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Sami Pinarbasi

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the actions of Mancunians who either supported or opposed abolitionism between the years 1792 and 1807. A central part of this article is an exploration of the individual signatories (and associated addresses and businesses) who attached their names to the Manchester pro- and antislavery petitions of 1806. This is achieved by using historical geographic information systems (GIS) to understand and plot patterns of opposing ideologies throughout the city in order to present the idea that the ideology expanded beyond social clubs, parlours, and published materials. The notion that two opposing sides of the slavery debate often occupied the same space is investigated. Such an approach will offer a hitherto overlooked aspect of slavery and abolition in Manchester.

Introduction

This article offers fresh perspectives on issues that have been the subject of significant historical analysis since the 1944 publication of Eric Williams's seminal *Capitalism and Slavery*. In methodological terms, rather than simply discussing the contents of the 1806 proslavery and abolitionist petitions upon which the article focusses, an interdisciplinary perspective will be utilised regarding these primary source datasets. The intention is to present a fresh and novel quantitative perspective on this material in order to challenge overly simplistic understandings of the nature of those who supported or opposed slavery, including their motivations for adopting such stances. GIS methods allow for the utilisation of spatially referenced databases and the representation of this information within historical maps. As Butlin has noted, the dataset of regions and localities helps to 'provide a dynamic framework for the study of the possible geographies of the past.'¹ Daniel Hopkins, Philip Morgan, and Justin Roberts argue that utilising maps and software 'invites the development and use of a geographic information system to map correlations between specific plots of land and slave populations' and that consequently

there is scarcely any end to the possibilities, and the data can be expected to generate new questions as fast as others are addressed; each ... map, upon examination of the patterns it reveals, is likely to lead to the design of new ways to visualise the data.²

Both the planter who maintained estates in the British West Indies and the abolitionist who organised petitioning efforts depended upon networks to achieve their desired outcomes.³ Joanna Innes's research suggests that, instead of interpreting eighteenth and nineteenth-century British society as a conglomeration of atomistic individuals, it would be more appropriate to reconceptualise members of a community, such as Mancunians, as being a part 'of a network of interdependencies.'⁴ Planters, merchants and abolitionists were important historical actors whose activities helped to both strengthen and weaken the bonds that linked networked Manchester to the British West Indies. This concept also helps the historical analysis of the connection between two physically distant but increasingly integrated economic regions. Such an approach, framing a topic as based on historical linkages, can illuminate various associations, whether based on the transnational exchange of goods, capital or slaves across the Atlantic Ocean, or upon the local transmission of abolitionist ideology throughout the streets of Manchester.⁵ Srividhya Swaminathan has contended that researching the slavery debates 'entails a "mapping" of the changes in rhetoric used. Each side develops arguments that respond to a complex mixture of factors such as geographical location ... and publications with opposing viewpoints.'⁶ This article will build upon Swaminathan's argument by mapping the spread of opposing ideologies throughout the city.

What was true in the 1780s was also accurate in the early 1800s when popular reformism began to re-emerge.⁷ In placing the general mobilisation against slavery from 1792 to 1807 within the context of the social upheavals and growth of mass politics in industrial Manchester, this article will examine the support and opposition to the slave trade through the prism of petitioning efforts that emerged from Manchester on 13 May 1806. The abolitionist counter-petition, titled *Petition from the inhabitants of Manchester against the Foreign Slave Trade Abolition Bill, 1806*, and an anti-abolitionist counter-petition, *Petition from Manufacturers and Merchants of Manchester in support of the Foreign Slave Trade Abolition Bill, 1806* offer important datasets of signatories which can be cross-referenced with addresses of Manchester companies in contemporary business directories. These petitions were a physical microcosm of the increasing separation between the elite and the burgeoning power of the British middle class. Manchester was the first city in Britain to produce an abolitionist petition. A general meeting of the Manchester Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade called for the petition as early as 29 December 1788. Sadly, this document is lost to history. Petitions represent the depth and development of Manchester's sociocultural and political networks. The 1788 petition was signed by 10,639 people, the 1792 equivalent by more than 20,000, both a result of well-organised mass-petitioning efforts by the Manchester Committee.⁸ The petitions of 1788 and 1792 were left for signatures at town halls, hotels, banks, coffee houses, and pubs. These Manchester petitions depended upon 'the existence of a complex political and social network which

fostered the easy circulation of political literature and agitation throughout society, and capable of well-timed agitation on a broad scale.’⁹ Yet the 1806 petition emerged from a distinct set of circumstances. It was hurriedly canvassed and dispatched to Parliament within a few hours as a reaction to Robert Peel’s anti-abolitionist petition of 13 May 1806. This was in direct contrast to the earlier Manchester petitions, which were the consequences of vast expenditures of energy, ingenuity, material resources, organisation, propaganda and public discussion. Earlier petitions resulted from Manchester Committee meetings called for that specific purpose.

Economic interest built up the slave systems; enlightened principles such as freedom and liberty helped to destroy them. These connections between inland Manchester and the British West Indies have been hitherto neglected, and will form the heart of this article.

The Manchester-British West Indian trade

Manchester embodies an interesting dilemma concerning slavery, as it facilitated the power and influence of both the colonial elite and the abolitionists at a concomitant juncture in history. The city was a node in a network which was connected to and dependent upon other locales. One man who exploited such networks was William Stout, a grocer with substantial business interests in Manchester, who invested in several shipments to the British West Indies, and was one of the first figures to profit from the Manchester-British West Indian trade network. In April 1702, Stout financed the voyage of the *‘Employment* (which) met with a low market at Barbados, for what they carried outwards; but their goods very dear; muscovado sugars, 38s. per hundredweight ... cotton wool, 12d. per pound.’¹⁰ Such trading ventures, while not overwhelmingly profitable for grocers such as Stout, helped to lay out the economic blueprint for other Manchester-based merchants and traders to profit from the British West Indian-Manchester connection.

The West Indies helped to consolidate Manchester’s importance in the eighteenth century. Samuel Touchet is a figure who, according to Sven Beckert, represented the ‘outwardly oriented capitalism’ which ‘came to dominate the centuries-old worlds of cotton’ and focused networks of commerce ‘into a single empire centred in Manchester.’¹¹ The amounts of cotton Touchet imported, as shown in [Table 1](#), are impressive. Local authorities and government officials viewed his activities with mistrust. They suspected Touchet of monopolising the importation of cotton into Manchester and eviscerate any local competitors in the cotton market. Touchet attempted to justify this engrossment, telling a House of Commons committee in 1751 that raw cotton was ‘used by Negroes in the plantations,’ and that it was desirable to allow the raw cotton business to continue unabated.¹² Touchet’s questionable activities can be explained by Richard Sheridan’s assertion that early entrants into the British

Table 1. Manchester and Samuel Touchet cotton imports, 1745–1749.

Year	Quantity of raw cotton imported (lbs.)	Quantity of raw cotton imported by Touchet (lbs.)
1745	1,469,523	170,786
1746	2,264,808	418,204
1757	2,214,869	470,643
1748	4,852,966	200,026
1749	1,658,365	171,716

Source: *Reports From Committees of the House of Commons, 1738–1765*, vol. 2 (1803), 300.

