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# The Challenges of Liberal Ideas, Revolution and Social Crisis: Correlates in Supporting the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

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**Abstract:** The slave trade was arguably one of the most unfortunate things that ever happened to black Africa and a dent on the moral image of Europe. For over five hundred years, this inglorious trade persisted and Africa served as the supply source and the Americas the last point of disembarkation. It profited Europe more than any other venture at the time, and impoverished Africa more than any other singular phenomenon. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain found it expedient to abolish the trade in preference for other 'nobler' means of capitalism. Arguments necessitating abolition are rife; spanning both moral and economic flanks. However, there are other neglected angles that were persuasive and may have informed the early actions of the British Crown. One of the arguments appear to be the emerging wave of liberal ideas which of cause ignited the consciousness of the early Americans to the issue of equality and freedom. These ideas were potent in the revolutions in both America and France. The second was the imagined social crisis that the continuation of the trade would have engendered in Britain and her overseas possessions in America, and the spirit of rebellion often demonstrated by the slaves in the colonies. It is also plausible that the rivalry emerging in Europe at the time was another silent factor in facilitating abolition. The paper intends to critically examine these factors as necessitating the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade beyond the orthodox arguments of morality and humanitarianism.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Liberal, Ideas, Revolution, Abolition, Trans-Atlantic

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## 1. Introduction

The institution of slavery as heinous as it was is traced back to antiquity. Slaves had existed in the societies of antiquity in the forms of daily labourers, house keepers in the services of nobles and courtiers in the courts of kings and princes. The splendour of the great empires of the past, were attended as a result of massive exploitation of slave labour in both agricultural and construction works. The mines through which the precious stones and germs used in beautifying their palaces were firmly worked by slaves. Thus the industry and tenacity of the slaves made the beauty of these empires. The origin of the slave trade from Black Africa to the outside world is reputed to have begun with the trade across the Sahara to the Mediterranean world, and this had been defined to include the whole of the Muslim world north of the Sahara. The main factors supporting the demand for slaves, included

the need for affluent members of the society to have servants in their homes, the need for slave services in the military infrastructure of these societies and finally high demand for labour in agricultural and mining enterprises. By the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese and the Spaniards had emerged as sea faring powers in Europe through their oceanic voyages leading to the conquest and establishment of colonies in the Americas. [15]

These American colonies became future resource base for exploitation of natural resources which in due course required renewed labour supply. It is instructive to note that even before the said exploration and conquest of the new world by the Spanish Conquistadores, the Portuguese explorers particularly Antam Goncalvez, had sailed to the rocky coast of Africa by 1441 to capture sea lions. In one of his voyages, he brought some captives from Africa to exhibit at the court of Prince Henry the Navigator. Putatively, it was

this exhibition that excited the curiosity of other explorers of Portugal, and in 1443, Nuno Tristao; one of Goncalves's men went to Africa and captured twenty-nine blacks whom he took back to Portugal. Consequently, the door to slave trade business opened and the Berbers began making trips inland to buy slaves in exchange for horses, Spanish silk, silver and other items [14]. What started initially as mere adventurism, crystallized eventually into major economic activity of the profiteering nations of Europe that engaged in the awful trade. In the beginning, the Portuguese slave trade business in Africa was a royal concession and continued in that fashion for about fifty years before that monopoly was broken by the intervention of other European states. By 1471, the Portuguese were already constructing Elmina Castle on the Gold Coast, and had established good relations with Queen Nzinga Nkuwa the Manikongo, who is reputed to be the first Congolese monarch to have embraced Lusitanian Catholicism. The monarch had at some point written Pope Leo X denouncing the evils of the slave trade on her kingdom [19].

The discovery in 1493 of the "New World" and the subsequent brutal conquest of the native population by Christopher Columbus was to be an important marker in the history of the transatlantic slave trade. The conquered 'red Indians' were put to severe hardship in the mines and plantations which occasioned high mortality on the population, leading to the back and forth movement of Bartholomew de las Casas to Spain on behalf of the Indians. It was his pleas before King Charles V in 1517 for the substitution of Indian labour that warranted the granting of the *Asientos*, a sort of contract to the beneficiary which permitted the importation of up to 4,000 African slaves annually into the Spanish

Colonies of the Americas [14]. This license caused the massive importation of African slaves into the Spanish colonies. By 1500, Portugal had established herself in Brazil and using their coastal settlements in West Africa, they massively imported African slaves into the mining camps so much so that the Crown had to decree on the number of slaves to be imported annually at two hundred. Even this quota which also varied from Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Bahia and Minas Gerais, could not be sustained as slave dealers often broke the law, leading to the eventual abolition of the quota system [4]. As a result, the transatlantic slave trade continued unabated for over four hundred years.

