slavery interests.

The political system in Brazil, which is made up of federal states, also favored the representation of pro-slavery interests. Slave owners had a majority in the local legislatures. In addition, coffee planters held the most important positions in the houses of parliament and the cabinet, exercising “very clear political domination”4 there. So the balance of power in the legislative branch of the sovereign countries of the United States of America and Brazil favored slave owners’ interests.

The British and French cases belong to a second category of abolition instances enacted not by sovereign countries for themselves but in the context of a relationship between a home country and its colonies that practiced slavery. In contrast to the situation in the United States and Brazil, colonial interests were not directly represented in the home country’s legislature. British and French colonies actually had no representatives due to their special status, which allowed them a certain amount of autonomy.5 British legislative colonies were governed by local legislatures through which they could vote for their own laws. They were not represented in the home country’s legislature, similarly to the Spanish colonies that were governed by special laws.6 The colonies’ interests were usually represented only indirectly in the British and French parliaments through three types of intermediaries: colonial officials, absentee plantation owners, and colonial merchants.7

To ensure that its voice was heard loud and clear in parliament, the colonial lobby had paid agents there to represent its interests. The agents engaged in a wide range of activities, from lobbying parliament to buying the favor of the most influential politicians. On the parliaments’ benches,
these various hired representatives rubbed elbows with colleagues who were also interested in maintaining the slave trade and slavery, being either owners of colonial property or defenders of the commercial and maritime interests of the relevant countries.

Even though colonies did not have the benefit of direct representation in the home country’s legislature, they still managed to work out ways to gain influence comparable to that of their counterparts in sovereign states. In the end, pro-slavery interests had to be considered as abolition progressed, regardless of the type of government that existed.

**Political Changes Were a Decisive Factor**

Abolition was the result of a power struggle between two groups—its proponents and opponents—that each used different strategies. But the parliamentary stage was important to both. That is why changes in the balance of the political forces present during periods of reform or changes in government influenced the course of the abolition process. An instance of abolition was often the result of a break with previous policies. It was dependent on increased influence and power for its supporters who, one way or another, had to overcome the reluctance of political circles that were frequently more conservative than innovative. So it was often the result of a more or less sharp break in government continuity, which could be caused by civil wars, wars for independence, revolution in the home country or slave rebellions, changes in the system of government, or parliamentary reforms.

Some colonies abolished slavery after gaining their political freedom. North America’s former Thirteen Colonies, which became independent in 1776, began their emancipation process in 1777. The same applied to the former Spanish-American colonies, where the process occurred during the period from 1811 to 1869 following the Spanish-American wars of independence (1808–26). Slavery’s end in the French colony of Saint-Domingue can also be explained by the fact that the colony gained its independence. The slave revolt that broke out in September 1791 forced the commissioners who were sent there to decree the abolition of slavery in 1793, ratified on 4 February 1794 by the National Convention.

Slavery was not permanently abolished in the French territories until the Second Republic, following the July Monarchy. The revolution of 24 February 1848 gave rise to a temporary government in which a majority opposed slavery. This new balance of power favored the abolitionists, making it possible to end slavery by decree on 27 April 1848 without the issue having been debated by the National Constituent Assembly, which though it had been created on 23 April did not begin its work until 28 April. The
absence of any legislative body that could discuss the abolition law allowed the executive branch to immediately implement a reform that otherwise certainly would have been the subject of many protracted debates. Schoelcher explained in July 1848, as cited by Drescher, that “if the emancipation committee had waited on the approval of the National Assembly, slavery would still be in place in the territory of the French Republic.”

The Spanish Revolution of September 1868, which ended the reign of Isabella II, also brought the abolitionists to power. Beginning in 1869, some members of the Sociedad Abolicionista Española became part of the new government that resulted from the revolution. These Spanish abolitionists immediately took up the question of doing away with slavery, supported by the Puerto Rican plantation owners, who had been asking for emancipation since 1866. Following discussions of several emancipation plans by the revolutionary legislature, the partial abolition law, named after Segismundo Moret, the Minister of Overseas Territories, was promulgated by the republican government on 4 July 1870. Under pressure from the Puerto Rican representatives, the final law bringing about abolition in Puerto Rico was unanimously approved by the Cortes on 22 March 1873. In Cuba, freedom for the slaves was recognized by the Spanish government in 1880 at the end of the Ten Years’ War (1868–78) and ratified by the signature of the Treaty of Zanjon on 10 February 1878.

Changes in the legislatures also favored success for the abolition process. The British reform of 7 June 1832 modified the system of electoral districts by reducing the number of boroughs and giving abolitionist interests better representation in the House of Commons. The Whigs’ subsequent accession to power is seen as having facilitated the vote for abolition on 28 August 1833.