West Indian market attempted to achieve economic supremacy through their actions: ‘wealth was more rapidly to be attained by seizing a great share, a monopoly if possible, of the supply of tropical output, and the profits of disposing of it in the European market.’¹³ Touchet also invested in a 2,180 acre Jamaican plantation called Dukinfield Hall in 1763, which was named for a Greater Manchester locality and was home to 375 slaves.¹⁴

The demand for such cotton goods facilitated the economic and geographical growth of Manchester. Instead of insular investment in local and national business networks, Manchester’s merchants, traders and investors were heavily involved in the British West Indian trade. John Aikin, who documented his tours of British cities, acknowledged the decisive role overseas markets played in spurring on Manchester’s growth. He wrote in 1760 that:

within the last twenty or thirty years the vast increase of foreign trade has caused many of the Manchester manufacturers to travel abroad ... and the town has now in every respect assumed the style and manners of one of the commercial capitals of Europe.¹⁵

Though initially the trading ventures of merchants such as William Stout were ‘a minor trade, little more than a subsidiary occupation for a few thousand agriculturalists,’ this changed as the eighteenth century progressed.¹⁶ Caribbean markets offered opportunities to Manchester merchants and capitalists who were brave enough to invest in the West Indian trade: ‘the international market was highly competitive, and considerable effort was required to be successful. Few sensible entrepreneurs would choose to operate in that market if their alternative was a comfortable, sheltered domestic market.’¹⁷

In their testimony before a select committee, planters themselves valued British trade with the islands at between £50–60 million in 1775, and £70 million in 1789.¹⁸ Yet in 1807, George Hibbert attested that the value was just under £100 million, and twice as much money was invested in the slave trade from 1791 to 1807, at the height of abolitionist agitation, as in the relatively agitation-free years of 1761 to 1780.¹⁹ In addition, David Eltis and Stanley Engerman suggest that ‘the share of the British West Indies in British exports increased only after the middle of the ... century, and reached sustained heights in and after the 1790s.’²⁰ The reality was that the wealth that planters accrued left them vulnerable to charges of inhumane treatment towards their

slaves within the context of a changing discourse on the morality and economic efficiency of slavery.

Eric Williams's work which suggests there was an empirically quantifiable link between the economic output of the West Indian plantations and the development of the metropolitan economy—in this case, Manchester—has been challenged by historians such as Roger Anstey. This link manifested itself in other ways, beyond the strictly statistical. Overseas trade (the supply of and demand for raw materials) stimulated domestic demand in Manchester, and the result was permanent structural changes in the city's economy. There is much valid criticism of Williams's attempted linkage of the West Indian and British economies, but his approach can apply to a more detailed study of Manchester. The connections explored are not only economic but also political, cultural and ideological. The rise and fall of slavery in the West Indies was both cause and consequence of the dramatic eighteenth-century change within the metropole.²¹

Opposition to abolitionism

George Hibbert, born in Manchester, was the fifth son of the notable merchant Robert, and grandson to Thomas.²² Katie Donington's insightful work on the Hibberts has revealed that George saw himself as representing those who had a tangible and legitimate interest in the British West Indies. This was in defiance of the abolitionists, whose ideas he considered dangerously comparable to 'those wild projects of reform, to which modern philanthropy has given birth, and of which the civilised world has lately seen the results.'²³ Hibbert became a junior partner in the West Indies merchant house of 'Hibbert, Purrier and Horton'.²⁴ He knew how blatant his own interests were:

I am aware that, in declaring my connection with the West Indian trade, I subject myself to the charge of a bias of interest, which have recently been told have clouded the understandings and blunted the feelings of that class of person.²⁵

Hibbert clarified that he and his fellow planters were more than capable of defending the slave-based plantation economy which made them rich.²⁶ The West India lobby had the supposed interests of Manchester at the heart of its trade and argument. It linked the financial health of the British Empire, on both on a regional and national level, to the slavery status quo:

I have known the West India body long ... they have felt their intimate connection with all the leading interests of the mother country ... the British capitalist, manufacturer ... landholder.²⁷

Despite these connections, the idea that Manchester industrialists promoted abolitionist doctrine solely to distract attention from their own form of exploitation proved popular among anti-abolitionists. *Tu quoque* arguments seemed to

gain traction during the ten years covered in this article.²⁸ An early historiographical trend was to interpret the years 1792–1807 as having cleared an ideological path for British industrialists by publicising the horrors of slavery. In *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, David Brion Davis suggested that abolitionism served the purpose of reinforcing capitalist values in the early nineteenth century.²⁹ Yet twelve years later, Davis concedes that ‘I did not mean a fixed set of ideas and doctrines used to promote concrete class interests.’³⁰ Instead, abolitionism can be viewed as a tool to aid the understanding of historical notions of class, ideology, political and sociocultural progress. Christopher L. Brown alludes to the negative perception of the abolition movement, suggesting the abolitionists were ‘denounced as quixotic knights-errant, as pious charlatans all too happy to ruin the Empire with costly and disastrous experiments in social engineering for the good of an inferior race.’³¹

Planters and others with a tangible interest in the trade between 1787 and 1807 resented Manchester’s abolitionist influence on the West Indies. It is unambiguous that ‘white West Indians ... had selfish but pressing reasons to resist being absorbed into the moral structure of the metropolitan culture.’³² The principal weapon of the proslavery interest in defence of its trade was an appeal to the ethos of capitalism.³³ Until the eve of the 1807 Act, this was an important defence against abolition – that antislavery was incompatible with concepts of property rights, enshrined in British law and culture alike. While regulating trade was a materially different concept to the removal of property, both ideas seemed incompatible with long-held concepts of law and property rights. Organised abolitionism opposed the unobstructed commercial policy of the British government by diminishing the established trade of the kingdom, specifically during war. The sugar abstention movement is just one example.³⁴ It was:

evidently for the public good, during a war which demands all our resources, to augment our mercantile and colonial industry, our productive capital, our returns, our exports and imports by every means—abolition would instead benefit the foreign capital.³⁵

The fear for anti-abolitionists in Manchester was that no clear end point existed in the progression towards reform. If the abolitionists were ‘inspired by a combination of manufacturing ideology, economic innovation and zeal for labour management reform, what was to restrain their support from calling for justice inside Britain as well?’³⁶ It was a legislative Pandora’s Box.

Robert Hibbert Jr., cousin to George Hibbert MP, was born in Jamaica rather than England, unlike the rest of his family, and was a partner in a mercantile house in Kingston that dealt principally in slaves and sugar.³⁷ Hibbert wrote to James Brydges, George’s business partner, on 20 May 1787:

the rumour of this intended novelty (abolition) which spread like wild fire amongst our Negroes and to which great additions were made, no less than that there was to be an

abolition of slavery (Emancipation) altogether ... nothing was ever more calculated to raise commotions amongst a set of people (the slaves) naturally peaceable and harmless but who if they knew their power, they would have our Lives and property entirely at their mercy.³⁸

George Hibbert's personal defence of the slave trade is unsurprising, as he was both an MP and a central figure in the Society of West Indian Planters and Merchants, an organisation which lobbied government for favourable policies towards planters.³⁹ Hibbert's comments in 1787 coincided with intensifying antislavery agitation in Manchester which came after two decades of significant colonial unrest in North America and the Caribbean. Starting with Tacky's Rebellion in 1760, the British West Indies experienced a long period of instability before Manchester's first antislavery petition in 1788.⁴⁰ According to one calculation between 1700 and 1788 one slave uprising occurred every 5½ years in the islands owned by Britain prior to the outbreak of war in 1756, while throughout the Ceded Islands slave plots were constantly reported.⁴¹ Brown proposes that this unease, alongside international conflicts, forced Britain into a period of collective self-scrutiny.⁴²