The demographic impact of the Trans Atlantic slave trade on Africa remains enormous notwithstanding that scholarship on the number of slaves involved has not been harmonized. Curtin looking at the shipment of slaves into Spanish America throughout the period of the trade came up with the figure of 1, 552, 000. For Brazil he figured out that about 3 [7], 646, 800 [20] is an acceptable figure for the duration of the trade. His calculation based on region and country gave different figures stretching throughout the period of the trade. Inikori in his study thinks that Curtin's figure underestimated the figures between 40 and 60% [15], and if Curtin's figure is raised by 40%, it will give a total figure of 13, 392,000 as the

figures actually received in the Americas and about 15, 400,000 exported from Africa by way of the Atlantic trade. [15] In a research conducted after those of Curtin, Inikori and Leslie B. Rout. Jr, Douglas Chambers relying on the strength of the Du Bois CD-ROM database suggests that about 11.6 million people are estimated to have been shipped from Africa to the New World between 1470 and 1860 [5]. David Eltis has advanced scholarship further by even drawing attention on the regions where slaves were exported and their points of disembarkation in the new world. With this, it becomes easy to know the number of slaves exported during the period from each area as well as identifying slaves exported based on their ethnic or regional origins [9]. The population losses occasioned by the transatlantic slave trade on Africa as well as the far-reaching consequences on Africa's development remain a sad chapter in Africa's history. These sources on the number of slaves exported from Africa south of the Sahara during the period certainly are speculative and are by no means the exact number. Bearing in mind that millions of Africans were carted away, tens of thousands died in the process of procurement, shipment and in service, and these figures remained unaccounted for. But whether there is a consensus on the actual number, makes no meaning and cannot remake the context in which that phenomenon occurred or mitigate its consequences on the history and civilization of the continent.

The slaves as bondmen experienced varied and debasing limitations that vitiated their beings, and therefore resorted to armed struggle and rebellion to frustrate the continued success of that industry earlier in time before the thought on abolition became official. As an incomparable phenomenon in human civilization, its fall outs challenged both the political, moral and spiritual foundations of European civilization, leading to its eventual abolition. Literatures are however replete with reasons for the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, but the main thrust of this chapter is to examine the factors of liberal ideas, revolution and social crisis as silent forces that supported the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by the profiteering nations of Europe, thus ending a norm that had immensely profited Europe and impoverished Africa for over four hundred years.

## 2. The Abolition of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade

In the history of the world, the Atlantic slave trade represents the greatest involuntary migration of people of African descent in a scale unknown in human history. Not only was the migration of demographic importance to Africa and the Americas, it was also at the core of an economic system in which Africa supplied the labour and Europe the entrepreneurial expertise, North America the food and transport, and South America the precious metals and other raw materials [20]. Slavery has been said to be more than solely a means of controlling the labour of others, it was one of mans most important institutions [17]; however the advent

of technology in Europe and the quest for wealth and empire by the leading European nations then, radically changed both the understanding, pattern and dimensions of that institution. A major offshoot of this involuntary migration and enslavement of Africans, was the birth of the African Diaspora in the Atlantic world [16]. The long duration of the trade and the horrors experienced by the bondsmen in servitude constantly left them palpitating in anticipation of freedom. The freedom granted the slaves by their masters varied in the Americas, and this ranged from manumission to *coartacion*; but with great difficulty to attend and did not in any way mean the end of that inglorious institution. The ultimate challenge faced by the so-called 'civilized' world and the profiteering nations in that inhuman enterprise was its abolition and the reintegration of former slaves into the society as free persons and on the basis of equality and dignity.

