

Free to Enslave: Politics and the Escalation of Britain's Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1688–1714

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ENDING Britain's transatlantic slave trade required political intervention, and histories of abolitionism traditionally privilege the movement's political aspects over its economic rationales. Explanations for the expansion of British slave trading in the Atlantic (and the origins of American slavery) concentrate, contrastingly, on the atomized economic calculations of colonists and their suppliers. Yet there remains an underappreciated political aspect to the development of Britain's slave trade. From 1690 to 1714, members of Parliament debated the slave trade in sixteen parliamentary sessions, absorbing about the same amount of legislative time as discussions of its abolition decades later. Would a joint-stock monopoly company—the Royal African Company—better satisfy the colonies' demand for slave labor and better serve the interests of the British state than an open trade in which any subject was free to trade in slaves?¹ These debates, surprisingly ignored

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¹ Roger Anstey supplied the classic political narrative of British abolitionism. See Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1975), 406. For a famous attempt to show how the politics of abolitionism served economic ends, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1944). For the belief that the rise and fall of slave trade volumes was determined primarily by economic factors, see Richard Nelson Bean, *The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1650–1775* (New York, 1975), 73. Most slave trade scholars attribute some role to the state in the establishment of the English slave trade to the Caribbean. See Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1999), 74–102. Throughout this article I equate the entrenchment of mainland American slavery after 1700 with the escalation of the slave trade. The distinction between slavery and the slave trade derived partly from the abolitionists' decision to legislate against them separately and partly from the development of a culture of slaveholding in what would become the United States that noted the benefit of creating a self-sustaining population of slaves

by historians, had a considerable effect on the evolution of Britain's transatlantic slave trade. Locating the escalation of the trade within its broad and rich political context shows how modern political culture and institutions were involved in the escalation as well as the later abandonment of Britain's trade in human beings.

In the century after 1660, the annual volume of the English slave trade increased from approximately seven thousand to more than forty thousand. Slave trade historians typically rely on war (in Europe and in West Africa), fluctuating planter purchasing power due to oscillating colonial commodity prices, and the changing availability of white indentured labor to explain the rise and fall of slave trade volumes.² They

to prevent the need to buy slaves in the trade. In conflating slavery and the slave trade in their developmental stages, I fix attention on the preabolitionist perception of slaves as goods, which helps to dismiss arguments in the literature that view the mutual reinforcement of ideas associated with liberty and enslavement as paradoxical. See esp. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 4–5. The absence of a coordinated transition from indentured servitude to slavery on the American mainland remains an important tradition within the literature. See Russell Menard, "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," *Southern Studies* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 363, 389. See also David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984), 54. Throughout this article I define open trade in contradistinction to a monopolistically organized trade. My definition of open trade includes the situation of the Africa trade under the terms of the Africa Trade Act in which the state levied a duty on trade and the similar scenario sometimes proposed by the separate traders of a regulated company that had exclusive control of their trades and permitted all Englishmen to trade after payment of a small entry fine. Unlike joint-stock companies, members traded on private account. I define free trade as a situation in which the state has no formal regulation of trade, which is what occurred in the Africa trade from 1712 onward.

² David Richardson, "The British Empire and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1660–1807," in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall, vol. 2, *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford, Eng., 1998), 441, 443. For the importance attached to war and commodity prices, see Bean, *British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, 74. For the importance of changing availability of white indentured labor, see Menard, *Southern Studies* 16: 355–89; David W. Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (Cambridge, 1981), 152. The opening up of new lands for settlement in North America also increased demand for slaves. Isolating the effect of these determinants is difficult because they interrelate; warfare affected markets for plantation goods and restricted the supply of white servants, and larger slave populations expanded the supply of colonial commodities and therefore affected their price. Nevertheless in the peacetime years 1683–84, when the London price of muscavado sugar declined from just less than twenty-two shillings to nineteen shillings per pound, the total annual volume of the slave trade dropped from more than thirteen thousand to fewer than eight thousand (a 42 percent reduction). For sugar prices, see Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (Baltimore, 1973), 496–97. For slave volumes, see David Eltis, "The British Transatlantic Slave Trade before 1714: Annual Estimates of Volume and Direction," in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L.

have not appreciated how political changes allowed interests on both sides of the Atlantic to lobby to change Britain's slave-trading franchise from monopoly to open trade. The demise of the Royal African Company's monopoly had an enormous effect on the volume of Britain's transatlantic slave trade. Though the company could never entirely enforce its monopoly, its demise allowed more Englishmen to become involved in the slave trade and ship many more slaves.

The company's monopoly power decreased in three stages. First, in 1688, James II's flight deprived the company of its governor and its best means of enforcing its monopoly. Second, in 1698, after public deliberations throughout the 1690s, Parliament passed the Africa Trade Act, which opened the slave trade to all English citizens for a period of thirteen years on payment of a 10 percent duty on imports and exports. Independent slave traders became known as separate traders. Third, these separate traders prevented the company from gaining parliamentary recognition for its monopoly, and the 1698 act expired in 1712, opening up the slave trade to all. In 1686, during James II's reign, when the Royal African Company's monopoly came closest to being enforceable, English slavers embarked on thirty-seven voyages. By 1730 the open trade in slaves allowed slavers to conduct 120 voyages. During this period the company's market share fell from 86 percent to 1 percent.³

Historians have generally agreed that the collapse of the Royal African Company's monopoly was important to the expansion of the

Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville, Fla., 1996), table 10-1 (all total slave-trading volumes are drawn from this table unless stated otherwise). A more dramatic connection existed between slave trade volumes and the outbreak of war from 1689 to 1714 with a brief respite from 1698 to 1702. The threat of French privateers in the English Channel and in the Atlantic dissuaded many from assembling African cargoes, and freight rates increased by up to 100 percent during wartime. After the outbreak of the Nine Years' War in 1689, the volume of the English slave trade plummeted from just less than six thousand to fifteen hundred in 1690 (a 75 percent decrease). Similarly, during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-14), slaving volumes dropped from more than eighteen thousand in 1701 to less than six thousand in 1702 (a 66 percent reduction).

³ Under the terms of the 1698 Africa Trade Act, slaves and gold remained duty free, whereas redwood incurred a 5 percent duty. See *The Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1820), 7: 393-97. The company's demise allowed a long-term increase in the total annual capacity of the English slave trade of at least 59 percent compared with a maximum short-term and peacetime effect of changing colonial commodity prices of 42 percent and a maximum short-term effect of warfare of 75 percent during this period. The comparisons of separate trader and company market share are based on annual numbers of voyages rather than numbers of slaves delivered because scholars can be more precise about the former. They are derived from David Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999). All comparisons of the separate traders and the company's slave-trading performance are drawn from this data set unless otherwise stated.

British slave trade. Considerably more attention needs to be paid, however, to the causes of the company's demise.⁴ Any explanation must consider the achievements of its competitors as well as the weakness of the company's position. The separate traders benefited from undoubted economic advantages over the company. Rather than using (and having to fully finance) the company's African forts, they dealt with vendors from their ships. They traded faster, beat the company's ships across the Atlantic, and received higher prices for their slaves.⁵ The company's eco-

⁴ Historians have assumed an effect of the demise of the Royal African Company's monopoly without fully describing it (see, for example, Menard, *Southern Studies* 16: 368). Some historians have denied any effect on the grounds that the company's monopoly lacked enforceability without assessing to what extent and when and, therefore, the effects of a shift to legalized free trade in slaves (see David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* [Cambridge, 1986], 146–50). Scholars who believed that the company's monopoly could be enforced explain its demise with reference to natural, structural inefficiencies of monopolies that offered insufficient incentives to employees according to the precepts of classical economic theory. For this tradition, see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd (Oxford, Eng., 1976), 2: 740–43; S. R. H. Jones and Simon P. Ville, "Theory and Evidence: Understanding Chartered Companies," *Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (December 1996): 925–26. Others see evidence of company efficiency as proof of the absence of monopoly power and argue that because of the costs of maintaining its forts on the African coast, the company failed to compete with its free-riding interloper competitors. See Robert William Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish, and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720* (Cambridge, 1912), 2: 20–32; Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Theory and History: Seventeenth-Century Joint-Stock Chartered Trading Companies," *Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 4 (December 1996): 916–24. The company's principal historian, K. G. Davies, attributed its demise to war and financial policy (with the political changes associated with James II's fall as a hastening factor). Davies stressed a dissonance between the company's design and the stockholders' interests. He compared the company to a public utility and saw its financial failure in terms of the unwillingness of the company's shareholders to subsidize imperial policy. See Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957), 344–49. Davies also offered a version of the dispute between the separate traders and the company. Though sensitive to economic and political factors (but he characterizes their interaction as accidental [ibid., 346]) and to the role played by the colonies in opposing the company, Davies overstates the importance of the company's structural faults and the interlopers' commercial advantages when explaining the company's demise and neglects to consider, to the right extent, the separate traders' political acumen, how political conditions favored their rise, and how legislative failure resulted from a deliberate strategy (ibid., 122–51).

⁵ Company officials observed the separate traders' superior victualing. See Thomas Stewart to Royal African Company, Sept. 19, 1711, in Records of the Royal African Company, Treasury Series 70, vol. 8: fols. 114–15, National Archives, London. Acting Governor Edmund Jennings recorded Virginia planters' greater willingness to pay more for separate trader slaves in his response to the Board of Trade's 1708 inquiry about the management of the slave trade. See Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C., 1935), 4: 89.

conomic failings are also well enumerated. Most important, its employees on the African coast and in the colonies could not be relied on to act in its interest. It is essential, however, not to attribute the company's decline solely to its economic failings. With continued political backing, the company could have been economically successful. With government support it would have remained attractive to investors.⁶

Most commentators confine the political aspects of the company's downfall to the developments of 1688, which deprived the company of the monarchy's nurturing and protecting influence. But institutional and ideological change within the Atlantic political sphere proved more formative for England's eighteenth-century transatlantic slave trade than

⁶ The company's stock price responded to political developments as much as to short-term cash flow. The East India Company proved how economically successful monopoly companies, as much as those such as the Royal African Company that struggled to generate profits, could stimulate opposition from independent merchants. In the African and East Indian cases, company reform (whether its opponents eclipsed it as in the African case or incorporated themselves within it as in the East Indian case) depended on the emergence of an external political opposition. Conversely, the Royal African Company repeatedly encouraged investment in its stock by members of Parliament on the grounds that parliamentary confirmation of its charter would have improved its stock value. See Royal African Company to Richard King, Nov. 30, 1708, in *Records of the Royal African Company*, T70, vol. 44 (unfoliated). The comparison with slave trading in other European nations is instructive too. The monopoly companies that managed Dutch and French slave-trading operations survived into the 1730s and 1740s because these states regulated the activities of independent slave traders more assiduously than Britain. British Atlantic merchants had sufficient political power to successfully intervene within a more inclusive political system decades in advance of their Continental rivals. Though independent slave traders from Nantes convinced French authorities to dismantle the French Guinea Company in 1713, this legislation limited their activities to twelve sailings per year. Liberalizing legislation in 1716 allowed only four cities to dispatch African cargoes and, unlike the British trade, the French government levied taxes on their activities to support French forts on the coast of Africa. The French state did not open the slave trade to the Gold and Slave coasts to all French citizens until 1741, whereas the French Senegal Company maintained its monopoly farther north throughout the eighteenth century. Legislation opening the Dutch slave trade appeared in 1730 and 1734, but charges limited the independent Dutch traders' profits. The Dutch arrangement could not be compared with the British situation of 1698 until 1738. See Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison, Wis., 1979), 13–34; Johannes Menne Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge, 1990), 126–48, 201–2. Comparison with European slave trading confirms that there was nothing natural about the failure of monopoly companies in this period. The political factors described in this article offer only part of the explanation for British slave trade supremacy. Other important considerations include sea power, financial and maritime resources, colonial development, and manufacturing strength. See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London, 1997), 389.

changes in political personnel.⁷ Changing political institutions after 1688 allowed the separate traders to intervene, defeat, and then eclipse the company by 1712 when the 1698 act expired. Politics not only explains the demise of the Royal African Company from 1688 onward but also accounts for distinctive, qualitative aspects of the evolution of Britain's transatlantic slave trade and American slavery after 1712.