A resurgent Manchester committee

British possessions in the Caribbean were foremost in the minds of many inhabitants of Manchester in the years leading up to 1806. The tempestuous years of 1800 to 1807, marked by the long Haitian struggle for independence and the ongoing naval wars with France, made the West Indian islands a serious threat to British stability. Mancunians representing the political elite 'had their opinions either changed or shaken by new considerations arising out of late events and existing circumstances in the West Indies.'⁴³ The years of chaotic French wars gave rise to numerous anti-war and social movements, such as the largely middle-class 'Friends of Peace,' who wished to challenge the constant state of war, and the militant working-class resistance of Ned Ludd and his 'army of redressers,' who wished to rebalance society by extending the franchise and improving social conditions in the industrialising cities of Britain. The government was obligated to build a network of barracks in northern England, including Lancashire and Cheshire, and to station 12,000 troops there, more than had been sent to fight in the Peninsular War.⁴⁴ A writer from Prestwich stated that:

meetings were immediately called, arrangements for forming military bodies made ... in obedience to the King's command ... in carrying into effect the law to enable his Majesty ... to provide for the defence and security of the town.⁴⁵

A bad harvest in 1800 and the commercial downturn of 1805 coincided with antislavery agitation.⁴⁶ It is no coincidence that an intense period of Caribbean warfare and domestic unrest occurred during the resurgence of abolitionism in

1806. Three months before the Manchester petitions appeared, the *Manchester Mercury* newspaper printed a letter regarding a failed slave rebellion in Trinidad, whereupon:

We had nearly rebellion of the Negroes here, and general massacre of the Whites ... a Negro slave of Shand's estate, had this day been executed in the Square in town ... the projects of these scoundrels were, to get possession all the white men, and grind them in Mr. Shand's new windmill.⁴⁷

Riots and general disorder were commonplace. 'Hunger riots'—working-class marchers who trudged along Deansgate, one of the city's main thoroughfares, demanding food in 1795 and 1800 disrupted Manchester's markets.⁴⁸ These marches were the exception rather than the rule, as petitioning efforts and political gatherings which even hinted at radicalism were restrained by the authorities with the help of the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act of 1794.⁴⁹ For Manchester, and for Britain more widely, the struggle against the slave trade occurred during a prolonged period of wartime privations and a suffocating atmosphere of reactionary politics and censorship. Davis argues that antislavery 'could not be stigmatised as the aberration of a radical era.'⁵⁰ Antislavery in Manchester was not confined to one class of citizen, nor did it embody radical class conflict. It was, after all, the outgrowth of a 'hard-nosed industrial town, not a sect that could be politically discounted for its long tradition of tender conscience and sectarian isolation.'⁵¹

Commensurately, newspaper support was crucial to the abolitionist cause, which was given publicity by the editors of the *Manchester Mercury* and the *Manchester Chronicle*. But this changed in the 1790s, due to the reactionary paranoia of the age, editorial censorship, and fear both of the authorities and of reactionary mobs who roamed the streets of Manchester attacking the property of perceived enemies and burning effigies thereof. The owners of these two newspapers publicly disavowed all antislavery agitation. Thus, two leading abolitionists, Thomas Walker and Thomas Cooper, founded their own newspaper, the *Manchester Herald*, on 31 March 1792.⁵² This was the only way to communicate about abolitionism to potential supporters throughout Manchester. The Government pressured the original Manchester Committee into giving up its regular meetings and expelling its more radical members.⁵³ The Committee held its last meeting on 17 April 1792. Thomas Walker drew attention from the authorities due to accusations of being a subversive radical. The government put him on trial at Lancaster assizes in 1794 for conspiracy against the constitution and the King. The political atmosphere was charged during the contentious trial. Walker observed that 'the town of Manchester has long extremely divided ... I wish ... that everything which proceeds from me may be the means of conciliating rather than exasperating dissension which have already produced much mischief.'⁵⁴ The jury acquitted Walker because the key witness against him knowingly lied under oath, but clearly overt political

campaigning brought serious risks. While domestic reaction and economic necessity stymied abolitionist efforts from 1787 to 1792, a new Committee of 1792 imposed itself upon the political elite and the proslavery interest. The clamour among the inhabitants of Manchester for structured, legislative change escalated. Another lost petition, again relying on the same tactics used in 1788, produced twice the number of signatories.⁵⁵

The abolitionists formed a new Manchester Committee in 1792 to counter planter influence, government repression, and Parliamentary delays. Headed by Thomas Walker, the involvement of the Manchester Committee in the 1792 national campaign was not as notable or prominent as it had been in 1787.⁵⁶ Indeed, a Liverpool newspaper editor detailed the decline in activity by writing that he received a letter from Manchester. His correspondent asserted that: 'the General Meeting ... was attended by seven members only. These consisted of the chairman, two lawyers, one apothecary, one stationer, the secretary and one other person, so little known.'⁵⁷ Seymour Drescher, in an excellent article challenging the accepted historiography of abolitionism, writes that

nothing resembling the great popular agitation of the 1792 effort was repeated before the 1807 Act. Such historical consensus led to the idea that the public and public opinion played little or no part, chiefly in the years immediately preceding 1807. Many historical accounts written on this period of antislavery focus on the interactions of the Parliamentary 'Saints,' Parliamentary legislation and 'Great Men.' Historiographically, much of this activity having occurred within a long lull in popular participation, stretching from 1792 until the 1820s.⁵⁸

This article adds strength to the claim that popular support for abolitionism and popular agitation in Manchester was central to the movement's success.

The Manchester petitions of 1806

The right to petition has been enshrined in British law since the Magna Carta, and both sides took advantage of this tactic. An anonymous author in 1733 wrote that 'the people of Great Britain have a right to petition the King ... for the redress of all their grievances, it will certainly follow that they have a right to petition a Parliament.'⁵⁹ Indeed by 1776, petitioning was seen as a birthright of the British subject.⁶⁰ Ironically, the constant stream of petitions originating from the Thirteen Colonies helped to establish a petitioning culture within Britain itself.⁶¹ Manchester petitioning efforts in the drive towards abolitionism were wholly unconcerned with the finer details, such as the economic or political issues which would be affected by abolition, or indeed with the more quantifiable issues, such as realistic alternatives to slave labour.

Paula E. Dumas explicitly sets out the political power of petitioning and analyses Parliamentary debates over the slave trade. It was during these debates that one politician lamented that 'it had been custom to send a circular letter to the patron of boroughs ... to counties and places where election was more general

and in the hands of many.’ Yet Manchester had no MP until 1832, nor was it incorporated as a municipal borough until 1838. This underscores Manchester’s uniqueness and helps to connect the city’s growth to wider notions of freedom and representation in the age of revolutions. This situation did not halt the city’s interest in Parliamentary debates over the slave trade. The *Mercury* reported in May 1806, the same month that the Manchester petitions were produced, that

in the House of Commons on Thursday night, on the subject of the Slave Importation Bill, Mr. [Charles James]Fox declared “that there were no transaction ... his Majesty’s present Ministers, would consider as contributing more to their glory than the *total Abolition of the Slave Trade*, could it be effected during their Administration.”⁶²

Such reporting would have concerned the proslavery interest, as Dumas states that its ‘members were afraid that their speeches, while acceptable within the Houses of Parliament, might be interpreted as seditious or dangerous by the lower classes that were outside the political arena.’⁶³