The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade took a gradual effort before it could be accomplished, even though that illegal slavery continued well into the twentieth century. Abolition was not so-to-say spontaneous, or easy to be effected; each European country involved in the trade responded to it at different times. For instance after the historic 1807 British abolition, freedom was to come to all the slaves in all the British colonies overseas through Acts of Emancipation promulgated in 1833. From this, it is evident that twenty six years had to lapse before the implementation of abolition in British colonies overseas-though the illicit trade continued in many kingdoms and chiefdoms in Africa with the support of local chieftains and the collaboration of European merchants who could not abandon the alluring business. One example of this collaboration was between the Niger Delta Chiefs who were supported by both the Portuguese, French, and Dutch traders who did not want to halt the trade when the British Empire did, and instead their ships filled the British vacancy [2]. Slavery and slave trading continued well into the 1840s in the West African coastal regions as attested to by the the British Governor of Fernando Po, Col. Nicolls, who commented in 1834 during his residence there that he had tried relentlessly to persuade Duke Ephraim [18], the leading figure in Old Calabar to stop selling slaves [18], but to no avail. The French on their own part accomplished abolition of slave trading in their colonies in 1848, the Danes in 1848, the Dutch in 1863, the Spanish in 1873 (Puerto Rico) and 1886 (Cuba) and two years later (1888) Brazil followed suit, thereby ending that system of oppression and exploitation that had plagued Latin America since the first colonies were established in the New World [20]. The historical discipline is laden with plethora of literature on slavery and abolition; at the same time too, historians appear to be split between two camps on the necessitating factors that paved the way for the eventual abolition of the slave trade. A compilation of papers emerging from the 1965 History Seminar in Edinburgh University which dealt exclusively on *The Transatlantic Slave Trade from West Africa* had in their different ramifications discussed slavery and abolition. Unfortunately

in the twentieth century, the attention of scholars became divided between two opposing schools of thought on the exact reasons for the abolition of the trade.

Thus the humanitarian and the economic schools of thought on the reasons for the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade emerged. The first school-the humanitarian school, named after Reginald Coupland who was a Beit Professor of Colonial History at Oxford had in its camp a vast array of British historians who believed like Coupland did [6], that it was British humanitarianism that necessitated the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Coupland as a conservative intellectual had every reason to advance views favourable to the British Crown, and no wonder his classical expository captioned *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, advanced the humanitarian interpretation for the abolition of the trade in humans. J. D Fage, writing the introduction to the book says "At the heart of this humanitarian imperialism lay the movement for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery that had begun with Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson and was to reach its height with Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton" [11]. Coupland's publication enjoyed uninterrupted acclamation in the historical promenade the British audience and even in the press. But what appeared to have disquieted the Coupland circle was the writing of Professor Macmillan in the British *The New Statesman*. Macmillan wondered if compared with economic motives for imperial expansion, the humanitarian motive was anything so strong as Coupland would have his readers believe. [11] It was this sudden salvo fired by an eminent historian who ordinarily was thought to share the same sentiments with Coupland that gradually opened up the fallacies and inherent contradictions in Coupland's work to the shock and disappointment of his apologists. The timely appearance of Eric Williams', *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944 radically changed the contours of the argument on abolition [27]. The book came at a time no expository work challenging the Coupland's thesis was available, thus opening an interesting vista on the neglected dimensions of the trade which the apologists of humanitarianism had not bothered to query. Williams, by upholding the socio-economic interpretation established a second school of thought on the subject thereby constituting a major challenge to the Coupland school and hence to the old accepted views on the abolition of slavery. [1] The book set out in clear and logical sequences, x-rayed the economic situation occasioned by the nose-dive in the sugar economy of the Caribbean islands which had served as the economic base of British merchants and in general England, and argued that because of the dwindling profitability of sugar and the loss of American colonies, Britain began to seriously rethink her plantation pursuit in the Americas. In a nut-shell, his argument was that mercantile capitalism had a persuasive effect in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade more than the often alluded humanitarianism.