Two related developments record the effect of political change on Britain's transatlantic slave trade: the emergence of modern political culture and institutions and a changing balance of power in Britain's Atlantic empire. The rise and success of the separate traders elucidates the part played in the slave trade's development by the emergence of the modern British state and a more open political culture. By interrogating the relationship between more inclusive government and enslavement, it is possible to qualify and complicate liberalism's associations with liberty. The rhetoric of liberty represented more than a fig leaf to obscure the darker side of empire. Liberal institutions proved instrumental in escalating the worst brutalities of British imperialism. Lockean motifs operating in England, such as the sovereignty of Parliament, can be more directly implicated in the development of Atlantic slavery than slavery can in the increased interest in republican ideology in America less than a century later. British freedom had more of an effect on American slavery than the latter did on American freedom. The rise of the separate traders illustrates how a shifting balance of power within the British Atlantic empire affected the development of the slave trade. Their success reflected a devolution of imperial initiative to colonists who, by the end of the seventeenth century, asserted themselves politically within the metropolis to the detriment of the African company.⁸

⁷ Others have seen the statutory regulation of the company's monopoly in 1698 within the context of a broad Whig movement to reform monopolies associated with the discredited royal prerogative. See George L. Cherry, "The Development of the English Free-Trade Movement in Parliament, 1689–1702," *Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 2 (June 1953): 103–19; Ann M. Carlos and Jamie Brown Kruse, "The Decline of the Royal African Company: Fringe Firms and the Role of the Charter," *Economic History Review*, new ser., 49, no. 2 (May 1996): 291–313. K. G. Davies underestimated the significance of the 1712 expiration of the 1698 act for the future development of the slave trade (he described the debates prior to the expiration as "utterly barren of consequence"), limiting its effect to the emergence of provincial slave trading and therefore remaining dismissive about the political and ideological aspects of debate from 1708 to 1712 (Davies, *Royal African Company*, 130, 151 [quotation]).

⁸ Most scholars have focused on the role slavery played in the advent of modernity. The escalation of the British slave trade cannot be abstracted from the rise to prominence of modern, liberal political culture and institutions. Slavery's involvement in modernity has offered useful correctives for those wishing to deny modernity's Whiggish overtones. See Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 4; Paul Gilroy, *The*

Perhaps more formative for the modern British state than any before or since, the years 1688 to 1714 saw Britain's territorial boundaries and infrastructure forged with constitutional monarchy, expanding state bureaucracy, and political parties as the state's principal tenets. During the same period, political power in England changed hands; new political personnel operated within novel political institutions and voiced innovative political economies. All contributed to the emergence of a new political culture that recorded how the relationship between economics and politics had changed from one of inseparability to one of interdependence. Though economic activity remained embedded within political frameworks, political institutions became more responsive but not entirely reducible to economic interests. This modern political culture had two hallmarks. First, adherents appealed to a political (but not party) ideology of natural right that was synonymous with individual economic self-interest and offered a politico-economic bond between liberal economics and notions of government. Proponents regarded the individual's right to pursue economic interests as a political stabilizer and a fundamental duty of government. Second, persuasive, associational mercantile interest groups that used political means to further their economic interests became a lasting feature of the political system.⁹ The structures and ideology

Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 42, 46. Scholars have previously noticed the tendency for more progressive states to participate most zealously in slave trading. The emergence of unregulated slave trading illustrates how the slave-free paradox can be detected in slavery's relationship to the rise of more inclusive institutions in the mother country after 1688 as well as in the mind-set of those individualists who conceived them. See David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 2000), 1. It is only a paradox in hindsight, yet the paradox helps explain the escalation of the British slave trade. For the reconciliation of imperial ideology by so-called free nations, see David Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 125–45. Compare with Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 376. Eltis asserted that the slave trade developed because Atlantic colonies evolved without much reference to metropolitan authority (see Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, 55). Focus on changes in the management of the slave trade in this period and the role that merchant-residents in England and the British state played disputes this view. K. G. Davies argued that slave trading was not well suited to monopolistic organization (see Davies, *Royal African Company*, 13). The role colonial lobbyists played in defeating the Royal African Company's monopoly in this period remains a neglected part of the narrative of slavery's origins in America and shows how imperial agendas and policy resulted from transatlantic dialogue.

⁹ The emergence of this political economy of interest can be traced to earlier in the seventeenth century. Its fixation with economic self-interest need not, because of its novelty, deny its ideological character. Primarily conceived of within the political realm, it cannot be dismissed as the mere celebration of economic efficiency, which was itself a novel phenomenon. For the emergence of an ideology of interest in this period, see J. A. W. Gunn, "Interest Will Not Lie: A Seventeenth-Century Political Maxim," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29, no. 4 (October–December 1968): 551–64;

behind political interventions in the economy brought different economic interests to the political forefront. More efficient political means now existed to advance material concerns. The separate traders were one such interest group. They benefited from reformed state institutions such as the Board of Trade and Parliament and embodied the new political culture.

The Royal African Company, however, had been nurtured by and relied on the absolutist royal prerogative. Reluctant to increase their dependence on Parliament, English monarchs had, since the sixteenth century, encouraged overseas trade as a safe and easy source of government finance. In return for unparliamentary tax revenues and loans, the Crown granted overseas trading companies lucrative privileges and the judicial power to enforce monopoly control over their markets. Their monopolies represented a politically constituted form of property. Without the backing of the state, such monopolies lost viability as economic entities. King Charles II founded the Royal African Company in 1672. Designed as a tool for the ruling dynasty's control of imperial policy, the Royal African Company's motto, *regio floret patricionio commercium, commercioque regum*, made explicit the perceived link between royal patronage and commercial prosperity. James, Duke of York, owned vast holdings in the company and profited from them. As principal shareholder he appointed himself governor of the company and, as Lord High Admiral and prosecutor of interloping slavers, he enforced its

Gunn, *Politics and the Public Interest in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1969), 205–65; Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J., 1977), 37; Steve Pincus, “Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth,” *American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (June 1998): 705–36. Not until the *Wealth of Nations* were economic interests described purely in terms of their macroeconomic benefits. Evolving notions of individual interests combined with the mercantilist theory of international relations (referred to in contemporary pamphlets as the national interest) that assumed Machiavellian competition between nations for scarce resources and prevented moral obligations from transcending national boundaries enlarged the scale of this enslavement. See Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation, 1500–1700* (London, 1964), 262. See also Jacob Viner, “The Nation State and Private Enterprise,” in *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, ed. Douglas A. Irwin (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 45. Mercantilist domestic policy, however, stressed the moral importance of full employment. Alison Gilbert Olson offers the best discussion of the emergence of transatlantic interest groups in the late seventeenth century. See Olson, *Making the Empire Work: London and American Interest Groups, 1690–1790* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 51–75. Scholars have shown how slavery created powerful political interests in the late eighteenth century, but few appreciate how political interests helped to escalate the slave trade at the beginning of the century. See Christopher Brown, “The Politics of Slavery,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York, 2002), 214–32.

monopoly. In 1679 interlopers sought to regulate the company's monopoly because of its associations with the Duke of York as part of a movement to exclude him from the Crown. But King Charles intervened and prorogued Parliament. From 1683 to 1686, with its governor on the throne and its Barbados factor, Edwyn Stede, governor of that island, the company's market share improved from 46 percent to 86 percent. During this period the company elevated the scale of English slaving activity to an unprecedented level. With comprehensive political backing, the company severely limited the activities of interlopers. Prior to the 1698 act, the company's opponents therefore objected to its political power as much as its economic failings. In the absence of a competitive market, no scope existed for registering opposition using economic methods such as purchasing from or selling to another corporation.¹⁰ In short monopolies were political phenomena. Successful opposition to them had to employ political means.

Prior to James's flight from England in 1688, few viable political means existed to oppose the company. Several features of the post-1688 situation jeopardized the future of the company's monopoly. An emerging judicial intolerance of monopolies that derived from the royal prerogative targeted the company. In 1689, in *Nightingale v. Bridges*, Chief Justice John Holt ruled that the company's seizure of the cargo of an interloping ship owned by Nightingale was unlawful because its monopoly derived from the prerogative and had been executed through admiralty courts. Holt added that any future enforcement of monopolistic privileges must derive from statute. The company, as a result, paid Nightingale damages, dispatched warnings to its colonial agents not to seize or detain interlopers, and applied to the reformed Parliament for a statutory confirmation of its charter. Depriving the company of the means to enforce its monopoly appeared to some like an official endorsement of independent slave trading. Interloping slave voyages increased dramatically as a result despite the onset of the Nine Years' War. The price of company stock therefore plummeted in the early 1690s.¹¹

¹⁰ Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 667–69. K. G. Davies recorded the company's motto (Davies, *Royal African Company*, 103). An approximate translation is "business is flourishing due to royal patronage and the kingdom is flourishing due to business." The records of the Royal African Company detail the company's shareholders and the size of their holdings. As the owner of three thousand pounds' worth of shares, James was the company's largest shareholder. See stock book in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 185. Albert O. Hirschman noted the importance of political means of response within markets. See Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 33.