Dumas helps to explain the anti-abolitionist opposition to petitions and the methodologies they employed. The endorsement and distribution of the Manchester petition was a notably effective method of agitation. It required the reading and signing of material by members of the public, and such municipal pressure held more weight in the House of Commons than a speech or debate. A familiar method of attack was to disparage the abolitionists and question the appropriateness of petitioning. Dumas explores British opposition to abolitionist petitions by relaying the remarks of Lord Sheffield during a debate on gradual abolition in the Commons that:

as to the petitions ... he knew that they were not the voluntary expressions of the people, but for the greater part had been procured by associations, and he should ever condemn such attempts to control the deliberations of parliament, as he thought them highly unconstitutional.⁶⁴

The same accusation could have been levelled at Manchester’s Sir Robert Peel, the originator of the 1806 anti-abolitionist petition, who had deep roots in the West India cotton trade. Peel, father of the future Prime Minister, organised a hastily arranged anti-abolitionist petition in 1806. It is considered a last-gasp attempt by the proslavery interest to establish that there was considerable support for slavery in Manchester and to stifle any impending legislation.⁶⁵ It is important to note that it attracted a paltry 111 signatures.⁶⁶ Peel criticised those who wished to end slavery by describing abolitionists as:

fraught with more mischief than I could describe ... the present was not the time for such a measure, when so many of our manufacturers were unemployed, and our looms were standing still.⁶⁷

Peel relied upon the argument that abolitionism posed an existential threat to the profitable nature of trade. Ceasing the transportation of slaves to the British West Indies was seemingly placed above the manufactory development

of Manchester by the Government. This methodology conforms to Dumas's assertion that proslavery supporters 'attacked the abolitionists' evidence, methods of gaining support, logic, and underlying ideology to undermine their position and discredit their reasoning.' It was important to proslavery supporters to delegitimise the opposition.⁶⁸

The anti-abolitionist petition of 1806 offers some interesting information regarding the nature of the opposition to the ending of the slave trade. The number of signatures on this petition totals 111, with 77 cross-referenced with contemporary business directories listing their professions. Most were merchants and manufacturers and were members of corporate partnerships located within the vicinity of the River Irwell. This data is plotted on a map of Manchester in [Figure 1](#). Warehouse owners, merchants, and manufacturers needed access to colonial products arriving by boat from Liverpool and other locations. Many signatories in this area were in the cotton-producing sector of the city. An interesting example of signatories sharing the same space is Barton Square where a cotton manufacturer, cotton merchant, a twist manufacturer and the owner of a twist warehouse all attached their names to the document. Twisting involved winding two or more threads or strands of cotton together. Countless warehouses and offices occupied this space in 1806, as it was a short yet busy road. The owners of these businesses may have been competitors, but William Myers, the merchant, would have sold cotton goods

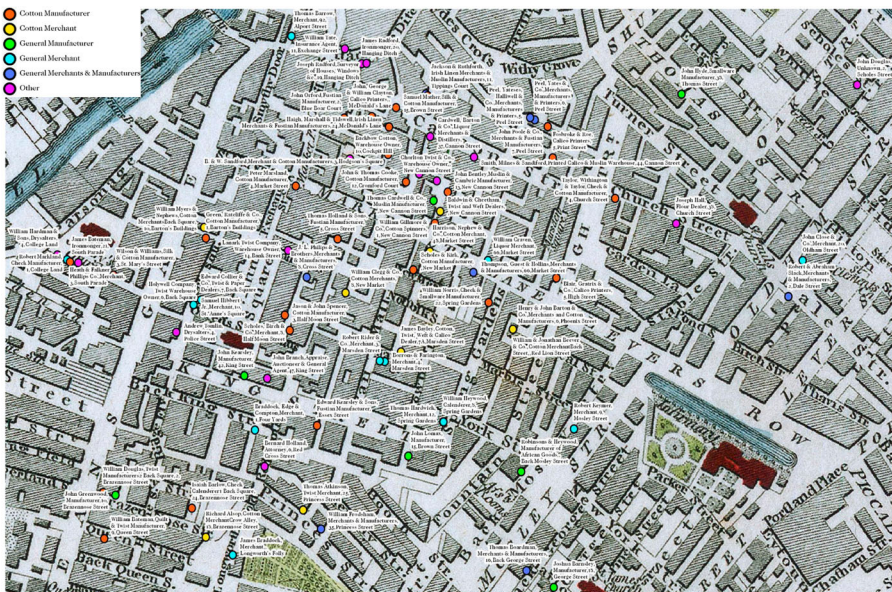


Figure 1. Map of anti-abolitionist signatures, 1806. Source: Manchester Petitions, 1806; Gerard Banks, *Banks's Manchester and Salford Directory: or, Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Manufacturers, and Principal Inhabitants* (Manchester, Gerard Banks, 1800), 1–60; R. & W. Dean, *Deans' Manchester & Salford directory for 1808 & 1809 containing an alphabetical list of the merchants, manufacturers, and inhabitants in general*, (Manchester: R. & W. Dean).

manufactured with raw material supplied by Green, Ratcliffe and Company, the twist manufacturer.

The interconnected nature of the cotton trade, reaching from the British West Indies to Barton Street, Manchester is evident in this petition. Samuel Hibbert, the son-in-law of George Hibbert also owned property near this location. His merchant business was situated in Manchester's Royal Exchange, where spun yarn and finished goods were traded on the international market, and which was only a few hundred yards from Barton Street. Hibbert was the wealthiest merchant in the city and owned several plantations in the British West Indies. It is unsurprising that he lent his signature to this petition, as nearly every businessman in his immediate vicinity also lent their signatures to the proslavery petition. Donington has suggested that George Hibbert's anti-abolitionist arguments were based on a traditional concept of political petitioning, which conceived of interest as an economic claim rather than a popular or moral one.⁶⁹ Abolitionism threatened the Hibberts' fortunes and Samuel's signature is representative of his desire to protect his Manchester-based business interests.

These signatories were primarily cotton and twist merchants, warehouse-owners and manufacturers. It is likely that they were customers or clients of Hibbert. Anti-abolitionism was a commonality they shared. Another interesting set of signatures are those of 'Peel, Yates & Company' and 'Peel, Yates, Halliwell & Company,' unsurprisingly located on Peel Street, in between Market Street and Withy Grove. Their trade was predominantly cotton-spinning and calico-printing, which influenced their owners' attitudes towards the slave trade and slavery. According to Dumas, anti-abolitionists commonly dismissed all anti-slavery claims and 'declared that the abolitionists' anecdotes were falsified, exaggerated, impossible, or out-of-date.'⁷⁰ Surviving evidence concerning Peel's proslavery ideology is limited. Yet in a speech to Parliament in 1794, he tried to counter abolitionist influence by warning of the dangerous consequences that would envelop the colonies due to abolitionism, inferring that Africans were content being slaves:

A greater degree of freedom, so far from increasing their happiness, would add to their infelicity ... in their condition they were happy, and the very exalted ideas we possessed of freedom had the effect to mislead us in our ideas of the situation of this race of people.⁷¹

Peel warned that a whiff of freedom would set a dangerous precedent throughout the British West Indies. Yet Peel himself represented the paradox of cotton manufacturers. His full-throated defence of slavery stood in contrast to the concern he expressed for the working conditions of cotton-spinners throughout Manchester. As MP for Tamworth, Peel introduced the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, 1802, which was a 'bill for preserving the health and morals of apprentices in cotton mills and other factories.'⁷² It is important to remember that the desire for change in the domestic status quo and the issues of reform

and abolition were paradoxically bound up together in many ways by both sides of the slavery debate.

