Ending the Slave Trade and Slavery in the British Empire: An Explanatory Case Study Utilizing Qualitative Methodology and Stratification and Class Theories

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Abstract
Since 1833, slavery in the British Empire was outlawed due to cultural, social and economic reasons. The Slave Trade Act of 1807 passed the British Parliament and created the first step towards social, cultural and economic equality in the British Empire. Although slavery was not abolished until 26 years later, the United Kingdom was far more socially progressed than most countries in the world, including the United States which did not make valuable post-Civil War steps toward equality until the 1960s. The Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed by Evangelical English Protestants and Quakers in 1878. Twenty years later, in 1807, the committee had sizable support in the British Parliament. The Slave Trade Act abolished the slave trade in the British Empire, but it did not outlaw slavery itself. It was confirmed in 1771 with Sommersett v. Stuart. Lord Mansfield, a judge in the King’s Bench Court of England, ordered that James Sommersett, a slave, be released from bondage, as well as the 14,000 slaves who lived in England. Applying the Stratification and Class Theories, the slave trade and the eventual abolition of slavery in the British Empire is qualitatively examined using an explanatory case study method. Using facts and statistics from primary and secondary sources through the application of document analysis and expert interview techniques, this paper tests the hypothesis that the social, cultural and, most importantly, economic atmosphere in the British Empire led to the abolition of the slave trade and the eventual abolition of slavery. This hypothesis is found to be valid based on the delineated findings.

Keywords: Stratification and Class Theories, slavery, United Kingdom

1. Introduction
The history of slavery is chronicled before the Common Era and significantly prior to the common understanding of slavery in the North and Central Americas. Pre-historic studies analyze the duality between rival tribal groups and the enslavement of opposing social groups. The modern notion of enslaving people of color—not simply those of African descent—emerged during European Imperialism and exploration of the Americas and the Asian continent. Of the chief European exploratory nations, the United Kingdom fostered enslavement and subservient lifestyles across the globe. Through their intercontinental empire an extensive network of master-slave relationships set the stage for global economic activity. By 1100 A.D. slavery was accepted as an economically beneficial practice. War goods disregarded in England were loaded onto ships and taken to Africa and exchanged for slaves with African tribal leaders. The slave trade in Britain became so lucrative that annually over 50,000 slaves from Africa were packed on to ships and brought to the British Isles.

Britain became an international trading post for slaves. Those that were brought from the African continent were either sold into slavery on the Isle, or they were traded for goods with other European countries. Most British citizens did not known what happened to slaves after they were sold to large plantations and those who has established plantations in the West Indies created organizations that stood to oppose the abolition of slavery.
The fight to end slavery in the United Kingdom began with the Evangelical English Protestants and English Quakers. In 1787, the Society of Friends, established by Quakers, was created as an antislavery organization—the first of its kind. After many years of success and failure, trials and tribulations, open disagreements and discrimination the slave trade in Great Britain and all of Britain’s subsidiary colonies was abolished in 1833.

2. Literature Review

Documentation regarding the slave trade throughout the British Empire is quite scarce in the world of academia (1977). One can attribute it to the early—earlier than the United States—recognition that slavery, as an institution, should be outlawed. Others attribute the scarcity of information to a shameful past of human mutilation and humiliation on behalf of Europeans (2003). Although a wide variety of information is difficult to uncover, the few reliable sources that address the issue provide for detailed and expansive analyses of the global slave trade on behalf of the British Empire (1997).

Marjie Bloy, Ph.D. chronicles the “Anti-Slavery Campaign” on The Victorian editorial website. According to Dr. Bloy, who begins the description of the slave trade with general accounts of packed slaves in the bowels of trade ships, ending this international, economically beneficial and justified practice was very difficult (2010). It is documented that in 1787 a committee of twelve Quakers established the first anti-slavery movement. The committee, which included six members of The Society of Friends, worked to, “publish such information as may tend to the abolition of the slave trade” (1999). The committee looked to shed light on the horrors of the slave trade through pamphlets and other means of printed material that proved to stir public sentiment against the slave trade (1837).

Leaders of the committee, Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp, detailed the deplorable living conditions experienced by slaves as the traveled hundreds of miles in the bottom of the slave ships. These detailed accounts, alone, began to sway the British public about the necessities of slavery as an institution (2010). Quakers, barred from participating in the political arena in Britain until 1828 relied on the Evangelical leader William Wilberforce to voice their concerns to Parliament. The war with France in 1793 created an atmosphere where the anti-slavery movement became a topic of patriotism. With this newly established anti-slavery social movement and the continued efforts by Wilberforce, through proposing legislation, 1807 saw the slave trade in British colonies abolished. Also, it became illegal for slaves to be carried on cargo ships. This was an important step towards the committee’s ultimate goal of abolishing slavery altogether.