¹¹ W. Darrell Stump, "An Economic Consequence of 1688," *Albion* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 26–35. One example of company correspondence to colonial agents

Parliamentary consideration of the Africa trade served to publicize the breadth of opposition to the company. Greater use of petitions to assert grievances after 1688 and their increasing legitimization of requests for reform saw the company under siege from multiple interests. The separate traders proved far more successful at portraying themselves as a national movement. The company submitted more petitions than it was able to cultivate: of the seventy-four procompany petitions, forty-four were submitted by the company itself. The separate traders, by comparison, were more effective at mobilizing others to support their cause. Only 5 of the separate traders' 135 petitions were signed by separate traders themselves. Their potential constituency was far larger than the company's because their collective trade was so much more impressive in scale. The size and oppositional solidarity of the independent traders prevented the company from successfully branding its opponents as merely self-interested individuals, though it repeatedly tried to do so.¹²

The geographic reach of the separate traders' petitioning constituency was also far larger than the company's. Seventy-three of their petitions arrived from the provinces compared with eight for the company. The separate traders benefited from twenty-seven petitions from the colonies compared with the company's eleven. Though the company enjoyed a network of representatives in all the major outports and all British-American colonies, its poor trading record prevented it from gathering signatories for the petitions that the company dispatched to them. The company relied excessively on petitions from its metropolitan suppliers. Its support emanated from the manufacturing and planting interests as opposed to the overwhelmingly mercantile profile of the separate traders' petitioning interest.¹³

warning them of the consequences of enforcing its monopoly is the letter to Henry Carpenter and Thomas Belchamber, the company's agents in Nevis. See Royal African Company to Carpenter and Belchamber, Mar. 10, 1691, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 57 (unfoliated). Robert William Scott documented joint-stock company share price movements. Prices fell from 52 to 20 shillings from 1692 to 1694 (Scott, *Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 2: 32–35).

¹² The debates can be followed in the *Journals of the House of Commons* (London, 1803), vols. 11–16. For a more detailed discussion of the Africa trade debates in Parliament, see William A. Pettigrew, "Parliament and the Escalation of the Slave Trade, 1690–1714," in *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament and People*, ed. James Walvin and Stephen Farrell (Edinburgh, Scotland, forthcoming). For the rising importance of petitioning, see Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, Eng., 2005), 124; David Zaret, "Petitions and the 'Invention' of Public Opinion in the English Revolution," *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (May 1996): 1497–1542. Charles Davenant dismissively regarded the separate traders as being self-interested. See [Davenant], *Reflections Upon the Constitution and Management of the Trade to Africa . . .* (1709), repr. in Charles Whitworth, ed., *The Political and Commercial Works of Charles D'Avenant* (London, 1771), 5: 130.

¹³ Minutes from a House of Lords discussion in 1713 read: "The rich men seem for an open trade, the Planters for a separate trade because the Company trusted

The separate traders enjoyed more spontaneous petitioning support, which, after 1688, could more readily assert itself. They received thirty-three petitions from provincial civic bodies such as borough corporations and mercantile interest groups including the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers. Such groups often dispatched their own interests by watching the progress of Africa trade debates. The separate traders also proved more imaginative and successful as cultivators of other influential petitioning interests than the company. Robert Heysham, the separate traders' parliamentary leader, wrote to colonial and provincial civic bodies to arrange petitions. In January 1709 the company's agent in Liverpool informed Africa House (the Royal African Company's London headquarters on Leadenhall Street) "that this post Mr Heysham has written to Captain Clayton to Get a petition from that Town against the Company."¹⁴ Heysham also wrote to several other members of Parliament and obtained a petition from Chester in February 1709. Such lobbying helped the separate traders to simultaneously recruit sympathizing members of Parliament to their banner and gather petitions.

The separate traders also placed more value on the number of signatures rather than their quality as the company did. In September 1709 the Royal African Company's agents in Barbados enclosed a petition "of ye Best Characters and Estates in ye Island and are now owners of $\frac{2}{3}$ of ye Land and Negroes." They went on to recount how the governor bowed to the interest of William Heysham (Robert's brother and business partner in Barbados) and had his militia officers rally their "common soldiers" to sign a separate trader petition that was "Kept out of

them" (*The Manuscripts of the House of Lords* [London, 1953], 10: 173 [item no. 3019, fol. jj]). During the 1690s the company received support from wool-producing areas such as Kidderminster, Montserrat, Shrewsbury, and Witney. The separate traders benefited from petitions from Barbados, Berkshire, Bristol, Devon, Essex, Exeter, Gloucester, Hallamshire, Jamaica, London, Maryland, Norwich, Plymouth, Somerset, Southwark, Suffolk, Virginia, Wiltshire, and York. In the second stage of debate, the company received petitions from Barbados, Exeter, Kidderminster, and London, whereas the separate traders cultivated petitions from Aberdeen, Ashburton, Barbados, Birmingham, Bridgewater, Bristol, Carolina, Chester, Crediton, Dartmouth, Devon, Dundee, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Inverness, Jamaica, Kingsbridge, Lancaster, the Leeward Islands, Liverpool, London, Lyme Regis, Maryland, Minehead, Modbury, Montross, Plymouth, Taunton, Totnes, Virginia, Wapping, Westbury, and Whitehaven (*Journals of the House of Commons*, vols. 11–16).

¹⁴ Jacob Reynardson to Royal African Company, Feb. 26, 1713, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 45 (unfoliated); Jasper Mauditt to Royal African Company, Jan. 28, 1709, *ibid.*, T70, vol. 9 (unfoliated). See also how the Bristol merchant venturers supplied the Bristol member of Parliament, Joseph Earle, with "a butt of sherry wyne" to be distributed to further the interests of the company's opponents (Merchant Venturers' Hall Book, Nov. 10, 1713, in Bristol Records Office, Bristol, Eng.).

Town and signed by Servants and Such.” “Had we thought,” they went on, “the number of hands and not the Quality we could easily out done them . . . [and] could had all the sailors in the five men of war which are in much better circumstances than [r]ough servants hardly a Degrees above slaves.” Excluding the separate trader petitions themselves, petitions in support of the separate traders contained nearly eight thousand signatories compared with the company’s twenty-five hundred. Company sympathizers found the separate traders’ lobbying methods distasteful. Daniel Defoe, a company propagandist, believed that the separate traders imposed on their provincial contacts and watched with amazement as “the Clamours of the Petitions which they have rais’d, (*as Witches do the Devil*) from the several Counties of *England*, and made the poor People say any Thing they bid them.”¹⁵ The separate traders’ political repertoire better suited the post-1688 political climate in which appeals to public opinion legitimized proposals for change.

A more open political culture after 1688 allowed another means for the broadly based opposition to the company to express itself. The period between the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695 and the Stamp Act of 1712 saw the printing of unprecedented numbers of pamphlets and broadsides. During the 1690s and until 1714, parliamentary debates about the management of the slave trade generated close to two hundred printed pamphlets circulated by both factions around coffeehouses in the capital, in the provinces, in the colonies, and in the lobby of Parliament. Of those pamphlets that were clearly partisan, the company produced a slight majority. As a proactive lobbyist in need of a statute, the company had more of a case to make and employed experienced pamphleteers including Defoe and Charles Davenant to write in support of its monopoly. The separate traders wrote their own pamphlets and prided themselves as trading practitioners rather than theorists or commentators. The company and its opponents exploited the press to mobilize the opinion of an emerging critical public whose contribution increasingly buttressed requests for change such as the desire to liberalize the Africa trade. Both factions debated which of their respective posi-

¹⁵ Raynes Bate and Thomas Stewart to [Royal African Company], Sept. 3, 1709, in *Records of the Royal African Company*, T70, vol. 8: fol. 95 (“common soldiers”; “of ye Best Characters”); Rawlinson MSS A312, fol. 7, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Eng. (“Had we thought”). For Daniel Defoe’s concerns about the separate traders’ petitioning, see Defoe, *Review of the State of the British Nation*, Mar. 22, 1712, in Arthur Wellesley Secord, ed., *Defoe’s Review: Reproduced from the Original Editions* . . . (New York, 1938), 21: 627. The calculations for the numbers of signatories on company and separate trader petitions are based on extrapolations from transcriptions of a series of Africa trade debate petitions preserved in *Records of the Royal African Company*, T70, vol. 175.

tions better suited the people (or the public) or the national interest, and both argued that they represented broadly based interests.¹⁶

The strength of the company's ties with the displaced regime led pamphleteering critics after 1688 to couch their opposition in constitutional terms; interlopers regarded monopolistic restrictions on trade as an insult to the common law. They reinterpreted certain aspects of the company's charter—most notably its stipulation that company personnel seize the goods of interloping Africa traders and prosecute their captains and crews in company-sponsored admiralty courts—as emblematic of Jacobite tyranny. One pamphleteer described how the interlopers' political wing had “now broken in upon [the company] . . . under a pretence of their zeale for the publick rights and liberties of the subject.” Unaware of the irony of the language, another pamphlet asserted that monopolies were “the Badges of a slavish People . . . nothing hitherto but an English Freedom has been wanting to extend the Trade.”¹⁷ Just as the right to discuss the national interest became an essential part of the

¹⁶ Tim Keirn has analyzed these pamphlet debates. He acknowledged the political aspect of the company's position as well as the importance of politics to its demise. Keirn described too anachronistic a notion of policy making in an era of legislation better characterized as diffident and tentative, overstated the importance of party to the parliamentary dispute, and was too dismissive of the separate traders' individualism and how the legislative vacuum after 1712 resulted from their lobbying strategy. He does not view the Africa trade debates in the context of the evolving slave trade and British Empire. See Keirn, “Monopoly, Economic Thought, and the Royal African Company,” in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London, 1995), 430. The company employed Daniel Defoe and Charles Davenant as pamphleteers. Defoe received payment from the Royal African Company. See Keirn, “Daniel Defoe and the Royal African Company,” *Historical Research* 61, no. 145 (June 1988): 243–47. It is not clear whether Davenant was paid. Humphrey Morice sent draft copies of Africa trade pamphlets he wrote to his uncle, Nicholas Morice, for his opinion. See N. Morice to H. Morice, Mar. 25, 1709, in Humphrey Morice's Letterbook, Morice Papers, Bank of England Archive, London. For pride in experience of trade, see [Anonymous], *Some Remarks on a Pamphlet, call'd, Reflections, on the Constitution and Management of the Trade to Africa . . .* ([London], 1709), 4. For emphasis on the importance of the “publick,” see [Anonymous], *Considerations Upon the Trade to Guinea* (London, 1708), 25. For the importance of appealing the people, see [Anonymous], *The Case Between the African Company and the People of England* (London, 1692).