Many of the businessmen whose names were attached to the anti-abolitionist petition are found within a one-mile radius of Peel's businesses. Indeed, it may have been his economic or social influence that compelled others to follow his lead. One visitor to Manchester remarked that:

partly from the high opinion formed at the judgement of Sir Robert Peel, and partly that they might have an opportunity of standing within the chance of some of the respectable connections he had formed; being induced to drop their favours upon them, everyone wished to have a warehouse near him.⁷³

Davis contended that the Williams' thesis exemplifies too literal a conception of 'self-interest.'⁷⁴ Yet self-interest permeated all of the slave trade debate within Manchester. The interconnection of the cotton sector, economic influence and anti-abolitionist thought in Manchester is personified by Peel's presence on his eponymous street. Numerous people attached signatures to this petition. These included Andrew Tomlin, a dry-salter on Police Street, John Branch, an auctioneer on King Street, and Bernard Holland, an attorney with an office on Red Cross Street (now part of Albert Square.) Perhaps these individuals moved in the same social circles as planters, West Indian merchants or slave traders. Andrew Tomlin was presumably of the firm of 'Andrew Tomlin & Company,' which was co-owned by Thomas and George Tomlin, a famous dry-salter and baker of Liverpool.⁷⁵ Indigo was a popular product stocked by dry-salters, and the plant thrived in the tropical West Indies, and Jamaica in particular.⁷⁶ Their clear economic links to Liverpool could have made the brothers predisposed towards the slave trade status quo.

The proslavery petition horrified abolitionists, who reacted by organising their own, much more fruitful, petition, which attracted 2,350 signatures within hours.⁷⁷ It was noticed by the Lords and was referred to in Hansard on 13 May 1806, when the Earl of Westmoreland presented a petition from 'certain merchants and traders of Manchester against the Slave Importation Restriction Bill.'⁷⁸ Figures 2–4 display data from the abolitionist petition relating to Manchester city centre and Salford.

The antislavery petition helped to accentuate a pattern of abolitionism in Manchester as a counterbalance to proslavery hegemony throughout the Empire. Figures 2–4 show a sample of the 2,350 signatures that appear on the abolitionist petition, with 290 of them able to be cross-referenced with contemporary businesses. J. R. Oldfield suggested that 'petitioners frequently referred to the trade as "unchristian", meaning that it was either "repugnant" or reproachable.'⁷⁹ Yet no religious language appears in the preamble of the 1806 Manchester abolitionist petition, perhaps hinting at the extent of secular radical influence and the broad motivations for opposing the slave trade in industrialising Manchester. Tib Street contains a number of signatories protesting the slave trade, which seems appropriate as it was a focal point of radical politics in

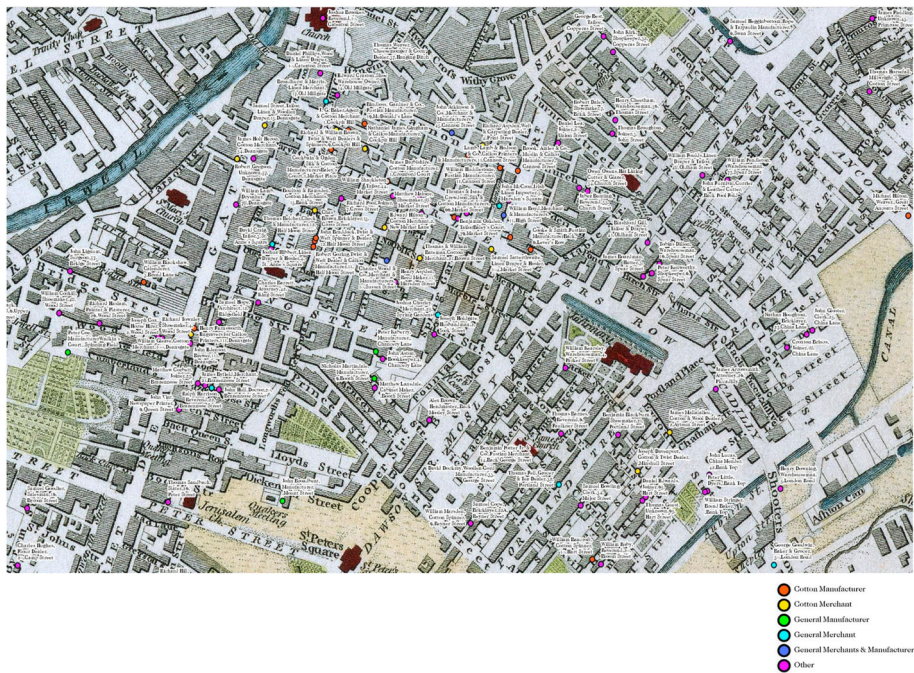


Figure 2. Map of abolitionist signatures, Manchester city centre, 1806. Source: Manchester Petitions, 1806; Banks, *Directory*, 1–60; R. & W. Dean, *Directory*, 1–60.

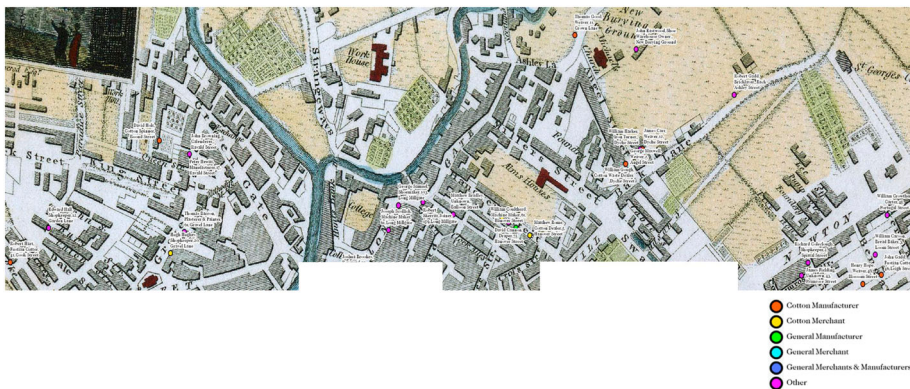


Figure 3. Map of abolitionist signatures, Salford and north Manchester city centre, 1806. Source: Manchester Petitions, 1806; Banks, *Directory*, 1–60; R. & W. Dean, *Directory*, 1–60.

Manchester. The street's pubs, the Elephant Inn and the Prince Regent Arms, were regular meeting points for gatherings in opposition to slavery and in support of workers' rights and the expansion of the franchise. It was also a focal point for agent provocateurs and government spies.⁸⁰

Another example of politically important locales in Manchester was the Bull's Head Inn on the corner of London Road and Granby Road, which is still in business today. The pub was a popular meeting place for radicals; Thomas



Figure 4. Map of abolitionist signatures, south Manchester city centre, 1806. Source: Manchester Petitions, 1806; Banks, *Directory*, 1–60; R. & W. Dean, *Directory*, 1–60.

Walker, co-founder of the Manchester Committee, was a frequent visitor and held numerous meetings there.⁸¹ On the doorstep of the pub were two signatories: Thomas Eyre, a silk weaver, and Henry Downing, a warehouseman and shopkeeper, and in the next block of buildings were a dyer, a bread baker, a shopkeeper, and a grocer.