Whether arising from profound changes in existing political landscapes or occurring as part of a more unbroken political context, the decision to abolish slavery was often the result of a “new” political context that gave slavery reformers a voice and a certain amount of freedom to act. Yet the abolitionists were far from being revolutionaries, or even all progressives. They could sometimes be described as neoconservative liberals planning to overhaul—not destroy—the existing colonial system. For example, abolitionist William Wilberforce, the movement’s great apologist, was a fierce opponent of all causes he considered too radical or revolutionary. Though he fought for the reform of prison conditions and against the death penalty, he also supported the suspension of habeas corpus in 1795 and opposed workers’ right to unionize in 1799. The same was true in France. Though at the time political parties per se did not exist, the abolitionists can be classified with the opposition—moderate, liberal, center-left, or the Gauche Dynastique.
While a power imbalance frequently gave the abolitionist process a critical push, this was not a hard-and-fast rule. The July Monarchy that followed the Restoration scarcely changed the French government’s policy on possibly freeing the slaves, while the Swedish, Danish, and Dutch emancipations do not seem to have resulted from any political change whatsoever.

Pro-slavery interests were sometimes jeopardized by changes in government likely to reduce their presence in the legislative or executive branch. For both defenders and opponents of the slavery system, their numbers and influence in parliament or the government were significant factors that affected the outcome and conditions of the abolitionist process. These parameters are difficult to quantify, however. Accurately estimating the number of members of parliament or the general public who were directly or indirectly involved with the slave trade and slavery is a challenging task, for several reasons.

First, the proliferation of stakeholders involved in colonial trade and slave ownership, in both the colonies and the home country, makes it difficult to identify them. Furthermore, available information about the influence of slavery supporters appears not to be very reliable. It does seem that assertions made in the legislatures about the importance of the colonies or the slavery system cannot be taken at face value due to the reasons they were made. Their purpose was to convince the parliamentarians of the need to maintain a pro-slavery regime in the colonies because of the number of people, in both the colonies and the home country, associated in one way or another with the slave-based production system. Yet nothing allows us to conclude that persons directly or indirectly involved with the slave system necessarily favored maintaining it, or even that they thought about the issue at all. Indeed, it is highly likely that some of them did not even know they were participating in the slave trade or slavery. So it would be risky to assert that they were a part of antiabolition efforts.

For example, in Great Britain Patrick Colquhoun, a statistician and merchant associated with the West Indian trade, estimated in the early 1800s that 20,000 families, or 160,000 individuals, lived on income from the colonies. This was less than 2 percent of the total population of Great Britain (England and Wales), which was taken as 8.893 million in 1801. Some three decades later, at the Chamber of Deputies session held on 22 April 1835, French member of parliament and abolitionist Hippolyte Passy estimated at 50,000 the number of English families with an interest in keeping the colonies prosperous. If we, like Colquhoun, assume that there were eight people per family, the total number of individuals with ties to the colonies would then be 400,000, or less than 3 percent of Great Britain’s estimated total population of 13.897 million in 1831.
In light of these estimates, which moreover are probably high, the issue of keeping slavery in place in the British West Indian colonies would have affected only a minuscule fraction of the population. However, those concerned, mostly members of the well-to-do social classes, doubtless exercised disproportionate influence in the legislative and executive bodies considering their demographic weight. As landowners, they were generally members of the affluent social classes that were well represented in government. Though they made up a tiny fraction of the home country’s total population, it is appropriate to take their number in parliament into account when assessing their political influence, which was not in any way related to their proportion in the general population.

It is difficult to estimate the number of people from the general population who were involved with the slave trade and slavery, and naturally the same is true of the legislatures. Some English-speaking authors have attempted to assess the number of representatives in the British Parliament who were associated with the slave system. Although their conclusions are sometimes contradictory, they do give a general overview of the colonial “party’s” influence over time. The main authors who discuss the British West Indies lobby are Lilian M. Penson, Barry W. Higman, Izhak Gross, and Nicholas A. Draper.

Penson is the author of an article on the influence of the colonial lobby and the ties between absentee plantation owners and colonial merchants in eighteenth-century Great Britain. Higman gives a complete picture of the composition and development of the West Indies “party,” from Britain’s abolition of the slave trade until emancipation in 1833. Gross examines the proportion of abolitionist and antiabolitionist forces in the House of Commons and how it changed between the 1832 parliamentary reform and the implementation of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1834. Finally, Draper identifies some recipients of British compensation, among whom were several members of Parliament. So he has an opportunity to point out those in Parliament with sufficient interests in the ownership of slaves and colonial property who have received a share of the compensation intended for the owners of freed slaves.

It is commonly acknowledged that the colonial lobby’s influence in the House of Commons continued to decline throughout the long process of abolition. The 1832 parliamentary reform weakened the pro-slavery group and strengthened its opponents. The electorate’s increased size and power as a result of the reform also gave public opinion more influence than it had ever had before. “Popular” causes such as the abolition of slavery began to attract more attention and were easier to push through. The abolitionists, well aware of the advantages that could arise from this new system of representation, began an intense propaganda campaign in an-