¹⁷ Untitled handwritten pamphlet in Harleian MSS 3710, fol. 238, British Library, London (“now broken”); [Anonymous], *A Letter to a Member of Parliament Concerning the African Trade* ([London, 1709?]), 3 (“Badges of a slavish People”). For other examples of separate trader pamphlets that used constitutional arguments, see [Anonymous], *Proposals Humbly Offered to the Honourable House of Commons for Enlarging and Protecting the Trade to Africa* ([London, 1709?]); William Wood, *A Survey of Trade . . .* (London, 1718). One pamphleteer in particular despised the practice of imprisoning crews of interloping vessels. William Wilkinson claimed his brother died in the custody of the company. See Wilkinson, *Systema Africanum* (London, 1690), 3. For further associations of the company with tyranny, see Anonymous, *Remarks on a Pamphlet, call'd, Reflections*, 31.

functioning public sphere, the right to advance one's own economic interests became, during the second half of the seventeenth century, a critical part of an ideology for an increasingly commercial society. By celebrating the societal benefits of individual economic self-interest, opponents of the company's monopoly yoked the cause of political liberalism to economic growth. The company, however, justified the joint-stock organization of the trade by arguing that the unrestricted pursuit of private gain undermined the public good: "While every single Person pursues his own particular Interest, the Publique is deserted by All, and consequently must fall to Ruine. For which Reason, the Crown hath Erected and Established Fraternities or Companies of Merchants." Public discussion helped vindicate the independent trading model as a superior exporter of goods and as a supplier of slaves. Interlopers, however, grounded their opposition to the company's monopoly in the political ideology of individual rights rather than the proto-Smithian theory of monopolistic inefficiency.¹⁸

From 1707 the Board of Trade began to assist Parliament in umpiring the dispute between the company and its opponents. The board's first report to the House of Commons in 1708 read like a list of complaints against the company. Much of the separate traders' testimony appeared verbatim. The board scrutinized the company's affairs forensically, whereas custom house records sufficed as evidence of the separate traders' operations. The board also allowed the separate traders to overstate their contribution to the increasing volume of the trade while tolerating the separate traders' overinflated claims about corruption among company personnel. After *Nightingale v. Bridges*, the onus was on the company to justify its proposed restriction of the Atlantic economy. Designed as a means for the state to inform itself about the unregulated overseas economy in the absence of a state-sponsored monopoly company, the board depended on the testimony of independent merchants whose interests were likely to be contrary to those of a company. For an institution charged with encouraging trade, the separate traders' superior trading record furnished the ultimate recommendation. The board's support for

¹⁸ [Anonymous], *Certain Considerations Relating to the Royal African Company of England. In Which The Original Growth, and National Advantages of the Guiney Trade, are Demonstrated: As Also That the same Trade cannot be carried on but by a Company and Joint-Stock* ([London], 1680), 1 (quotation). Charles Davenant argued that independent traders could not be relied on to trade when the prospect of profits looked bleak. See Davenant, *Reflections Upon the African Trade*, in Whitworth, *Political and Commercial Works of D'Avenant*, 5: 130. For an example of a separate trader pamphlet that justified opposition to monopoly according to the political ideology of individual rights, see [John De Witt], *Extract of divers Passages relating to Exclusive Joint-Stock Companies taken from Monsieur De Witt's Treatise of the True Interest and Political Maxims of Holland and West-Friesland . . .* ([London, 1710?]), 3.

the separate traders damaged the company's credibility and helped authenticate the separate traders' claims.¹⁹ The infrastructure of the modern state offered a platform from which new ideas and new groupings fixed on the company as the next target for reform.

Scholars have mapped the party divisions of Whig and Tory onto the dispute between the separate traders and the company with the Tories favoring the latter. The individuals involved doubtless maintained opinions that would categorize them as either Whig or Tory. But the party affiliations of the company and separate traders did not allow either side a legislative victory in the Africa trade dispute. Party labels perhaps stimulated early momentum for both sides' cause. Yet they did not decide the issue. One-third of the company directors in Parliament were Whigs and nearly half the parliamentary separate traders were Tories, including their leader, Robert Heysham. Party networks did not supply a decisive means for either faction to mobilize sympathetic constituents. When cultivating members of Parliament, the company lobbied men of both party persuasions.²⁰ Twenty-eight percent of those supporting the company in Parliament were Whigs and 41 percent of those supporting the separate traders were Tories. The separate traders received support from staunchly Tory boroughs such as Totnes as well as Whig constituencies. The company failed to fasten its cause to a party majority to gain a parliamentary statute. The separate traders therefore did not need to incite the rage of party to counter the company. The expansion of Britain's slave trade, like its abolition, had cross-party appeal.

¹⁹ According to one scholar, the conduct of the board's inquiry into the Africa trade as well as its objections to the company were grounded in party bias. For the Whiggery of the board, see I. K. Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy: The Board of Trade in Colonial Administration, 1696-1720* (Oxford, Eng., 1968), 127. The board's predecessor, the Lords of Trade and Plantations, which had executive power through the Privy Council, had acted with the Royal African Company to limit interloping in the 1680s. See Colonial Office Series 153/3, p. 270, National Archives, Kew, Eng.

²⁰ According to Tim Keirn, of thirty-one members of Parliament known to have supported the company from 1688 to 1714, at least twenty-five (71 percent) may be identified as Tories. Of the forty-one known to have opposed the company, a minimum of thirty-five (85 percent) were Whigs. See Keirn, "Monopoly, Economic Thought," 430, 434. My own research disputes this correlation by counting twenty-three Tory supporters of the company out of thirty-nine (53 percent) and twelve Whig supporters of the separate traders out of twenty-two (55 percent). See *Journals of the House of Commons*, vols. 11-16; *Manuscripts of the House of Lords*, vol. 10; Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vols. 9, 44-45, 88, 169, 175. In any case such small numbers could not secure legislation in either faction's favor. On one occasion the company wrote to some Whig members of Parliament to convince them to support its cause. See Sam Whetcombe to Anthony Henly et al., Feb. 5, 1709, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 9 (unfoliated).

A new generation of separate traders formed themselves into a powerful interest group. In the 1690s a handful of plutocrats managed the separate traders' political operation. Oligarchs including Sir Gilbert Heathcote and John Gardner led the cause for free trade. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, politically active separate traders numbered more than one hundred, whereas nearly five hundred individuals are documented as assembling cargoes bound for Africa. By isolating those whose repeated involvement in the trade can be proved and those who operated politically more than once, twenty-one elite separate traders emerge.²¹ Those who appeared before the Board of Trade or in Parliament or who wrote reports—including Richard Harris, Robert Heysham, Isaac Milner, Humphrey Morice, and Peter Paggen—represent the unofficial leaders of the separate traders' political operation. All traded slaves on a vast scale.

Paggen, a Huguenot immigrant from the Low Country, had been a large-scale tobacco merchant since the 1690s. He also shipped indentured servants and guns to the Chesapeake. Milner, the scion of a Whitehaven Dissenting Church family, seems to have served some kind of apprenticeship to Paggen. By the early eighteenth century, Milner was one of the principal tobacco traders in London. Harris was a Jamaica

²¹ John Oldmixon describes how "the opening the African Trade was . . . more owing to his [John Gardner's] contrivance and industry than any other person or persons whatsoever" (Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America, Containing The History of the Discovery, Settlement, Progress and present State of all the British Colonies* . . . [London, 1708], 2: 47). Despite the survival of records detailing those who paid the 10 percent duty for part of the period of the act, historians have traditionally asserted frustration about the lack of material concerning the separate traders' activities (see Davies, *Royal African Company*, 148). A comprehensive analysis of all the available sources for independent slave trading under the terms of the 1698 act (which expired in 1712), principally based on the Royal African Company's records of outgoing exports and the collection of the 10 percent duty in London, Bristol, and provincial slave-trading ports, produces a grand total of 452 named separate traders (see entry book in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vols. 1198–99). My prosopographical study of the separate traders represents the only systematic attempt to identify the individuals who opposed the company's monopoly and began independent slave-trading operations. I define someone as politically active whose support for a cause within a political context can be documented with a signature or minutes of proceedings of an official political institution. On these terms, during the lifespan of the 1698 act, 106 individuals can be classed as politically active separate traders. There is a strong correlation between the extent of interest in slave trading (measured in number of consignment years) and the extent of political activity (measured in number of political actions). For separate trader petitions, see Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 175: fols. 100, 148, 217; CO 388/11–12, 14, 21. The elite separate traders were Robert Brook, John Brown, Peregrine Brown, John Burridge Jr., Robert Cruickshank, Stephen Godin, John Goodwin, Richard Harris, Robert Heysham, Abraham Houditch, Charles Kent, Edward Lascelles, Joseph Martyn, Isaac Milner, Humphrey Morice, Peter Paggen, Nathaniel Rous, David Waterhouse, Benjamin Way, James Wayte, and William Wood.

sugar trader. Morice began his career as a merchant trading to the Iberian Peninsula but expanded his interests to Jamaica. Encouraged into slave trading by Milner, he later married Paggen's daughter, Katherine, and served as governor of the Bank of England in 1727. Morice and Harris hunted together at the former's Chiswick estate. They typically represented the movement before the Board of Trade and wrote pamphlets. Second only to the Royal African Company itself, Heysham had been the largest importer of sugar into England in the 1690s and became the largest independent consigner of slaves to the colonies in the first decade of the eighteenth century. He stood as the member of Parliament for Lancaster from 1698 to 1715 and led the separate traders' cause in Parliament. He died resplendent in 1727 worth more than forty-five thousand pounds and surrounded by goods suitable for the Africa trade, such as chintz and rangoes.²²

With a single exception, the separate traders' political leadership and demands remained the same throughout the period. The successful realization of their economic ambitions hinged on their coherence as a political interest group and the breadth of their support. The Glorious Revolution offered the separate traders the opportunity to develop their political acumen, and the slave trade supplied them with the benefits of a branch of colonial trade that became, because of their increasing political leverage, less regulated. In the capital their experience in other trades and partial exploitation of party-political connections opened channels hitherto unexplored by merchants with political ambitions. They also enjoyed connections throughout the provinces, obtaining financial backing from provincial city corporations themselves increasingly assertive under the new constitutional arrangements.²³

²² For Peter Paggen, see Gilbert Heathcote to William Blathwayt, May 10, 1701, in Blathwayt MSS 341, Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. For Isaac Milner's apprenticeship to Peter Paggen, see Francis Nicholson to Board of Trade, Aug. 20, 1698, in CO 5/174, item no. 52. For Milner's encouragement of Humphrey Morice into slave trading, see Morice to Thomas Wood, Aug. 7, 1705, in Humphrey Morice's Letterbook, Morice Papers. For evidence of Richard Harris and Morice as a hunting partnership, see Humphrey Morice Papers, Oct. 8, 1714, in Add. MSS 48590, British Library. For evidence detailing the extent of Robert Heysham's sugar import business in the 1690s, see D. W. Jones, "London Overseas-Merchant Groups at the End of the Seventeenth Century and the Moves against the East India Company" (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1970), 204. For Heysham's will, see "Will of Robert Heysham," in Commons Serjeant, bk. 6, box 49, fol. 114b, no. 3263, Corporation of London Records Office.