The Ancoats area was also a site of radicalism and was home to many individuals and businesses who attached their names to the antislavery petition. This area of the city saw several riots and protests in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. St. George's Field (now George Leigh Street) was a meeting point for supporters of John Wilkes in May 1768 and a site for Catholic emancipation protests at the turn of the century; both instances devolved into violence when soldiers and yeomanry killed protestors. Signatories Richard Coleclough, a baker, William Crowther, a carter, and William Carson, a bread baker, were all based in this area. It is unknown whether they were also involved in radical politics, but it may have had an influence. In the city centre, the Cross Street Chapel was a focus of middle-class radicalism and antislavery agitation throughout the period. Eight signatures appear in the petition from the block of buildings which surround the chapel.

The diverse nature of the antislavery petitioners is evident from this block alone. The signatories include several attorneys, a surgeon, an apothecary, a school-teacher, and a cotton merchant. Abolitionist preaching from the Chapel perhaps had an influence on these people. Intriguingly, this chapel was the preferred place of worship for the Gregs and Hydes, two families who

had long-established links to the West Indies.⁸² There is an element of dissonance here, as both families were well-established Unitarians, and yet the Unitarians spread religion-oriented abolitionist agitation. Swaminathan's work on British abolition explicates this issue by observing that both sides claimed a "Christian" identity by approaching their understanding of the term from opposed perspectives.⁸³ The Manchester-British West Indian connection produced many such paradoxes throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Joshua Brookes, the most prominent name on the antislavery petition, increased the legitimacy of Manchester-based opposition to the transatlantic slave trade. As shown on the map, Brookes was the chaplain of the collegiate church of Manchester in 1806, a position he held until his death in 1821, giving him leadership of the largest holy site in Greater Manchester. While no surviving sources depict his support for abolitionism, beyond the 1806 petition, he also baptised Sarah Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman from southern Africa at the church in 1811. Baartman was a *cause célèbre* in the preceding years, having been exhibited as the 'Hottentot Venus' as part of a freak show that toured Europe throughout the early nineteenth century.⁸⁴ It is telling that Brookes baptised Baartman, a gesture which humanised an African while his fellow Mancunian, Samuel Greg, listed her as property in his plantation's inventory book, alongside cattle and agricultural hand tools.⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that a cluster of six shopkeepers along the River Irwell attached their names to this petition. Throughout the long eighteenth century, members of this profession were conduits of the Manchester-British West Indian trade network, and reaped the profit thereof through an increase in their standard of living, levels of dispensable income, and improved literacy. The combination of these factors within an urbanising area such as Salford were 'part of the agenda of modernity,' which included abolitionism and a serious challenge to the elite-dominated status quo, represented by merchants, planters and traders.⁸⁶ Stocking goods that were exchanged for slaves contributed to the power of the elite, while signing a petition challenged their power.

Swaminathan has stated that 'while the abolitionist movement has received a great deal of scholarly attention, it had rarely been studied in the context of the interaction with the proslavery campaign.'⁸⁷ It is important to consider, therefore, that these interactions are analysed within the unique context of Manchester. The overlapping of differing professions and social groups was not limited to those on the same side of the slavery argument. [Figure 5](#) plots patterns of support and opposition to the abolition of the slave trade. It is in a heat map format, which represents data as distinct colours along each street in Manchester's city centre. Abolitionism dominated this area, yet there are instances of both sides being represented within the same street. Barton Square, opposite St. Ann's Square, housed the business of William Myers, a cotton merchant, 'Green Reddish & Company,' a cotton manufacturer, alongside a twist

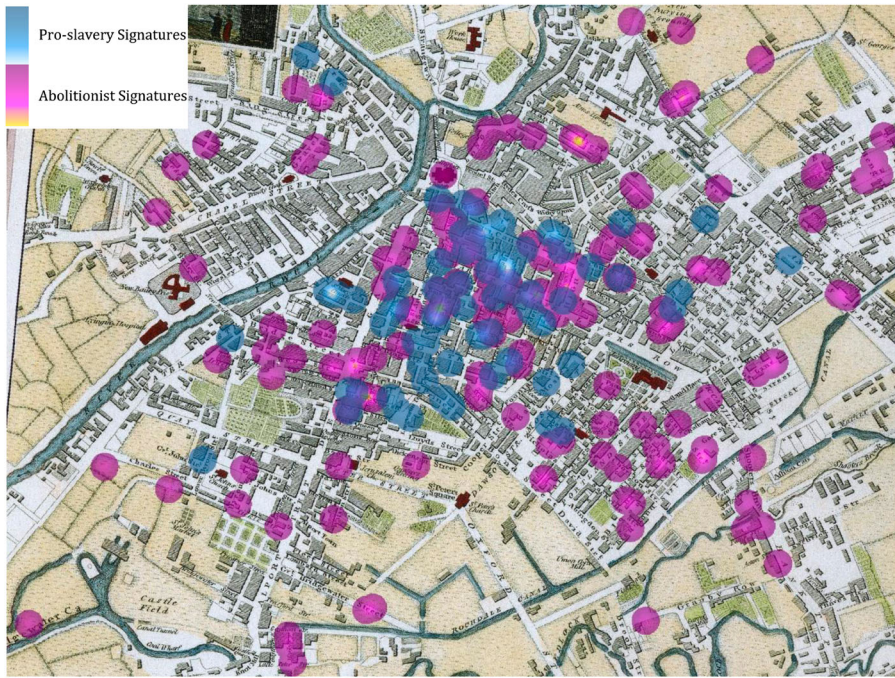


Figure 5. GIS heat map of antislavery and anti-abolitionism in Manchester city centre, 1806. Source: Manchester Petitions, 1806; Bancks, *Directory*, 1–60; Dean, *Directory*, 1–60.

manufacturer and twist warehouse owner who lent their names to the proslavery petition, while ‘Osbaldiston & Company,’ a fustian manufacturer, and ‘John Walker & Company,’ a cotton and paper company, supported abolitionism. This narrow alleyway offers a microcosm of the struggle over the slave trade and an example of opposing ideologies occupying the same space. This phenomenon is also apparent in the buildings at the intersection of Market Street and Cross Street. Abolitionist sentiment in this area was mostly represented by fustian manufacturers, and the proslavery presence was indicated by cotton manufacturers, a calico printer, and three warehousing companies. The signatories were neighbours. It was likely that they would have been aware of each other’s professions. It is essential to avoid generalising about those involved in the cotton trade as being proslavery. Thomas Cooper was himself a calico-printer, yet he was also an abolitionist. The question must be posed: why did a significant percentage of textile workers, dependent upon colonial products from the British West Indies, play a key role in the 1806 abolitionist campaign?

Despite abolitionism’s popularity and the extent of radicalism’s appeal to politically unrepresented Mancunians, there were areas of the city in which reactionary and loyalist ideologies were openly exhibited. According to Katrina Navickas, St. Ann’s Square and the Collegiate Church held loyalist displays, mainly during celebrations of the King’s birthday. The area even experienced Church-and-King mob riots on 4 June 1792, while important political and

commercial buildings were constructed on aristocratic land. One such example were the buildings owned by Lord Ducie in Market Street and Exchange Street which were demolished on 21 July 1806, and the cornerstone of the new Exchange was laid that day, with medals of Lord Nelson and Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger being enclosed during a ceremonial event.⁸⁸ Yet within a few yards of this location, Benjamin Oakden, a tailor whose business was located at 79 Market Street, signed the antislavery petition as did Thompson, Guest, and Hollins, a merchant and manufacturing corporate partnership, that resided at 66 Market Street Lane. Again, competing ideologies often occupied the same space.