Eric Williams' arguments elicited diverse reactions from the historical circle especially from those who had queued behind Coupland. Though in their various reactions to

counter Williams' position, they often adopted what Asiegbu called the "hit and run" approach with only taking issues with specific points [1], while still dodging the major questions raised by the thesis, namely the determinism as to the dominant factor in official minds at Whitehall who had the final say over national policy. He noted that every critic of *Capitalism and Slavery* had new points here and there to concede. Like Roger Anstey who agrees that the decline of mercantilism made action against slavery and the slave trade more possible.<sup>1</sup> Hargreaves also conceded the position of Williams when he noted that between 1783 and 1807 commercial expansion and American independence had changed the British economy to such an extent to permit action against slavery.<sup>2</sup> The arguments of Eric Williams appear stronger in the light of the subsisting circumstances before the eventual British decision to abolish slavery and the slave trade. The decline in the profits emanating from the sugar industry of the Caribbean Islands upon which the British Crown had drawn unimaginable fortune made her begin to think seriously on the development of alternatives and substitutes-in this regard the idea of looking toward the east for trade came to the fore. Also the rebellion and successful independence of her North American colony almost within the same period of the economic decline of the Caribbean plantations. The two developments combined, affected the decision of the British crown. To wit, it was not totally the British humanitarianism that motivated Whitehall's choice of action; behind that façade lay other factors.

The process that eventually culminated in the shattering of the bastion of slavery started arguably in 1765, when Granville Sharp the progenitor of the humanitarian crusade, encountered a battered Negro, one Jonathan Strong in his brother's surgery in Mincing Lane. Strong's master one David Lisle had brutally battered him that he almost became blind and was thrown into the street to die. Sharp took him to hospital, got him treated and eventually found him a job. Sharp left and forgot about that ugly scenario. But after two years, the criminal Lisle saw Strong on the way, having recovered fully, recaptured and sold him out to a Jamaican planter called James Kerr. Sharp was at it again when he got wind of the development. He with the help of James his brother intervened and made a case before the Lord Mayor, who in freeing Strong held "that no person slave or free, could rightfully be imprisoned if no offences were alleged against him." [11] This victory though with legal colouration, was to set the long running battle between the slave owners in England and a mere busy-body- Granville Sharp. In consolidating his position and determination to fight against the institution of slavery in England, Sharp could not have avoided the intellectual rigour such exercise imposed. Thus it can be said without equivocation that what nourished the pursuit of Sharp at the on set to fight the great fight was his

resoluteness in exhuming the liberal ideas embedded by liberal jurists and intellectuals in the laws of England. This is an obvious fact which most historians have always neglected to mention, though his humanitarian nature was in issue; but what concretized that was his discerning ability and commitment arising from the need to prove his case against his adversaries.

Because of the devastating effect of Sharp's action on Lisle, he instituted a law suit in damages to the tune of £200 against Sharp, but looking at the subsisting state of affairs in England then, Sharp's lawyer advised him not to fight the case but rather to settle it out of court on the best terms he could and leave the "Negro to his fate." He did not concede that advice but rather believed that the laws of England were not as 'injurious to natural rights as so many lawyers for political reasons had been pleased to assert.' Consequently for two years, Sharp devoted his attention to the law books, which resulted in a memorandum, he gleaned from Holt's judgment supported same with an exposition of the principles of villeinage and the common law. The intractability of the matter led Lisle and Kerr to back out of the damage suit and were fined treble costs for dropping it. This intellectual feat emboldened Sharp, and the memorandum was published under the title: *The Injustice and dangerous Tendency of tolerating Slavery in England* published in 1769. [11] Chief Justice Mansfield had read Sharp's Memorandum, and felt that it was going to put the state of the law in jeopardy if followed accordingly because of the possibility of reversing legal opinions including his own by a layman. After wavering for a while over admitting the position of Sharp with respect to the true state of the law, Mansfield was eventually trapped by the Somerset case in 1772. The case was victory for Sharp and a defeat to the slave holders; it also laid the foundation for the eventual end of slavery in England and much later in the entire British Empire.

A very important point to be stressed and understood is that almost all of the abolitionists in England and those who spoke against slavery in America were people with liberal spirits, who were no doubt influenced by contact with religious, intellectual and liberal publications of the day in which slavery had been demonized. The religious appetite of the realm was deepening especially with the rise of the Evangelical Movement from 1774. One of the leading figures in the movement, John Wesley, had published *Thoughts of Slavery*, which not only attacked the institution of slavery but also called for its end. Added to this was Robertson's *History of America*, which described the growth of American slavery [11], as well as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which denounced the folly and injustice which had first directed the project of establishing colonies in the New World. Slavery had engendered unhealthy monopoly, and Smith derided that system as the key stone of the colonial arch, on the ground that it restricted the productive power of England as well as the colonies [23]. No less important was the work of Thomas Paine captioned *African Slavery in America*, in which he had berated the institution of slavery in America. Records have it that it was this work that set the stage for the formation of the

1 Roger Anstey, *Critique of Capitalism and Slavery*, quoted in J.U. J. Asiegbu, *Slavery and the Politics of Abolition*, xv.

