



This image was the frontispiece to a 1710 election tract, a dialogue between the two parties of Whig and Tory that had begun to polarise the political landscape in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The ‘language’ of slavery is clearly exploited here – indeed, the image powerfully incorporates and visualises key aspects of the ‘discourse’ prevalent in texts of the time. Slavery is used in juxtaposition to ‘liberty’ – the term is evidently part of a conceptual pairing that makes it difficult to treat alone. The Tories are here portrayed as the party of slavery and the Whigs as the party of liberty (further explored in the text that followed). The visual references are highly significant. Slavery is associated with a) galley slaves, a trope often associated with the Ottoman Empire but also France b) a wooden shoe, which symbolised the oppression of the French by their monarch, Louis XIV, and hence more generally the ‘popery and arbitrary’ government with which he was so closely identified. In 1673 a wooden shoe, with the arms of Louis on one side, that was left on the chair of the Speaker of the House of Commons was all that was needed to suggest that England had also succumbed to popery and arbitrary government c) a packhorse, weighed down by a heavy burden which includes what is perhaps a whipping post, linking it to the whip flailing above it, all indicating oppression. What is also interesting about this image, of course, is what it also omits: there is no reference to the slavery of Africans that had, as the following table shows, undergone a transformative expansion in the later Stuart period in the Caribbean:

Table 1. Population of English Colonies, 1630–1720

Year	Barbados			Leeward Islands			Jamaica			Chesapeake (VA and MD)		
	White	Black	Total	White	Black	Total	White	Black	Total	White	Black	Total
1630	1,800			1,000						2,400	100	2,500
1640	14,000			15,000						8,000	100	8,100
1650	23,000	12,800	35,800	18,800						12,400	300	12,700
1660	19,000	27,100	46,100	17,100	2,000	19,100	3,000	500	3,500	24,000	900	24,900
1670	20,000	40,400	60,400	9,000	3,000	12,000	7,000	7,000	14,000	38,500	2,500	41,000
1680	20,600	44,900	65,500	10,000	9,000	19,000	12,000	15,000	27,000	55,600	4,300	59,900
1690	20,000	47,800	67,800	8,700	15,000	23,700	10,000	30,000	40,000	68,200	7,300	75,500
1700	15,000	50,100	65,100	7,800	20,000	27,800	7,000	40,000	47,000	85,200	12,900	98,100
1710	13,000	52,300	65,300	9,000	30,000	39,000	7,000	55,000	62,000	101,300	22,400	123,700
1720	17,700	58,800	76,500	11,300	41,700	53,000	7,100	80,000	87,100	128,000	30,600	158,600

Sources: Barbados and Leeward Islands white population, 1630–1700: Henry Gemery, “Emigration from the British Isles to the New World, 1630–1700: Inferences from Colonial Populations,” *Research in Economic History* 5 (1980): 211, table A.1; white population, 1710–1720, and black population, 1650–1720: John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 153, table 7.1; Leeward Islands black population, 1660–1710, and white population, 1710: Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 312, table 26; Leeward Islands white and black populations, 1720: Alan Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, rev. 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 461; Jamaica, white and black populations, 1660–1710: Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 312, table 26; white and black populations, 1720: George W. Roberts, *The Population of Jamaica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957; repr., Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1979), 33, table 4, and 36, table 5; Chesapeake (VA and MD), white and black populations: McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 136, table 6.4.

In other words, ‘slavery’ was a language applied here to the points of division between the parties – mainly concerning political and religious ideology as well different views on political economy. Thus slavery was to live under political tyranny, to be deprived of religious freedom, to be deprived of the freedom of trade – but not applied to chattel slavery.<sup>1</sup> Nor is there any mention of slavery in relation to the position of women.