Both petitions supply a wealth of data on the viewpoints of the men who both supported and opposed the destruction of the transatlantic slave trade. Women had limited access to the political sphere beyond attending meetings and avoiding the use of sugar and were prohibited from signing petitions. [Figure 6](#) compares the most common occupations of signatories of each petition. Unsurprisingly, a sizeable part of the manufacturing elite and the merchant class of the city gave their support to the status quo. Several warehousemen signed the anti-abolitionist petition, as the shipping of cheap goods arriving through Liverpool from the West Indies would have been important to their livelihood.⁸⁹ Cheap West Indian-produced goods kept warehouse costs low and profits high. What is surprising is that, despite proslavery support from cotton merchants, cotton manufacturers and warehousemen, the numbers of men in these professions who signed the antislavery petition was much higher. For example, five warehousemen signed the proslavery petition, while fourteen signed the abolitionist petition, and fifteen shopkeepers signed the abolitionist petition, despite not a single shopkeeper's signature appearing on Peel's



Figure 6. Comparison of Anti-abolitionist and Abolitionist Signatures. Source: Manchester Petitions, 1806; Bancks, *Directory*, 1–60; Dean, *Directory*, 1–60.

petition.⁹⁰ Typically, shops during this period would have sold sugar, rum, cotton goods, tobacco, tea and coffee – goods produced on West Indian plantations.

Economic self-interest was not a primary concern for Manchester shopkeepers. Instead, it would have been of greater importance to challenge the power and influence of the mercantile elite and planter class that had dominated Manchester for a century. To damage the Peel and Hibbert monopolies would have allowed their competitors to prosper.

The cotton interest undoubtedly benefitted from the exchange of capital, slaves and goods between Manchester and the British West Indies in the decades prior to 1806. The wealth and status that the slave trade had given these men was unmatched. Twelve merchants signed the anti-abolitionist petition, but the same number also signed the abolitionist document. It is surprising that members of the mercantile establishment would attach their names to the abolitionist petition, but the same dichotomy applies to cotton manufacturers, cotton merchants/dealers, and fustian manufacturers. All were likely members of the middle class and more sympathetic to the slavery status quo. Antislavery was a vehicle for political activism in unenfranchised Manchester. Support for abolitionism reflected a cross-section of Manchester society. The signatories of the petition included many men of the professional middle class – doctors and attorneys – alongside the merchant and manufacturing middle class. This diverse cross-section is concentrated at the intersection of Market Street and Spring Gardens, where each of these social groups was represented: Thomas Milne, an attorney, was two blocks away from James Jackson, a doctor, and these signatories were within walking distance of Thomas and Isaac Crewdson, who were silk and cotton manufacturers.

According to Davis, Britain's antislavery movement reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order based around free trade and free labour. Access to cheaper goods maximised profits for those who wished to challenge market leaders such as the Peels and the Hibberts. This was nowhere more obvious than in Manchester in 1806. Antislavery activity transcended class boundaries, insofar as such efforts had an egalitarian and inclusive ideology which often helped to engender the sympathy of the public. The Manchester proletariat, including cotton-spinners and factory workers, concurred on this issue with the mercantilist, artisanal, entrepreneurial, and capitalist bourgeoisie of the city. Slavery was a cause that would 'elevate its citizens above the prosaic level of their daily working life.'⁹¹ Antislavery could serve as a safe vehicle for mobilising massive public support.

The disparity between both petitions in terms of the quantity of information available about their signatories is clear. Presenting any sweeping theory or in-depth comparison of the two documents, based on the information presented, would be inadvisable. Most of the city's professions were represented in both petitions, though employees of manufacturers and warehouses might have been

pressured into signing the anti-abolitionist petition by unscrupulous bosses. Most abolitionist and proslavery signatories either worked or lived in the city centre, with Salford being the second most popular location of the signatories.

This dataset offers a quandary that reflects how divided Mancunian society was in 1806. Religious conviction, commercial interest, or family loyalties influenced opinion on slavery in this period. Microhistorically, the two surviving 1806 petitions show that entrepreneurs, capitalists, merchants and skilled workers were split, though not evenly, over the continuation of the transatlantic slave trade. Given the ratio of proslavery to abolitionist signatures, it is difficult to suggest that members of these professions were the avowed enemies of abolitionism. Nor should the data be used to argue that it was nascent capitalism or the new bourgeois industrial order in Manchester that was ultimately successful in 1807.

The notion that Manchester, a city with admittedly fewer links with slavery than London, Liverpool, or Bristol, was as involved as they were in the abolition of slavery is a fascinating one, especially in the context of the turn of the century when the 1790s witnessed a period of anti-Jacobin conservative reaction against reform movements and radical dissent. The primacy of the elite and the rule of law led to the repression of political agitation and antislavery dissent. The Church and King Society formed in Manchester in the early 1790s sought to repress free speech in public places and attacked the homes of prominent abolitionists.⁹² Although the city was not completely dominated by the West Indian trade, many of its inhabitants had a tangible stake in such business ventures, more so perhaps than the population of any other inland city in Britain. Britain's plantation colonies supplied one quarter of the town's insatiable demand for cotton.⁹³ It is extraordinary how the growth of Manchester from a provincial town of limited importance to a booming city which:

offered an environment in which opposition to slavery among a small, religious-based group of people could be transformed into a truly national campaign to end first the British slave trade and then slavery itself.⁹⁴

It is not surprising that a significant portion of Manchester's population was persuaded to support abolitionism, despite the obvious economic benefits slavery brought them;

quite apart from the politics of envy, there was a concern that the profits were dangerously speculative, especially so given the prospect of slave revolts, and might precipitate a financial crash. Economic stability was more important ... than profit, particularly when Britain stood alone against Napoleon.⁹⁵

Manchester set the model for the slave trade agitation in other towns.⁹⁶ The anti-slavery movement in Manchester was successful at showing how much could be done to mobilise public opinion outside Parliament. The success of 1807 was the culmination of efforts by abolitionists to put the interest of the city on the same

level as the humanitarian and moral issues.⁹⁷ Their aim was to essentially ‘democratise’ abolitionism and make it accessible to Mancunians beyond the members of the Manchester Committee or the business rivals to the mercantile elite. The popularisation of antislavery made more of a national impact than any Parliamentary speech. Parliamentary debates and mass mobilisation extended over weeks and months, yet in May 1806 Mancunian abolitionists had only hours.⁹⁸ The Act for the Abolition of the Slave made the transatlantic slave trade illegal from 1 May 1807.⁹⁹ Abolition marked a clear-cut shift in both the parliamentary *and* non-institutionalised principles of British society.¹⁰⁰ It damaged the West India interest in Parliament and Manchester, whilst simultaneously providing political succour to unenfranchised Mancunians. The number of signatures on a hastily arranged petition are proof of this.