²³ In March 1712, fearful of the Tory ministry's support for the company, Humphrey Morice and Richard Harris moderated their proposals in a Board of Trade hearing. Barbadian traders (including Sir Robert Davers, Robert Heysham, Gilfrid Lawson, James Lowther, and Thomas Onslow) accused them of breaking rank and they were silenced. See transcription of Board of Trade minutes, Mar. 12, 1712, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 175: fol. 295. The Bristol Society of Merchant

The separate traders' force as a coherent political movement therefore depended on structural alterations within the British political landscape. Institutions such as the Board of Trade, though formed to maintain monarchical control over foreign policy, were vehicles for consultation, discussion, and compromise and offered peripheral groups, such as the separate traders, the opportunity to influence policy. In so doing they replaced the Jacobite unilateralism that had sustained the Royal African Company. The growing power of Parliament after the revolutionary settlement altered the location of political initiative because the legislature became increasingly sympathetic to the interests of a more powerful and assertive periphery in the provinces and colonies that wished to see control of the lucrative trade in human beings wrested from what was regarded as an overprivileged and corrupt metropolis.²⁴ Similarly, the 1707 Act of Union and the expectations it produced among Scottish commercial interests encouraged political movements distant from London to lobby Parliament if they believed the capital restricted economic opportunity. Scottish boroughs submitted nine petitions, all against the company. The separate traders' political victory depended on the perception that they represented a marginalized majority in the metropolis, provinces, and colonies against an incumbent but outmoded minority that had proved itself an ineffective custodian of the national economic interest.

The new, modern political culture operated transatlantically with new institutions and notions of empire favoring the separate traders. A changing balance of power in Britain's Atlantic empire saw a devolution of political initiative to those at the colonial periphery at the same time that those colonial interests began to develop a political presence in the metropolis. As a largely Atlantic interest group, these changes favored the separate traders. The separate traders' operation proves that historians' attempts to separate British Atlantic interests into center and periphery or metropolis and colonies represent an interpretive fallacy. Like the economics of slave trading itself, the politics of company opposition proceeded transatlantically. The separate traders represent a truly Atlantic grouping with deterritorialized interests.²⁵

Venturers paid £150 to the firm of Richard Harris and Co. to help fund lobbying in Parliament against the company's monopoly. See Merchant Venturers' Hall Book, Nov. 10, 1713, in Bristol Records Office.

²⁴ [Anonymous], *The State of the Trade to Africa Between 1680 and 1707, as well under the Management of an Exclusive Company, as under that of Separate Traders, Impartially considered, with Regard to Matter of Fact and Demonstration . . .* ([London, 1708]).

²⁵ One memorable rendition of the mentality of dividing the slave trade too neatly into either supply-and-demand or metropolis versus colonies schemes is

As a newer, unregulated branch of overseas commerce, British Atlantic merchants grew accustomed to an exceptional degree of independence to which they attributed the growth of their trade. Atlantic merchants had played a critical part in opposing Charles I and in affecting the domestic political changes that brought about the Glorious Revolution. Because of this tradition, they opposed monopolies that they believed hindered their continuing expansion. They sought to create an Atlantic slave trade as deregulated as the sugar and tobacco trades. Plantation lobbies, of which the separate traders were an early example, combined the interests of merchants and their colonial contacts. They stood between the preferences and decisions of colonial planters and the wider influences of the Atlantic market for slaves. The rise to power of such private interest groups with colonial agendas formed part of a broader development that altered how the British Empire functioned. According to one authority, from 1660 to 1760 “major influence upon the monarchs shifted from institutional interests . . . to voluntary interests that offered to facilitate the crown’s administration in exchange for being allowed to participate in it.”²⁶ The Board of Trade offered a platform for increasingly assertive colonial interest groups. The separate traders supply an outstanding example of one of these facilitating interests that worked with the board to formulate imperial policy, whereas the company represents an old-style institutional interest rapidly losing its influence.

The board galvanized opposition to the company by uniting domestic disapproval with the contempt that many colonial planter-residents had for the company. In 1708, at the request of Parliament, the board embarked on the first inquiry into the transatlantic slave trade to

Thomas Jefferson’s attempt to blame George III for imposing the slave trade on the American colonies in his early draft of the Declaration of Independence. See Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1950), 1: 318. Robin Blackburn saw the ending of the company’s monopoly as an attempt to placate the colonists without acknowledging the episode’s Atlantic dimension by stressing how colonists could operate more effectively in London by 1700 (see Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 266). Blackburn’s separation of metropolitan and colonial interests is as artificial as dividing their economic impersonations, supply and demand. The desire to emphasize the connectedness of the colonies and the mother country and therefore to add contingency to American independence represents one of the goals of Atlantic history. For the multifarious aims and definitions of this historiographical tradition, see esp. Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford, Eng., 1986); the forum in the *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 426-500; Armitage and Braddick, *British Atlantic World*.

²⁶ Olson, *Making the Empire Work*, 11 (quotation). For Atlantic merchants’ tendency to oppose monopoly, see Gary Stuart De Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party, 1688-1715* (Oxford, Eng., 1985), 137.

include testimony from all the Atlantic colonies. The board's inquiry required colonial governors to establish whether planters would rather be supplied with slaves by the company or the separate traders. It placed colonial evidence at the heart of the dispute, to the disappointment of the company, which preferred to focus parliamentary attention on the African coast and English exports. The inquiry also explicitly privileged the slave trade as a more important aspect of the Africa trade debates than the export of English manufactures. Aware of the board's inquiry, the company's deputy governor, Thomas Pindar, dispatched a letter and procompany pamphlets to the company's agents for them to circulate among planters. Pindar understood, as the commissioners did, that colonial testimony had become increasingly important to Parliament: "It will be difficult to preserve this Trade unless the Plantations make application that it may be done."²⁷ His assessment records the novel metropolitan expectation that colonists intervene in the formulation of imperial policy.

Jamaica and the Chesapeake colonies opposed the company as an inadequate supplier of slaves. In Barbados, however, where the company had come closer to meeting colonial demand, colonists complained of the political power the company exerted over its many debtors. In 1695 Governor Francis Russell described how "The Agents of the African Company carry such a sway here as almost to stop any proceeding, for if a man does not vote as they would wish for a Vestryman or Assemblyman they proceed against him for what he owes them for negroes." Such political control limited the scope for opposition to the company in the short term. Accordingly, the 1698 act prevented agents in the sale of slaves (whether with the company or not) from acting as judges in the colonies. The act reflected opposition to monopoly based on the concentration of political power that being sole creditor allowed. The legislature helped, in separating judicial and political power from slaving activity, to distribute this political power throughout the market. Attempts to separate slave trading from judicial responsibility undermined the company's pseudo public credentials and helped cut off its political life support. Interests antithetical to the company, however, continued to exploit their political capital to attack it. Colonists who objected to the company's monopoly had, since the 1670s, used colonial courts to prevent its seizing interloping cargoes. By 1700 government officers who supported the separate traders or simply wished to avoid settling their debts minimized the frequency and duration of court sit-

²⁷ Royal African Company to Gawin Corbin, Apr. 20, 1708, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 58: fols. 332-35.

tings to prevent the company from pursuing its debtors. Despite replying to Pindar in reassuring terms in 1709, Mitford Crowe, the Barbadian governor, later bowed to the separate traders because of their influence within the assembly and had his militia officers rally common soldiers to sign their petition. Similarly, when the company approached Virginia tobacco planters for support, its agent, Gawin Corbin, reported how planters refused to sign any public petitions, presumably for fear of offending their merchant creditors, many of whom operated as separate traders.²⁸

Separate traders used their formal connections with colonial assemblies to further their cause and choreographed the board's reaction to colonial testimony. Benjamin Way and Richard Harris presented their separate trader memorial to the commissioners moments before submitting Jamaica's pro-separate trader response months in advance of the governor's reply. Though mostly resident in London, all the separate traders had Atlantic interests. Using a database of contemporaneous mercantile petitions, it is possible to establish each trader's other trading interests. Within the sample, eight were primarily Jamaica sugar merchants. Seven operated predominantly as Chesapeake tobacco merchants. Three were Barbados merchants, two operated primarily in the Leeward Islands, and the other in Carolina. They divided, therefore, primarily into Jamaica and Chesapeake circles. These colonies were least satisfied by the company's slave-trading operation. In the 1690s sugar merchants formed the core of company opposition. The importance of the tobacco interest to the separate traders' cause during the second phase of parliamentary consideration from 1707 to 1713 confirms the effect that the 1698 act had in opening up the supply of slaves to mainland America. Aware of the labor needs of their colonial suppliers, the separate traders served an integrative role in the British Atlantic economy by diversifying into slave trading to increase the size of their sugar or tobacco businesses. Of the Royal African Company's directors who served during the term of the 1698 act, whose other trading interests can be established, only one-quarter had Atlantic trading interests.²⁹

²⁸ J. W. Fortescue et al., eds., *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series: America and West Indies* (London, 1903), 14: 524 (item no. 1930, quotation). Robert Heysham's brother, William, was a key political player in the Barbadian assembly. See Raynes Bate and Thomas Stewart to [Royal African Company], Sept. 3, 1709, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 8: fol. 95. For a record of Virginia planters' diffidence about signing company petitions, see Gawin Corbin to Royal African Company, September–October 1709, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 8: fol. 97. Micajah Perry, the unofficial leader of England's tobacco industry, assembled African cargoes in 1702, 1704, and 1707 (entry book in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 1198).