2 J. D. Hargreaves, 'Synopsis of A Critique of Eric Williams' Capitalism and Slavery', quoted in J. U. J. Asiegbu, *Slavery and the Politics of Abolition*, xv.

first anti-slavery society in America. Though generally in Europe, the era of *Enlightenment*, had produced a number of notable intellectuals whose liberal ideas concerning justice, liberty and freedom had spread like fire against monarchical absolutism. Fortunately, too, people read and believed these authors, whom they had seen as champions against absolutism. It was to this class of liberal philosophers that Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Jean Jacques Rousseau belonged. The latter's influence cannot be ignored, especially upon the great Jacobin leader Robespierre, who during the French Revolution, tried to put his teachings into practice [10]. The shifts in intellectual and liberal climate of Europe from the 1760s no doubt echoed a unique mood that radically altered the mood and perceptions of events in the world.

The liberal ideas in Europe quickly found its way across to America and with the translation into English of the *Abbe Raynal's Histoire des deux Indes*, as well as other pamphlets, which contained an account of slavery and the slave system; many educated Englishmen became more aware of the injustice of slavery and thus averse to it. Also Quakers like Anthony Benezet was seriously active in denouncing slavery through series of pamphlets he published. [11] Another Quaker John Woolman had argued in his papers that a person's colour must not be a factor in the determination of his or her rights [29]. He maintained that the goodness manifested by our gracious creator toward the various species in the world is clearly in our frame and constitution that innocent men, capable of managing themselves, were not intended by the creator to be slaves. To him, "the colour of a man avails nothing in the matters of right and equity" [30]. Amidst all, what appeared to have rocked the British slave institution was the separation of the thirteen American colonies. This loss compelled British statesmen to review the British agenda for the future and even strengthened the abolitionists in their quest to end slavery in the British Empire. Eric Williams believed that the American Revolution destroyed the mercantile system and discredited the old regime, and that the independence was the first stage to the decline of the sugar colonies. [23] The separation of the American colonies led the British Prime Minister Pitt, in 1783 to begin to take abnormal interest in the East. In 1787, William Wilberforce was encouraged by Pitt to sponsor the proposal for the abolition of slave trade. [23] Thus the situation on ground helped to catalyze the efforts of the abolitionists; even the Quakers, through their writings conscientised the public as much as Wilberforce and his cohorts did when they delivered a deadly blow eventually through Abolition Bill that the die-hards in parliament could no longer defeat. The abolitionists though faced severe constraints with respect to getting through parliament the abolition bill; they however continued to spread the awareness on the evils of slavery through publications and circulation of propaganda pamphlets. In these pamphlets, they urged their sympathizers to boycott slave-grown produce in favour of the free-grown produce of India. This propaganda was also recommended by the abolitionist committee in 1795 and by many pamphleteers in England,

for example, William Fox in 1792 informed the British people that in every pound of sugar consumed that two ounces of human flesh was in it. Through a mathematical calculation, it was estimated that if a family using five pounds of sugar a week abstained for twenty one months, one Negro would have been spared enslavement and murder. [23] Mention must also be made of the influence of the French Revolution which was also a product of the same liberal ideas of the eighteenth century. The principles of the "Right of Man" had shaped the American Revolution, it was also proclaimed in the French Declaration [21], and it became a moral weapon against slavery and the anti-abolitionists in the British parliament.