Yet this is not to say that such discursive connections were not made by contemporaries at the time, since slavery was a powerful language available for invocation in multiple contexts and in which metaphor and parallels increased the polemical weight of a claim. One document to make the comparison between gendered and politico-religious slavery is the diary of Sarah Cowper. The wife of a Whig MP (Sir William Cowper), and the mother of two more, Sarah nevertheless felt oppressed by her tyrannical husband, who removed her from any position of authority within her household, and she deployed the language of slavery to express this. In December 1701 she noted ‘this day the New Parli[a]m[ent] mett, and Chose M<sup>r</sup> Harley for Speaker; Contrary to the Mind of y<sup>e</sup> King. To have a right and Title to power and Governm[ent] without the Exercise is a hardship and greivance Equal to Slavery. I Speak it from Experience in the low and litle Sphere I move in as a Wife and Mistress, where Serv[ants] presume to use me with the utmost Contempt of my Authority which I must endure without hope of redress’.<sup>2</sup> In 1702 she wrote that ‘a prospect of Slavery is less formidable to mee, who

<sup>1</sup> Will Pettigrew has shown how demands for freedom of trade were used to defend and expand the slave trade [*Freedom’s Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (2013)

<sup>2</sup> The language of ‘servants’ is another key one to explore

have all my daies lived a Slave. ffor the definition of that I take to be, one who is oppressed by a Tyrannick power, and Arbitrary Will Contrary to Reason and just Governm[en]t. Now I have suffer'd so much from that, as come what will it can scarce be worse with mee'. A remarkable entry in 1706, shortly after the death of her husband, reads: 'Lead your Life in Freedom and Liberty, and throw not your Self into Slavery Since it may be truly Said I have outdone Anna the Prophetess in Chastity; tho' not in piety and Devotion. For She liv'd wth an Husband Seven year from her Virginity; wheras I scarce five in that Sense, tho' in a Matrimonial State near 43'.

Sarah Cowper was not alone in using the language of slavery across the contexts of politico-religious disputes and gender. Mary Astell, in *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700), applied the arguments of the Whig theorist John Locke to the sexual subordination expected in marriage: 'If all Men are born free', as Locke and other Whigs asserted in their 'state of nature', she asked 'how is it that all Women are born slaves, as they must be if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect Condition of Slavery? and if the Essence of Freedom consists, as our Masters say it does, in having a standing Rule to live by? And why is Slavery so much condemn'd and strove against in one Case, and so highly applauded and held so necessary and so sacred in another?'<sup>3</sup>

The language of Whig constitutionalism, which had political and religious 'slavery' at its heart, could thus also be used to attack the oppression of women. More remarkably still, some proto-feminists also linked the oppression of women to that of African slaves. Judith Drake, a Tory (or at least married to a Tory polemicist), published *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696) in which she asserted that "'Women, like our Negroes in our western plantations, are born slaves, and live prisoners all their lives.'" Drake did not go on to assert that 'negroes' should be freed; but the parallel could be said to carry this implication. The intersectional link with African slavery was perhaps most famously made in the late eighteenth century by Mary Wollstonecraft, who supported abolition and publicly said so.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Preface to 1706 edition. Locke provides a negative definition of the 'Freedom of Men under Government' as 'not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man' (Locke, *Two Treatises*, II.22). For a discussion see Jacqueline Broad, 'Mary Astell on Marriage and Lockean Slavery', *History of Political Thought* 34:4 (2014); Patricia Springborg, 'Mary Astell (1666–1731), Critic of Locke', *American Political Science Review*, 89 (1995), pp. 621–33

<sup>4</sup> *Vindication of the Rights of Women*: 'Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? Is not this indirectly to deny woman reason? *Vindication of the Rights of Men*: 'is it not consonant with justice, with the humanity, not to mention Christianity, to abolish this abominable mischief'. For a discussion see D. L. Macdonald, "Master, Slave, and Mistress in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 11 (1992), 46-57; Moira Ferguson, "Mary Wollstonecraft Problematic of Slavery," *Feminist Review* 42 (Autumn 1992), 82-102. Carol Howard, 'Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on Slavery and Corruption', *The Eighteenth Century* 45:1 (2004), 61-86 argues that earlier commentators miss that she sees a slave as someone who is morally corrupt and complicit in their on-going corruption, as well as someone oppressed.