²⁹ *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations* (London, 1920), 1: November–December 1708. Perry Gauci created the database of late-seventeenth-century and early-eighteenth-century English mercantile petitions that I have used. I

The separate traders' political operation reflected their Atlantic business networks. Though they also operated independently, three shared cargoes with the Royal African Company and so appeared unlikely to jeopardize this trading relationship by publicly attacking the company. Others primarily shipped iron to Africa. Because they usually sourced ore from northern Europe, they operated outside the Atlantic constituency that formed the bedrock of the separate traders' movement.³⁰ Also nearly half the politically active separate traders have no proven slave-trading record. Sir Robert Davers appeared on the separate traders' behalf before the Board of Trade in February 1712. Davers served as an unofficial parliamentary spokesman for the increasingly formalized plantation interests in Parliament, and his appearance as a separate trader lobbyist confirms that the separate traders represent an early incarnation of this interest. The large group of politically active non-slave-trading separate traders underscores the extent to which the separate traders' interests went beyond slave trading to the broader concerns of the Atlantic world

am grateful to Dr. Gauci for granting me permission to use this database. The following names result from the prosopographical analysis described in footnote 21. The eight elite Jamaica separate traders were Robert Brook, John Burr ridge Jr., Richard Harris, Abraham Houditch, Charles Kent, Humphrey Morice, Benjamin Way, and William Wood. The two elite Leeward Islands separate traders were Joseph Martyn and David Waterhouse. The elite Carolina separate trader was Stephen Godin. The seven elite Chesapeake separate traders were John Brown, Peregrine Brown, Robert Cruickshank, John Goodwin, Isaac Milner, Peter Paggen, and James Wayte. The three elite Barbados separate traders were Robert Heysham, Edward Lascelles, and Nathaniel Rous. The Board of Trade's pro-separate trader report showed a particularly strong influence from the tobacco interest after it collated the results of its inquiry. "Ye greatest part of the Negroes furnished to Virginia, Maryland, Carolina and New York has been by the private traders and that not above two Hundred have been carried to those Parts by the Company since their Establishment . . . those plantations so profitable to this Kingdome ought not to have been neglected in such manner for without such a supply by the Private Traders near one halfe lessened your majesties Customes and the Navigations of this Kingdome" ("Report of the Lords Commissioners of Trade into the Africa Trade," Feb. 3, 1708, CO 28/2, sec. 231, fols. 1-5). These conclusions reached the board's report into the trade before the receipt of any testimony from the Chesapeake, suggesting that tobacco merchant-residents in England exerted considerable influence over the board. I used the same means to identify the other trading interests of the company directors as I used for the separate traders. Out of 168 directors in this period, it is possible to identify the other trading interests of 61. Five percent of the company directorate traded to the Levant, 10 percent to the East Indies, and 59 percent to Europe.

³⁰ Committed Africa traders who showed no interest in lobbying against the company included Daniel Jamineau (twelve consignment years) and Anthony Tourney (eleven consignment years). Sir William Benson, Jamineau, and Abraham Lodge shared cargoes with the company as derived from the prosopographical study described in footnote 21. Benson, James Berdoe, and Tourney traded in iron as derived from the same study.

market. Their interests and constituencies encompassed every corner of the British Atlantic world, from London to all the Atlantic colonies to the provincial outposts on the Atlantic rim.

Some planters criticized the company as an ineffective supplier of slaves prior to its demise. The company, in their eyes, restricted access to labor, the scarcest colonial commodity. But such protest remained insignificant until the political means existed to convert uncoordinated complaint into reform via the increased access that colonial planters and other peripheral groups had to metropolitan political institutions during the final quarter of the seventeenth century. The board's inquiry offered another opportunity. The rise of colonial agencies from the 1670s and the shift from direct trade (in which English firms purchased colonial produce from factors in America) to the consignment trade (in which colonists dispatched their produce to commission merchants in London) offered colonists two further transatlantic means of influencing metropolitan events. Some of the separate traders served as colonial agents, and all operated commission houses. With James II gone and his attempts to increase the mother country's control of the colonies dead in the water, the separate traders benefited from the fleeting emergence of a more horizontally integrated Atlantic system within which the colonies began to address the mother country as fellow participants instead of subordinates. Decisions taken in London privileged colonial agendas at the expense of the metropolitan environment. London served as the location where provincial and colonial interests affected imperial policy decisions.³¹

In the pamphlet discussions, both sides argued about the implications of their respective positions for the development of Britain's empire. The company and the separate traders espoused contrasting

³¹ K. G. Davies, "The Origins of the Commission System in the West India Trade," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 2 (1952): 89–107; Jacob M. Price, *Perry of London: A Family and a Firm on the Seaborne Frontier, 1615–1753* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 30–32; Keirn, "Monopoly, Economic Thought," 432. Lists of company directors can be found in Minutes of the Company's General Court, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 101. Robert Heysham, Joseph Martyn, Peter Paggen, and Nathaniel Rous had all acted as agents for colonial assemblies as derived from the prosopographical study described in footnote 21 (the former two for Barbados and the latter two for the Leeward Islands and Maryland, respectively). For Rous, see Fortescue et al., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, 18: 717 (item no. 981). For Martyn, *ibid.*, 13: 348 (item no. 1192). For Heysham, *ibid.*, 17: 619 (item no. 1255). For Paggen, *ibid.*, 18: 641 (item no. 911); Francis Nicholson to Peter Paggen, Dec. 21, 1698, in Ellesmere MSS 9572, Huntington Library. Visits to London by colonists were often seen as opportunities to arrange slave consignments: "[Your father] is very earnest for getting you the business of negro consignments tho he is afraid that will prevent and hinder the satisfaction of seeing you in England" (Stephen Fouace to Philip Ludwell, Apr. 22, 1711, in Lee Family Papers, 1 L51, fol. 72, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond).

versions of the empire. Davenant, the company's leading apologist, supported a public utility model of the company that produced slaves according to demand and exported sufficient British goods to maintain employment. He believed that the Royal African Company should expand its control of African territory. The Africa trade represented, in Davenant's mind, more a tool of imperial policy than a means to generate wealth. The company represented the seventeenth-century notion of economic concerns remaining subordinate to social agendas or political strategies. He argued for the necessity of joint stock to maintain a united front against European competitors and supposed that British interests required a well-endowed society to act as a diplomatic representative of the British state in Africa. The separate traders' position appeared markedly different. Though not explicitly anti-imperialist, they highlighted the impracticalities of the company's seventeenth-century imperial agenda. They viewed freedom of trade as the surest way to encourage imperial expansion and the discovery of new markets. They articulated a blue-water version of empire based on trade as opposed to the traditional territorial and conquest-driven conception that the company aspired to and championed the contributions of the mercantile class to the war effort.³² The company proved unable to reconcile its eastern Atlantic remit as a traditional monopoly company equipped with forts to suppress what it believed were barbarous African natives with the wishes of its western Atlantic constituency that preferred unregulated trade and enjoyed the political means to assert that preference at the company's expense.

Though the idea of a centralized empire existed, the desire to allocate funds to support it did not. The transition from company to open trade during this period reflected the deferral of this intellectually constructed empire to the practical realities that dictated, in the short term, that the relationship between center and periphery had to be negotiated. The old system centrifuged power, relied on unilateral directions ema-

³² Davenant, *Reflections Upon the African Trade*, in Whitworth, *Political and Commercial Works of D'Avenant*, 5: 138, 319. Andrea Finkelstein characterized Davenant's thought as "civic humanist." See Finkelstein, *Harmony and the Balance: An Intellectual History of Seventeenth-Century English Economic Thought* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2000), 225. The company never fully renounced its aim of establishing sugar and indigo plantations on the coast of Africa, which further fueled colonial opposition. See Fortescue et al., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, 13: 716 (item no. 2530). For an anticompany pamphlet arguing that liberating the English slave trade would enlarge it and championing the mercantile class's contribution to the Nine Years' War effort, see [Anonymous], *Heads of Proposals for A more Beneficial and Equal Establishment of a Regulated Company, to carry on the Trade of Affrica or Guiny* ([London, 1690?]), 1.

nating from clearly demarcated zones of metropolitan center to colonial periphery, governed through formal structures, and acted within a rigid national framework. The Royal African Company embodied this system. It connected closely with the state, and its agents remained, despite prescription under the terms of the 1698 act, entrenched in many colonial legislatures. Even after 1698 colonial governors' instructions contained requests to uphold the company's monopoly. The separate traders' rise was part cause and part effect of the emergence of a new approach to empire that encouraged interaction between center and periphery to the extent that the meaning of action could be deterritorialized, appeared powerless to stop the diffusion and contesting of metropolitan authority, was characterized by informal means of association, authorized transnational exchange, and released civil society and private commerce from the restrictions of state control.³³ This transition represents more than a decline in the strength of metropolitan authority. The new model of the center-periphery relationship derived from and responded to political interventions from peripheral interest groups. The shift also reflects concurrent alterations in political economy. In a trade-based empire, burgeoning individualism worked against centralized control of commercial initiative. The legislature did not explicitly countenance such notions during this period yet the implications of the separate traders' victory validated them implicitly.

The 1698 act expired in the summer of 1712, which left the trade in a confused state. It appeared to favor the separate traders because the 10 percent duty had expired. The company, however, claimed that in the absence of a statute to replace the 1698 act, the law of the English slave trade reverted to the company's 1672 charter. The Royal African Company dispatched advertisements to all the colonial and provincial ports warning separate traders not to assemble African cargoes without license from the company. The company claimed support from a resurgent royal prerogative in the later years of Queen Anne's rule. Lewis Galdy, the company's representative in Jamaica, congratulated the company "on their Success in Parliament," and Thomas Stewart, the Barbados factor, offered praise "on being restored to their rights." On the same day the separate traders' regulated company bill was defeated, the company achieved an act to legislate

³³ Elizabeth Mancke, "Negotiating an Empire: Britain and Its Overseas Peripheries, c. 1550–1780," in *Negotiated Empires: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas 1500–1820*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York, 2002), 257. For the informal aspect of Atlantic institutions, see Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 60–61. This deferral endured in wartime but reversed from the late 1720s as the metropolis sought to extract more from the colonies by tightening its centralizing grip.

a union with its creditors, which allowed it financial breathing space. Company officials argued that the act also offered clear parliamentary countenance to its charter and therefore its monopoly.³⁴

The company's star appeared to rise. It benefited from the ascendancy of Prime Minister Robert Harley, who had remained supportive of the company since his presentation of a Royal African Company petition in January 1694. The Harley ministry occupied key positions within the Board of Trade, and the separate traders began to lose the board's favor. It is likely that Harley, an expert on the Africa trade debates, did not wish to see the company destroyed because he saw a role for it as a supplier on the African coast for his South Sea Company. In 1713 the South Sea Company preferred the Royal African Company over the separate traders as contractors to supply forty-eight hundred slaves from the coast of Africa, which represented more than 50 percent of the annual slave trade volume at that point and, if successfully executed, would have transformed the company's fortunes. It offered a potential lifeline to the company and certainly lessened its resolve to force the separate traders out of the trade. The separate traders felt sufficiently uncomfortable with the legislative vacuum after 1712 to lobby for a statute confirming open trade. In a pamphlet supporting their 1713 open trade bill, the author remarked: "Without this bill the African trade remains very precarious; and no man can tell whether to enter into it, or to continue it when he is in." The company's South Sea interest ensured that the open trade bill would be blocked in the House of Lords after it had passed the Commons.³⁵ Despite its nonexistent trade and proximity to bankruptcy, the Royal African Company commanded a remarkable degree of support from the government.