Prior to the American Revolution, some blacks had agitated for their freedom, and in doing that, relied on the writings of revolutionaries like Alexander Hamilton, who had argued that even the British Constitution itself guaranteed their rights to liberty and self-government. For him, "*The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments and musty records. They are written as with sun-beam ...by the hand of divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by any mortal power.*" Some blacks did rely on this argument in America to sue for their freedom and won. Caesar Hendrick for instance was one of those blacks, and between 1773 and 1779, there were several such "freedom suits" in New England, and in each case the Negro bringing the suit won [29]. Of interest too are the works of a few African ex-slaves in England during the period. These are the poems of Phyllis Wheatley which appeared in 1773, Ignatius Sancho's collection of letters in 1782, and Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery*, which appeared in 1787, and Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, written by himself*, which appeared in 1789 [8]. These works in one way or the other touched on the conscience of the English public. For example, Cugoano's own was a direct critic and attack on the evils of slavery; in it he had called on the British government to send her fleet into the sea to fight the slave trade business. While Equiano's book was about himself and his experiences in servitude; he too, was an astute exponent against slavery and had worked with Granville Sharp in the abolition course. These liberal publications circulated in England and were read by the English public whose hearts and conscience were already pricked by the evils of the slave trade which had profited exceedingly the British Crown and the mercantile class. For instance, Equiano traveled through Britain selling copies of his book and making speeches against slavery. In 1789, he visited Birmingham and, in 1790, he visited Manchester, Sheffield and Nottingham. On Christmas day 1791, he was in Belfast, and visited Durham and Hull in 1792, and went to the West of England, at bath and Devizes, in 1793.<sup>3</sup> The anti-slavery activities of Equiano were obvious in England though history and historians have not given him an adequate place in the annals of abolition.

3 Paul Edwards, (ed.), *Equiano's Travels*, xiii.

Having lived through the horrors of slavery, and having been also influenced by Christian ideas he too became an abolitionist. In 1789, he submitted a letter to Lord Hawkesbury, the then Secretary of state, which was eventually included in the evidence published by the Committee Investigating Trade with Africa. He said "As the illicit Traffic of slaves is to be taken into the consideration of the British legislature, I have taken the liberty of sending you the following sentiments, which have met the approbation of many intelligent and commercial gentlemen." He argued that the abolition of the diabolical slavery will give a most rapid and permanent extension to manufactures, and that it would be more profitable for British businessmen to treat Africans as customers rather than as merchandise [13]. He was also part of the Sierra Leone settlement project, only that he did not eventually make it back to Africa. By and large, liberal ideas were contributory factors in the abolition of slave trade. The abolitionists themselves were deeply influenced by same, and through that their intellectual horizon broadened in their vigorous pursuit to earn the abolition of a shameful commerce that had brought disaster to humanity.

The American War of independence was no doubt a blow to the institution of monarchical autocracy. The inhabitants of the thirteen original colonies of America were concerned primarily with the idea of the triumph of liberty in the face of tyranny and domination. Tocqueville observed that at the foundation of America, the social condition was eminently democratic, and that great equality existed among the immigrants who settled on the shores of New England to the extent that even the germs of aristocracy were never planted in that part of the union [26]. Unfortunately, slavery was almost introduced in the colonies soon after establishment. The overbearing tyranny of the English monarch could not be consoled any longer by the leaders of American colonies, since it contravened the principles of freedom and liberty which they held so high and which some of the patriots asserted that the British Constitution itself guaranteed their rights to liberty and self-government. These principles run clear in the words of the declaration independence thus: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...*" [24] At the beginning of the American revolution, there were about two and half million people in the colonies, and about half a million were black slaves. The war was fought in the name of liberty, and many blacks were already in bondage and therefore determined to fight since the revolution was the only hope for freedom. It is on record that Thomas Jefferson, a patriot and a southerner who was deeply troubled over slavery, made a sudden attempt to settle the question when he wrote the declaration of independence. The original version of the Declaration contained a portion that condemned slavery, and among the grievances against the King of England was that he forced slavery on the 'unwilling' Americans. Jefferson wrote that King George III "*...determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold he has prostituted his*

*negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to...restrain this execrable commerce...*" [24] The impression Jefferson wanted to create was that southerners were against slavery, but the southern colonists and those who had dealings in the industry protested against that segment of the Declaration that it was struck out before the final draft was concluded. Unfortunately after the revolution had ended and American independence won, the issue of slavery in America remained unresolved not until the settlement in the slave compromise. As it were, the intellectual fire-brands in the revolution, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison wrote *The Federalist*, a collection of essays in an effort to enlist support for the adoption of the Constitution. Thus, *The Federalist* No. 54, says:

The Federal Constitution therefore, decides with great propriety on the case of our slaves, when it views them in the mixt character of persons and property. This is in fact their true character; it is the character bestowed on them by the laws under which they live; and it will not be denied that these are the proper criterion [24].

Obviously, this declaration worsened the fate of the slaves in America, and accounted for the continuation of slavery in the south which was only brought to an end through a very costly and bloody Civil War.