To avoid the ‘high politics’ focus of many histories of abolitionism, it is necessary to understand the campaigns of producers and traders in slave-produced goods to preserve their interests, with petitions that relied on networks which mobilised the public (regardless of class), urban resources, and moral capital. The concept of moral capital is something which abolitionist campaigners, members of the Anti-Slavery Committee and petition signatories could use as ammunition, Christopher Brown defines it as:

moral prestige whether of an individual, organisation or cause—in useful service. Moral capital—like economic, social, cultural, or intellectual capital—is a resource ... It not only sustains and enhances the reputation of an actor or actors. A cause that has earned moral capital becomes, itself, a source of moral capital for other causes: the association with people or causes that possess moral capital become a strategic benefit.¹⁰¹

The antislavery cause was a worthy one with which to ally all British radical movements or to use a source of inspiration. It is not surprising that evangelicals, academic moralists, or liberal newspaper editors and radicals were opposed to West Indian slavery, or that those who profited from the slave trade or slavery supported the pre-1807 status quo.¹⁰² By locating abolitionism within broader changes in British society from the late eighteenth century onwards, changes in self-reflexivity, or perceptions of self are linked to processes and outcomes of industrial-urban development such as class, or profession.¹⁰³ This concept is important in understanding attitudes in Britain towards antislavery. For those on the side of abolitionism, the Enlightenment embodied notions of freedom, equality, and the equity of political rights among all strata of British society. These notions prompted and cultivated abolitionist ideology. Ideas that ‘were transmissible from class to class, person to person, and individual to group by education and improved facilities for the formulation of public opinion ... as the New threatened the Old.’¹⁰⁴

Leon Marshall’s observation succinctly applies to the burgeoning of abolitionist sentiment in Manchester. It transcended class boundaries, social status, and

economic standing. Antislavery sentiment was transmitted and nourished from person to person, from a lowly Salford warehouseman to a cotton manufacturing magnate living on King Street, by signing a petition or being a member of an antislavery society. Until 1807, any hint of reformist desire from the proslavery interest or plantation owners in Manchester was non-existent. Typically, therefore, planters seem to have responded to the threats of abolition prior to 1807 by trying to stock up on slaves, with the result that prices of newly imported slaves in the British islands rose to unprecedented heights firstly between 1788 and 1792 and then again between 1804 and 1807, when abolitionist campaigning was at its peak, though there were always exceptions to the rule.¹⁰⁵ One planter wrote an interesting defence in the *Manchester Gazette* that he supported imminent legislation regarding the slave trade:

I am a proprietor of two estates in the West Indies, and profess myself friendly to the measure ... I have actively engaged in the manufacturing of many thousands of sugar and rum and have had the care ... of slaves ... I am firmly persuaded they will rejoice at it. That is ... if there are no more slaves to be brought to us, Master will for his own interest, take the better care of us ... this is ... founded on observation and confirmed by experience.¹⁰⁶

The anonymous author may have been Robert Hibbert Jr., who spent a sizeable part of his life in Jamaica. He subsequently invited Thomas Cooper, the famous abolitionist, to his plantation to baptise his slaves in 1817.¹⁰⁷ The author emphasised the influence of Mancunian abolition.

Manchester abolitionism fostered a network of like-minded reformers that was cosmopolitan in both its outlook and its composition.¹⁰⁸ It has been suggested that, because of the middle-class origins of the leaders of Manchester abolitionism, there has been an emphasis on using class consciousness as an analytical prism through which to examine their efforts. Even though abolitionism had bourgeois origins, it was not an elitist movement which shut out the involvement of those who were not attorneys, merchants, manufacturers, or professional tradesmen: warehousemen and weavers were signatories of the abolitionist petition. Robin Blackburn wrote that

in the short run, abolition, though essentially a middle-class issue in the years 1787–1807, did nothing to promote middle-class representation within ruling institutions. The passage of abolition offered symbolic satisfaction to middle-class reform while preserving unchanged the substance of oligarchic power.

Middle-class abolitionism in industrial Manchester helped to ‘cement ties with other respectable persons and assert their social conscience.’¹⁰⁹ The partly bourgeois character of the abolitionist movement in Manchester sought to create a broad popular alliance in order to end the transatlantic slave trade.¹¹⁰ The abolitionist movement presented a broad appeal which would challenge those who dominated the Parliamentary and governmental organisations which controlled both the West Indian colonies and Manchester.

This article has explored the idea that public opinion concerning the slave trade in Manchester seemed to progress and manifest itself sooner than Parliament's inclination to issue legislation on the issue. Though abolition may have been achieved without the involvement of Mancunians, the germination of a cotton industry that would eventually dominate the city brought the concomitant rise of abolitionism. This resulted in the ideology acquiring greater legitimacy and authenticity than was so in other English cities with less of an economic stake. Even abolitionists outside Lancashire thanked the citizenry of the region for 'the zeal, activity, and firmness which they have manifested in this noble cause.'¹¹¹ Historically, as Drescher aptly notes, Manchester should be given pride of place in reflecting the broadly popular and economically informed portion of the nation who agitated for the end of the slave trade.¹¹²

Conclusion

The success of 1807 was not the conclusion of Manchester abolitionism, but it was an important staging post in the journey towards total emancipation throughout the British West Indies. The movement for and against the slave trade in Manchester was complex and varied. Petition signatories appropriated language, methodologies, justificatory ideologies and motivations both in favour and against the slave trade from earlier campaigns such as the opposition to the Stamp Act or for permission to consecrate additional burial grounds in Manchester. Brown implies that abolitionism 'enjoyed popular success because it expressed values that held wide appeal and served more parochial interests.'¹¹³ For example, Nathaniel and Joseph Gould were cotton manufacturers and attached their names to the antislavery petition, yet their premises were located on Peel Street. This is the same street that Robert Peel's businesses were sited, both 'Peel, Yates & Co.' and 'Peel, Yates, Halliwell & Co.' It is no coincidence that in 1795 the Peel-owned warehouses on his eponymous street were valued by a London-based insurer at £10,800.¹¹⁴ Perhaps parochial interests were at play here, with Nathaniel and Joseph Gould challenging the economic, political and sociocultural domination of Robert Peel and the West Indian connection that enriched him. Peel himself represents the paradox of cotton manufacturers. His full-throated defence of slavery stood in contrast to the concern he expressed for the working conditions of cotton-spinners throughout Manchester. As MP for Tamworth, Peel introduced the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, 1802 which was a 'bill for preserving the health and morals of apprentices in cotton mills and other factories,' and thus represented a threat to the Goulds.¹¹⁵

The year 1806 witnessed the abolitionist network expanding to thousands of inhabitants throughout the city who, regardless of profession and class, lent their names to a petition which transmitted moral capital to fellow opponents of slavery. This moral capital enriched abolitionists, irrespective of their

nationality, geographic location or economic, political or sociocultural status. It would legitimise their future endeavours and provided a methodological path to those who supported causes such as political reform, free trade, and emancipation. Abolitionists challenged the mercantilist borders of Manchester and the British Empire.

A central feature of both proslavery and abolitionist activism was the existence of networks on which both depended. Goods, capital, and slaves dominated the networks that bound Manchester to the British West Indies in the years leading up to 1806. The abolitionist network helped to connect members of disparate social classes who united against slavery and reacted to Robert Peel's effort to garner 111 signatures in May 1806. Within hours, by signing the 1806 abolitionist petition, 2,350 Mancunians created a network of antislavery ideology that challenged, destroyed, and then eclipsed the slave-orientated network that had enriched Manchester and the British West Indies in the early nineteenth century.¹¹⁶

Through analysing the signatories of the Manchester petitions in 1806, this article has shown how Mancunians both supported and challenged the slave trade in the early nineteenth century. The microhistorical GIS analysis of the Manchester petitions helps to realise the connections and reactions to the slave trade which finally makes it easier to 'reveal factors previously unobserved.'¹¹⁷

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Notes on contributor

Sami Pinarbasi is an Associate Lecturer in the Department of History, Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University, GM 14, Geoffrey Manton Building, Rosamund Street West, Manchester, M15 6EB, UK. Email: S.Pinarbasi@mmu.ac.uk.