It is indicative of the company's low standing, however, that Harley instituted a new joint-stock company to honor the *asiento* contract with

³⁴ Lewis Galdy to Royal African Company, Oct. 20, 1712, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 8: fol. 124 ("Success in Parliament"); Thomas Stewart to Royal African Company, Oct. 11, 1712, *ibid.*, fol. 125 ("on being restored"). For a copy of this printed advertisement and a manuscript transcription of the letter that accompanied it, see Royal African Company to Barbados, July 11, 1712, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 58: fols. 418–19 (advertisement), 420 (letter). For evidence that the company believed the Creditors' Act represented parliamentary support for the company's monopoly, see [Anonymous], *The Case of about One Thousand Africa-creditors now united with the Company, by virtue of the late Act of Parliament* (n.p., 1713).

³⁵ [Anonymous], *The Present Case of the African Trade Truly Stated, with Reasons for the Bill for Establishing the same now depending* (n.p., 1711). For evidence that the separate traders began to lose the Board of Trade's support, see [Anonymous], *The Answer Of the Generality of the Creditors of the Royal African Company, to the Observations of the Separate-Traders: on the Bill for making effectual their Agreement with the Company* (n.p., 1712). Robert Harley had chaired parliamentary committees examining the Africa trade in the 1690s (Harleian MSS 3710).

Spain rather than reform the Royal African Company that, in design at least, appeared the obvious choice to supply slaves to the South Seas. The South Sea Company also sought to capitalize on the company's low standing by imposing harsh contractual restrictions on the length of time Royal African Company ships could moor on the African coast that the separate traders did well to avoid. The South Sea Company continually stalled payment to the African company, and the latter soon encountered problems in its existing sphere of operation. A Royal African Company pamphlet recorded the effects of a separate trading explosion on the coast of Africa in 1713 despite the failure of their open trade bill: "These Gentlemen have, with a high Hand, taken their Swill of Liberty, and have made a full Experiment what they can do for the Nation and Themselves, even as much as if they had had their Darling Act." Royal African Company agents in the colonies confirmed that the separate traders had vowed to continue trading without license from the company due to "encouragement from England" that combined extra-parliamentary acceptance of open trade with a refusal (inside and outside the legislature) to sustain the Royal African Company's monopoly. Stewart reported to the company that in June 1713 there appeared on the African coast "more Interlopers and other ships than have been known at one time, that they were neither encouraged nor molested by the Factors." By June 1714 company stock dropped to thirty-seven pence, "which is lower that at any time hither to it has been and declining."³⁶ Distracted by the misplaced expectation that its South Sea Company contract would solve its financial problems, the Royal African Company hardly watched as the separate traders, buoyed by broad public support, destroyed its market share.

The separate traders understood that legislative inertia would allow them to expand their trade. Realizing that, unlike a joint-stock monopoly,

For the South Sea Company's resolve to prevent the separate traders' bill, see Committee Minutes, June 27, 1713, in Records of the South Sea Company, Add. MSS 25495, British Library. The Royal African Company believed that the South Sea Company would oppose the separate traders: "By this interest we have now acquired you may rest assured no act of Parliament will ever pass in favour of interlopers for an open trade" (Royal African Company to John Clark, Aug. 14, 1713, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 52: fol. 332).

³⁶ [Robert Bleau], *A Letter from One of the Royal African Company's Chief Agents on the African Coasts*. . . ([London, 1713]), 1 ("Swill of Liberty"); Barbados to Royal African Company, Mar. 26, 1713, in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 8: fol. 128 ("encouragement from England"), 135 ("more Interlopers"); Barbados to Royal African Company, June 3, 1714, *ibid.*, T70, vol. 45 (unfoliated, "lower that at any time"). Records of the negotiations with the separate traders do not survive. The Royal African Company claimed to accept these disadvantageous terms for the public benefit. See Lord Oxford to Sir James Bateman, Sept. 15, 1713, in Add. MSS 25562, 6, British Library.

open trade required no statutory backing, the separate traders had simply lobbied Parliament to sustain a legislative vacuum, which would ensure that the trade would evolve without regulation and therefore with more profit for participants. As one pamphleteer explained:

Ever since the Parliament Voted that it was the undoubted Right of all the Subjects of *England* to Trade to Foreign Parts—none of those Free Traders have ever brought to the Parliament a Bill to settle this Trade, but still opposed what was offered by the Company . . . because those Free Traders . . . had just cause to believe that under such a Regulation, whatsoever it should be, they must Pay towards what by the Parliament should be thought necessary for the general Interest of that Trade whereas if they could continue that heavy load upon the *African* Company only by opposing this Bill, they should then enjoy their Trade without that Expence.

Within the postrevolutionary constitution in which Parliament had sovereignty, legislative failure often meant legislative vacuum because other branches (such as the Privy Council and the monarchy that had been the company's allies) were now less likely to intervene and resolve public disputes like that about the management of the slave trade. This development led to regulatory inertia and slave-trade expansion because of the lapsing of the 1698 act in 1712 and the separate traders' political power outside Parliament.³⁷

³⁷ [Anonymous], *Considerations relating to the African Bill* . . . ([London, 1698]), 3. In 1694, during a discussion concerning the future of the East India Company, Gilbert Heathcote, the scourge of several monopoly companies during this period including the African company, achieved a motion in the House of Commons declaring that all English subjects enjoyed the right to trade to the East Indies unless restricted by statute (see *Journals of the House of Commons*, 11: 50 [Jan. 8, 1693/4]). The period from 1688 to 1714 is famous for its statutory lapses, esp. the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695, which ended press censorship. See J. A. Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, 1979). The expiration of the 1698 act in 1712 had an equally important effect on the development of the British slave trade. The significance of these changes confirms the importance of state prescription and proves that change did not require state initiative. Similarly, the parliamentary confirmation that the Hudson's Bay Company had secured in 1690 lapsed in 1697. It is evidence, however, of the strength of political support for the African separate traders outside Parliament and throughout the British Atlantic world that legislative inertia favored the company's opponents in the case of the Africa trade and favored the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly in the context of that trade. Legislative politics had a tentative, experimental aspect rarely acknowledged in accounts of the first era of parliamentary sovereignty. For the Hudson's Bay Company, see E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670–1870*, 3 vols. (London, 1958–59).

To ensure a legislative vacuum, the separate traders blocked company attempts to secure statutory confirmation for their charter by publicly embarrassing the company with references to their own superior economic record and by cultivating the support of a far more impressive petitioning interest than the company could achieve. The separate traders may also have filibustered parliamentary proceedings in the hope of preventing statutes that would have led to the regulation of the trade. Company apologists argued that when the separate traders proposed legislation, they formulated schemes sufficiently outlandish to prevent success and maintain the legislative vacuum because a statute would have imposed charges on the separate traders' operation. Daniel Defoe accused the separate traders of offering legislative proposals that aimed at failure by being overambitious or ill-conceived. "I cannot say the Vigour of the Company has gain'd the Victory; but the Difficulty, or rather Impossibility of the Chimerical Settlements some Men have proposed, has given the dead Blow to all their Attempts." The company made similar accusations: "Some few Private Traders for selfish and particular ends had the art of propogating and imposing impractical notions on some members of the legislature in such a manner and possessing them with very groundless prejudice against the Company, that both the sessions terminated without any actual care being taken for the preservation of the Trade."³⁸

The separate traders nonetheless encouraged parliamentary consideration of the Africa trade debates because it offered the opportunity for them to achieve nonstatutory endorsements for open trade that would ensure public tolerance for the legislative vacuum. Concessions made in parliamentary debates as well as Board of Trade hearings in favor of the separate traders, though not confirmed in legislation, emerged into the public sphere and established broad support for an open trade. Parliamentary votes and resolutions occurred throughout the debates and allowed the separate traders to convince many outside Parliament that they enjoyed parliamentary favor. Such resolutions were often printed, which made them more influential outside the chamber. The resolutions, especially when originating from the committee of the whole house, confirmed that there existed broad parliamentary approval for the proposed scheme and that its translation into statute would be undone by disagreement about the legislation's fine print. One pamphlet complained how the company's assumption that the law of the Africa

³⁸ Defoe, *Review of State of British Nation*, June 8, 1710, in Secord, *Defoe's Review*, 17: 122; "Petition to the Queen," Dec. 3, 1710, in *Records of the Royal African Company*, T70, vol. 175: fols. 200–201.

trade would revert to its 1672 charter after the expiration of the 1698 act proceeded “without any Regard to the many Resolutions of this Honourable House repeated last Session, *viz. that the African trade ought to be free and open to all her Majesty's Subjects*” and went on to admit, “’Tis true the Bill for the National Trade did not pass last Year, but even the Adversaries thereto did agree, ’twas not because they were against an open Trade, but that some Clauses in that Bill were excepted against.” This pamphleteer believed a nonstatutory legislative concession from the reformed Parliament commanded more public authority than a charter derived from royal prerogative. Davenant noted how the board’s findings in early 1709 offered much-needed legitimacy to the separate traders’ cause and that “Transcribing them by way of report and intermixing them with such accounts as were demanded of ye Royal African Company, has happened to give them some more seeming authority than can reasonably be supposed to have been ever intended by the Lords Commissioners.” Davenant observed that such legitimacy proved influential with public opinion and helped, in turn, to influence the political process, “for the Separate Traders have taken occasion, from thence to print certain paragraphs of there own base allegations by way of Extracts out of the said report, as vouchers to gain Credit to the very same allegations again without doors.”³⁹ A quarter century of parliamentary scrutiny enabled the separate traders to convince the British state to leave them to their own devices. The strength and breadth of political will for separate trade throughout the Atlantic world assured that the trade in the absence of a statute of regulation would default as open.