America's successful war of independence fired the first salvo against an age-old institution which had profited the empire immensely. Not only that Britain lost the American colonies and the tax coming from slave holders, the war which French mercenaries had come to fight on the side of the revolutionaries, brought into question again Anglo-French rivalry. Apart from that, the war had an impact on the outlook of Frenchmen; those Frenchmen who were sent to fight along side the Americans against Britain, returned home convinced that "No taxation without representation" was a principle worth fighting for. They also saw no reason why they should continue to endure the greater tyrannies and injustices of their own king and government. [10] Thus the French revolution which swept away the decadent monarchy was fertilized by the American experience. This sense of freedom and liberty had also agitated the slaves in the Americas, and frustrations arising out of their existence had always been expressed in revolts and insurrection against their colonial overlords. The news of America's war of independence had spread across the Americas, and the revolutionary zeal of the bondsmen was fired by that. Though prior to the American Revolution, slave insurrection and rebellion had occurred in different parts of the colonies. Beginning from 1660s, it was not uncommon for slaves to rebel. For instance in the eastern counties of Virginia, where the Negroes were rapidly outnumbering the whites, suffered from repeated scares in 1687, 1709, 1710, 1722, 1723, and 1730. Also between 1712 and 1741, serious slave insurrection disturbed the peace of New York [28]. South Carolina in 1738 was also engulfed in slave rebellion [12], which frightened the slave holders to the extent that the South Carolina Assembly petitioned the King in 1740 over their plight. After the revolution and the continued

enslavement of Africans in America, slave rebellion intensified in brutal forms. The insurrections of Gabriel in 1800 and that of Nat Turner in 1831 attained national notoriety. The scenario did not change much in America before the outbreak of the Civil War.

In the Americas, the major pre-nineteenth-century form of overt resistance was running away with a view to establishing maroon communities. Also active rebellion was rife all through the history of slavery in the Americas, and during the nineteenth century, it superseded flight as a common form of slave resistance. In the colony of Brazil for instance where slaves working in the mines and plantations saw the worst form of inhuman treatment, “runaway communities flourished in the entire Bahia” [22]. Mention must also be made of the numerous *quilombos* set up by runaway slaves where slaves tried to recreate an African society in the Americas. These though were pre-nineteenth-century phenomena, but they had deep impact on white slave-holders mind set and formed the basis for periodic rebellion of the bondsmen in the Americas. Thus it can be argued that the spirit of slave rebellion prompting the setting up of *Palmares* in Brazil by runaway slaves as well as the *Palenques* in Mexico continued into the nineteenth century and shaped the future of that institution. A major slave rebellion aimed at complete independence in the model of America occurred in Haiti between 1791 and 1804. Here, slaves under the able and patriotic leadership of Toussaint Louverture and his fighters rebelled against the French. Both the French and even the British, made strenuous efforts to put down the uprising, it was finally brought to a successful conclusion by Dessalines, the African-born slave in 1804 [25]. This was a great feat to be achieved against the whites, and served as not only a warning to the slavers and their imperial overlords but also as a source of encouragement to the bondsmen. Though the quest for freedom through rebellion had been pursued at various times by the slaves in the Americas with the intention of setting up autonomous enclaves, it was only the Haitian rebellion that aimed at the complete independence of the entire slave community of the area from European slavery. For the French, the Dutch, the English, Spain and Portugal, the American Revolution and the success of the Haitian revolution sent a signal that deserved not to be ignored. The American successful war of independence and the progressively declining profitability of “slave” sugar of Cuba served as warning to Britain on what could become her fate overseas. Thus the idea of abolition which made little sense to her prior to these developments slowly began to be conceived as feasible to enable diversification into commerce and the development consumer markets where European commerce would thrive. The signing of the act of emancipation in 1833 could not have been for any other better reason. Therefore the two successful rebellions that of American and Haiti, as well as the fall outs from them, clearly facilitated the abolition of the slave trade. It must also be mentioned at this juncture that in Africa, slaves were rebelling incessantly against their captors and some of these rebellions also affected the market. For

instance in 1776, an English Captain, Peleg Clarke, described how slaves aboard his vessel in Accra rose up in rebellion. There was also a record of how Captain William Potter of the ship, *Perfect*, a Liverpool slaver had completed purchase of 300 slaves and was preparing to sail to Charleston, South Carolina, when members of the community in River Gambia who had witnessed the sale rose up and killed all the crew [3]. There were many such cases of rebellion while still in African shorelines and much of these were not recorded by the slavers. As rebellion and slave revolts occurred in the Americas so also did it occur in Africa and the European merchants became apprehensive of the future prospect and continuity of the commerce, whose profitability significantly dwindled upon any revolt particularly on board mid waters or after conclusion of sale on shore.