But a key question remains how far this intersectionality remained purely at the discursive level. One figure who shows that it need not is Thomas Tryon.<sup>5</sup> As an ‘independent’ (who sought liberty of conscience in religious matters)<sup>6</sup> he travelled to the religiously freer Barbados (1663-9) to continue his trade as a hatter; but on returning to London he began, in 1682, to publish works advocating non-violence, vegetarianism,<sup>7</sup> healthy living, ecological concerns and better treatment for slaves.<sup>8</sup> Tryon seems to have wanted to convert slaves into well-treated servants, principally because of the corrosive (enslaving) effect brutality shown to slaves had on their ‘masters’. He urged sugar planters to ‘set you and your Posterity free from those intollerable Burthens and Slaverys, you and your Servants undergo’ or else ‘suitable returns will be made to the Oppressor, or to his Off-spring; for the Groaning of him that suffereth pain is the beginning of trouble and misery to him that caused it; and it is not to be doubted, but under this black Character of Oppression and Violence’.<sup>9</sup> Tryon did seek to transfer some of the discourse into action, wanting to remove from the planters

the fatal necessity you are now under; to be Cruel and Inhumane to your poor Slaves, and give them at least a kind of Captivated Freedom, and relaxation from their insupportable Burdens laid upon them: And to excite you to the Discharge of your duty herein, its worth your consideration to suppose your selves or Children, for once in the condition of your poor *Negroes* ... Think not therefore to thrive by such Oppressive Methods and Severities; but consider with your selves, that the Groaning of him that suffereth the Pain, is the beginning of the Trouble and Misery of them that laid it on.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, in ‘The Negro’s Complaint’, Tryon takes up the evils of slavery from the slave’s vantage point. Speaking in the first person, the slave declares that ‘The stronger and more subtle murder, enslave and oppress the weaker, and more innocent and simple sort at their pleasure and pretend they have a right because they have a power to do so.’<sup>11</sup> Here then the slave is able to articulate his ‘slavery’. Although asserting that Africans were complicit in its perpetuation, Tryon credits the ‘Christian Tyrants’ with the ‘chiefest Crime’.<sup>12</sup> Tryon’s 146 page attack, which ends with an invocation of Christ as the ‘Redeemer’ who would ‘not forbear their Oppressions’, exposed the hypocrisy of Christian slave-owners though he

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<sup>5</sup> Philippe Rosenberg, ‘Thomas Tryon and the Seventeenth-Century Dimensions of Antislavery’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Oct., 2004), 609-642. See also David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), for ideas about dissonance between the languages of slavery.

<sup>6</sup> He was nearest to the Quakers and used a Quaker publisher.

<sup>7</sup> He thought that people allowed ‘that grand Tyrant, Custom’ to ‘enslave both their Souls and Bodies’ [*Miscellania* (1696), p.141]

<sup>8</sup> Tryon's two main tracts on slavery, "The Negro's Complaint of Their Hard Servitude, and the Cruelties Practised upon Them.. and "A Discourse in Way of Dialogue, between an Ethiopiean or Negro Slave and a Christian, That Was His Master in America," were published as parts II and III of *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies* (1684).

<sup>9</sup> *Tryon's letters upon several occasions* (1700), p.187.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp.199-200.

<sup>11</sup> *Friendly Advice*, p.80

<sup>12</sup> P.83

stopped short of calling for a ban on the slave trade.<sup>13</sup> There were limits to the languages of slavery even for those most shocked by its practice and for whom the language of religious liberty underpinned their discourse on race and oppression. Moreover, Tryon's re-description of slaves as 'servants', invoking a long-standing debate about master and servants relationships in early modern Britain, could be interpreted in two (not incompatible) ways: as a linguistic and conceptual evasion or slippage that prevented a head-on rejection of the slave trade and/or as a principled discursive move, to deploy the different language of service to attain Tryon's ends..

Besides important work in mapping the wide and diverse range of usages of the language of slavery, and then charting the very interesting interconnections between the usages, it is these moments of shift into different discourses and the potential/failed/successful transition between language and agenda<sup>14</sup> (in different fields), when there is a move beyond metaphor and parallel, that are perhaps most interesting to explore further.

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<sup>13</sup> He did envisage its end because the condition of the black 'servants' already there would render further importation of black labour redundant. In one tract, 'Sambo' declares that if conditions for the slaves were drastically improved 'we and our Posterity shall willingly serve you, and not count it any Slavery, but our unspeakable Happiness' [*Friendly Advice*, 219-20]

<sup>14</sup> As Austen and Serle showed long ago, language can 'act'; but it can also shape agendas and programmes for other types of action.