Political consideration after 1688 not only allowed for new economic interests to assert themselves politically but also affected how the slave trade evolved. The unregulated nature of British eighteenth-century slave trading resulted from the legislative vacuum that was a product of

³⁹ “The inhabitants think it in Vain to Sign Any More Papers in favour of the Company Since ye Parliament Countenance ye Separate Traders,” in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 8: fol. 106. The view that separate trader legislation enjoyed broad support but failed because of disagreement among members of Parliament about small print was commonplace. See [Anonymous], *The Case of the National Traders to Africa* (n.p., 1713). See also [Anonymous], *The Anatomy of the African Company's Scheme for carrying on that Trade in a Joint-Stock Exclusive on the foot of New Subscriptions* ([London?, 1710?]). Charles Davenant’s responses to the Board of Trade’s 1708 report are contained in [Davenant], “Some General Observations and Particular Remarks on the Report made by the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations the 3rd February, 1708 Touching the Contents of the Royal African Company’s Peticion Referred to them by her Majesty,” in Records of the Royal African Company, T70, vol. 175: fols. 87–96.

parliamentary sovereignty. Participants at the Atlantic periphery regulated the trade. African vendors had always required bribes and gifts to encourage their business. Colonial governments renewed their attempts to benefit from the expansion in the slave trade by levying duties on slave imports. In the colonies the slave trade played a part in the development of government, whereas in the mother country, its economic importance lay primarily in the foundations of private fortunes. The resulting expansion of the slave trade as a result of the Royal African Company's decline, however, led to expansion in the sugar and tobacco industries, which the British government taxed. One contemporary disputant in the debate believed that each slave contributed from thirty to forty shillings per annum to the Treasury. If the demise of the company increased the volume of the slave trade by 60 percent (a conservative estimate), customs revenue for the state increased by more than thirty thousand pounds per year and by nearly 3 million pounds from 1730 to 1807.⁴⁰

Politics also influenced the geography of the slave trade. The layout of effective political opposition to the company determined the locations for independent slave trading. Those colonies and boroughs with well-established means of lobbying Parliament benefited from the political campaign. Jamaica and the Chesapeake colonies received a greatly improved supply of slaves after the company's demise because their merchants had been persistent and energetic political opponents of the company. The mainland colonies in particular benefited, and the greater availability of slaves certainly catalyzed the shift from indentured servitude to slave labor in the tobacco colonies. In the fifteen years prior to the 1698 act, slavers transported close to fifty-five hundred slaves to the American mainland. In the fifteen years after, that figure increased by nearly 300 percent to more than fifteen thousand. Contemporaries associated this increase with the separate traders.⁴¹ Similarly, provincial outports such as Bristol and Liverpool began to develop much larger slave-trading industries after they defeated the London-based monopoly company. Bristol's established mercantile interest groups and both cities' representation in Parliament contributed directly to the expansion of

⁴⁰ [Anonymous], *Some Considerations: Humbly Offered to Demonstrate how prejudicial it would be to the English Plantations, Revenues of the Crown, the Navigation and general Good of this Kingdom, that the sole Trade for Negroes be granted to a Company with a Joynt-Stock exclusive to all others* ([London, 1700?]), 2. On the 60 percent figure, see footnote 3.

⁴¹ Eltis, "Transatlantic Slave Trade to British Americas," table 10-1. For the contemporary belief that the supply of slaves to mainland America increased after 1698 because of the separate traders, see footnote 29.

slave trading in those cities during the coming decades. The great cloth-producing areas for the company, such as Kidderminster, declined as the West Country suppliers for the separate traders grew, which in turn stimulated employment in the West Country, formerly an important source of indentured servants bound for America, lessening the supply of servants and encouraging the purchase of slaves.

Political consideration also altered public perception of the slave trade. Company and separate traders agreed that enslaved African labor was integral to the expansion of Britain's plantation economies. Broad participation in Africa trade debates helped to commodify African slaves as products indispensable for the successful development of the empire and to change the public's association of Africa from a source of gold to a source of slaves. Unlike metropolitan audiences, colonists witnessed slavery firsthand and consequently could not separate discussions about slave trade management from the reality of living in a slave society. One colonial pamphlet offered an isolated secular, moral critique of slavery several decades before an abolitionist movement developed in Britain. *A Letter from a Merchant at Jamaica* offered to show more of the "Iniquity of that Trade . . . than either the Planters or Merchants, the Company or Traders, will think it their Business to shew." Scholars tend to associate its progressive tone with the Whigs and therefore the separate traders.⁴² But closer reading of the *Letter* suggests that the author sympathized with the company because joint stock offered better means of managing the trade. The merchant mentions the danger of having so many buyers in an open trade, showing how the unregulated aspect of slave trading played a critical part in early abolitionist rhetoric. Unlike other pamphleteers who believed in the natural right to trade in slaves, the Jamaica merchant emphasized how slave purchases contravened natural law. Unable to appreciate the irony, the author evoked natural rights in much the same way as separate trader pamphleteers had when opposing the company's monopoly. The right to oppose slavery was hewed from the

⁴² [Anonymous], *A Letter from a Merchant at Jamaica to a member of Parliament in London* . . . (London, 1709), 4, 8 (quotation). Associating Africa with slaves rather than gold after the eradication of the company's monopoly went beyond perception to fact. With the demise of the company, trade moved away from the forts, which had, in any case, been designed as gold-trading facilities. See David Eltis, "The Relative Importance of Slaves and Commodities in the Atlantic Trade of Seventeenth-Century Africa," *Journal of African History* 35, no. 2 (1994): 237–49. Historians have failed to place the *Letter* within the context of the Africa trade debates and have seen it rather as a protoabolitionist tract. See Jack P. Greene, "'A plain and natural Right to Life and Liberty': An Early Natural Rights Attack on the Excesses of the Slave System in Colonial British America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 57, no. 4 (October 2000): 793–808; Keirn, "Monopoly, Economic Thought," 443.

same rock as the right to resist monopoly, though the latter, in this case, sought to escalate enslavement.

The importance the author placed on converting slaves to Christianity offered a means of exchanging guilt about the trade for a civilizing mission that complemented the company's imperialist agenda. This mission appealed to Parliament, which on two occasions inserted a clause about slave baptism into proposed legislation with reassurances that baptism did not threaten planters' human property.⁴³ There had been calls for slave baptism from the 1680s, yet widespread conversion of slaves did not begin in earnest until the eighteenth century. Parliamentary consideration broadened the terms of debate about the Africa trade beyond the relative merits of monopoly and open trade to some discussion of the slaves' confessional needs, which may have helped to disabuse planters and merchants of the seventeenth-century maxim that baptism meant manumission.

The *Letter* fits into a tiny tradition of literature critical of the slave trade. Thomas Southerne's theatrical version of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (which played throughout the period) depicted how the financial revolution privileged utility over enlightenment. Southerne watched with distaste as the quest for material gain subordinated notions of nobility and separated political economy from its social and moral foundations. The rising tide of scientific treatises that espoused the economic advantages of individual consumption lessened the tendency to view the moral ramifications of marketplace decisions. Southerne's arguments cohere with those in the *Letter* and suggest that an embryonic country party political economy may have informed early marginal opposition to the slave trade. This disapproval was grounded in distrust of unbridled commerce and was prophetic of the commercial jeremiads that kick-started the abolitionist movement half a century later.⁴⁴ If the company's monopoly had survived, early abolitionism, with its critique of the unregulated aspect of the trade, might have sounded different. The expansion of the slave trade after 1713 and the great economic rewards it conferred on participants and the British Atlantic economy postponed such discussion.

⁴³ Parliament inserted clauses relating to slave baptism into proposed Africa trade legislation in March 1710 and May 1712. See *Journals of the House of Commons*, 16: 555–60 (Mar. 16, 1710).

⁴⁴ Thomas Southerne, *Oroonoko*, ed. Maximilian E. Novak and David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln, Neb., 1976). See also William Letwin, *The Origins of Scientific Economics: English Economic Thought, 1660–1776* (London, 1963), 147. Philip Gould furnishes an excellent account of the early history of secular abolitionism and the role played within it by commercial jeremiads. See Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 12–42.

The dispute between the Royal African Company and the separate traders sheds new light on the evolution of the slave trade as well as Britain's Atlantic empire and should be viewed as an important chapter in both their histories. It proves how politically active British Atlantic merchants intervened to solve the colonies' problem of labor supply. The Glorious Revolution deprived the company of the political support that sustained its operations and affected administrative and cultural reforms that furnished a platform for the assertion of separate trader grievances and an arena that sustained them. As politics and economics emerged as separate but interdependent spheres, more efficient political means existed to help new groups further their economic ambitions. The separate traders used new, deliberative, and outward-looking institutions such as the Board of Trade to advance their economic interests. The highly politicized and institutionally pluralist world of the post-1688 constitutional settlement saw the company branded a deplorable relic of a bygone age, whereas the separate traders became emblematic of every British citizen's right to trade. The company's downfall seemed like the final death throes of the Stuart monarchy. A revolution associated with a Bill of Rights celebrating the "indubitable rights and liberties of the people" proved instrumental in the genesis of an open trade in human beings.

The eclipse of the Royal African Company proves how a novel alliance—of colonial planters and provincial and metropolitan merchants—and new sources of political influence in Whitehall destroyed a powerful city institution and how the partnerships of private merchants eroded the predominance of a large-scale commercial organization. An increasingly inclusive transatlantic political system victimized the company and the thousands of extra Africans enslaved as a result of its downfall. The partial devolution of overseas commercial initiative to its practitioners and the increased involvement of the provincial and colonial peripheries in the metropolitan political process was the most profound turning point of this period and the one most detrimental to the company. The British slave trade pivoted on an Atlantic moment when, during the later years of the seventeenth century, British-American interests engineered transatlantic political changes to expand their Atlantic economy. This development was most tragic for the additional Africans enslaved.

Parliamentary consideration of the debates had collateral effects on how the slave trade evolved. Slavery's exposure to legislative frameworks broadened the terms of debate, which led to calls for slave baptism and

sowed the seeds that blossomed half a century later as the abolitionist movement. The most remarkable side effect of the political process resulted from its failure to legislate in either faction's favor. Instead the separate traders used Parliament to engineer a legislative vacuum that would ensure a deregulated trade. Because of Parliament's sovereignty within the reformed constitution, institutions associated with the Jacobite era, such as the monarch and the court that had supported the company, would no longer be able to sustain its operation. The separate traders' political power inside and outside Parliament enabled them to publicize the company's dismal economic record and its long history of economic and financial mismanagement to prevent the company from gaining parliamentary approval for its monopoly. In the absence of a parliamentary solution and in the context of broad public support for open trade, slave trading developed unregulated and without barrier to entry. The separate traders' *de facto* triumph shows how new resources of political power produced an early victory for economic practicality and how the political liberalism of the late seventeenth century produced a prototypical economic liberalism that would not be rationalized until the late eighteenth century.⁴⁵

Debates about the management of the transatlantic slave trade also remind scholars that the full-scale British slave trade began as well as ended with a flood of pamphlets and an army of lobbyists. Examining the political debates about slave trade escalation shows to what extent, in late Stuart Britain, the trade relied on and nourished the blood supply of Britain's body politic as well as how far the explicit and considered desire to escalate and abolish the trade permeated the British Atlantic world. Political reforms after 1688 proved as important to slave trade escalation as those in 1832 were to slave emancipation.⁴⁶ By the time the slave trade was abolished in 1807, members of Parliament congratulated themselves on their disinterested benevolence, which represented the antithesis of the political economy of interest that had been, a century earlier, critical to the expansion and escalation of the slave trade. During the course of the eighteenth century, freedom acquired economic and humanitarian meanings in addition to its seventeenth-century political definition. All became determinants of modernity. Yet

⁴⁵ Keirn, "Monopoly, Economic Thought," 445. Compare with Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, N.J., 1978).

⁴⁶ For the argument that the Great Reform Act of 1832 improved the chances of slave emancipation, see Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 200.

their asynchronous evolution did much, with hindsight, to complicate freedom's associations with political liberty.