One other factor which historians have tended to ignore as having worked up Britain in her eventual succumb to the pressure of the abolitionists, though silent was a social one. At the time Sharp was undertaking his cases against those who wanted to hold slaves in England, there were slaves who had become manumitted in the Americas and had found their way back to Britain, where they were free but destitute. Also those slaves whom the agents of the King had convinced on their freedom if they fought on the side of the King of England during the American rebellion; some had returned to England alongside British soldiers and sailors. For instance a total of 4,000 Blacks left with the British from Savannah before the Americans could stop them. Six thousand blacks sailed away from New York on British vessels, and 4,000 were carried off from Charleston, South Carolina. These Blacks were taken to different places- Halifax, Nassau, and Europe where they started a new life as free men and women. [24] These slaves wherever they were, whether free or not, still carried the badge of stigma on them. In England they wandered about the streets, distressing the kind-hearted and alarming the timorous and the men of property. [1] Their plight helped in rousing anti-slavery movement in England; because the English society would not countenance that type of scenario, for as yet there were no provisions to accommodate them in the larger British society. The abolitionists quickly came to their aid by supporting them via voluntary contributions. Within a space of time, Sharp and other of his associates set up what was called “The Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor”, through which they distributed food daily to these destitutes in public houses they had founded at Paddington and Mile End Green. The Committee initiated an idea of getting a settlement somewhere in Africa where these blacks could be resettled. When the proposal gestated, the British government, long anxious to rid the streets of London of these ex-slave beggars quickly supported the funding of this resettlement scheme. This marked the beginning of what eventually became Sierra Leone Colony. No doubt, the presence of the ex-slaves in London aroused the conscience of the British public to fight the continuing slave trade to avert the possibility of having a society that would struggle to contend the menace of destitution, and to

ensure that as many as that were free and beggarly were resettled outside England. Because of the perceived social crisis which the continuing slave trade would have on England and her dominions, the idea of abolition slowly gained the attention of not only the government but the parliamentarians though with sheer reluctance. It can be argued that England which at a time was leading in the business did not encourage the settlement of freed blacks in the realm because of the “nuisance” factor of such presence and the racial problem it could generate for the future. Having free blacks in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century who were free but really not integrated on the basis of equality both in the society and job place had the potential of generating social tension between the dominant class and the less privileged ex-slaves; so to obviate this situation which was brooding, abolition and support of resettlement scheme back to Africa, became the best option. Of importance too was the danger posed by the industrial revolution and the emergence of the cotton gin and other technological advancements in the factories which had the obvious potentials of limiting slave manual labour and making slaves redundant and the business less profitable. The envisioned social crisis the continued trade in slaves could cause was within the community of factors that lent voice to the abolitionist cause and in fact silently contributed to the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

### 3. Conclusion

The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade was an act that eventually ended a heinous business which Morgan Godwyn, termed “a cruelty capable of no palliation”. [11] It was a trade that left Africa shattered and created the Diaspora in its wake. Scholars have no doubt expended intellectual energy and generated monumental controversies over the real and compelling reasons behind the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. The broad dimensions in which these scholars pitched their arguments were humanitarianism and mercantile capitalism. In these discourses, attentions were not duly paid to other salient issues that may have worked to encourage the abolition. As much as it is not in doubt that the two lines of the argument as represented by the historical line of divide-that is the Coupland’s and the Williams’ schools, were more persuasive, there are however other factors that silently contributed their quota in the process of abolition and those are the arguments this chapter has tried to present. Added to the idea of British humanitarianism and that of mercantile capitalism are the forces of liberal ideas, revolution and social crisis as essential correlates in supporting the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. It is the intention of this chapter to encourage and provoke more scholarship in this direction so far espoused so that through that, a new line of thought could be opened on the supporting reasons for the eventual end of an age-long norm that had debased humanity, destroyed a people and a continent, while profiting Europe.

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