In 1815, European leaders condemned the slave trade practice, but, as a testament to the lack of support for anti-slavery activists and to the close ties slavery had to the economic structure throughout Europe, little was done to alleviate the harsh conditions under which slaves lived. Fifteen years of pressing Parliament by Wilberforce and a slew of reforms that swept the nation led to a final rebuttal of the practice of slavery. In 1830 Parliament passed the Abolition of Slavery Act (1985). Those who continued to participate in the slave trade were fined £100 (1995). Some of the main provisions of the act included: all slaves under the age of six were to be freed immediately, slaves over the age of six were to remain as part slave and part free for a further four years. In that time they would have to be paid a wage for the work they did in the quarter of the week when they were "free," and the government was to provide £20 million in compensation to the slave-owners who had lost their "property."

Many attribute the end of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, more-so, to a moral obligation to lead the world (1995). Since it was not economically sound to eliminate the main form of labor throughout the empire, abolishing slavery set a precedent for the international community.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The theories used as guides for this study are the Stratification and Class Theories. The Stratification Theory, created by German sociologist Max Weber, as a three tier theory: class, status, and party. Each element is utilized to analyze the relationship between the various class groups within society and how those groups impact cultural exchange, values, and economic activity. This theory is useful because we are able to adequately study the relationship between slave and master and how that relationship led to the establishment of anti-slavery groups. It analyzes the duality between the slave trade, the economic aspects that support the slave trade, and the moral obligation to end the slave trade in the British Empire.
The second theory that is used as a guide for this study is the Class Theory. Developed by Karl Marx, this theory analyzes the relationship between the various classes within society. This theory is instrumental in this study, because it analyzes the duality between the class occupied by the Quakers and the class occupied by those members of Parliament who opposed the abolition of slavery. It is also important in analyzing the relationship between master and slave.

4. Data Analysis

As shown in the documents below, the abolition of slavery is detailed. Figure 1 is an image of The Abolition of Slavery Act, British Parliament. This document ended the slave trade and practice throughout the British Empire. Wilberforce in conjunction with the Quaker community worked tirelessly for this document to pass Parliament and in 1833, it finally did.

Figure 1: Image of The Abolition of Slavery Act, British Parliament, 1833.

Figure 2 is a portrait entitled “Heroes of the Slave Trade Abolition.” It highlights Zachary Macaulay, Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce, Thomas Fowell Buxton, and Thomas Clarkson. It is located in the National Portrait Gallery in London.
Figure 2: Portrait entitled “Heroes of the Slave Trade Abolition.

Figure 3 is an image of a sign that stand in front of The Society of Friends Church. This is the church that began the anti-slavery campaign in the British Empire. The Quaker community spearheaded the movement that became an international craze.

4.1. Expert Interviews

To gain a better understanding of the current atmosphere in Great Britain and the relationship between minorities and the majority two dual citizens of the United States and Great Britain were interviewed in a phone interview.
Questions were asked about whether, or not, relations were of quality between the various classes in society and races. The main questions that were asked are as follows: (1) From your schooling in Great Britain, is the history of slavery in the British Empire taught in school? (2) What do you think about the history of slavery in Great Britain in comparison to the history of slavery in the United States? (3) Can you speak about the race relations in Great Britain, today, and how those relations are tied to the history of slavery within the country? Subsequent questions were asked as follow ups.

The first interview was conducted with my neighbor. She was very receptive of the idea of the conversation. She spoke candidly about how relations between races and classes were much better than when she was coming of age. She also indicated that the abolition of slavery early in the history of the British Empire played a key role in how relations are between races. The second interview began during the first and was conducted with my neighbors husband. He added to the conversation by indicating that they came to the United States and noticed a significant difference in the relations among races. He noted that the gradual end of slavery in America and the subsequent fight for Civil Rights by African Americans attributes to much of the negative relations in the United States today.

The interviews were relatively short, but they provided for a first hand perspective as to how the abolition of slavery in the British Empire translates into more positive relations between races in Britain today. The interviews also provided an interesting comparison between the United States gradual abolition of slavery and the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

5. Conclusion

The research conducted in this inquiry led to the extensive conclusion that highlighted the duality between the end of the slave trade and the, eventual, abolition of slavery and modern day relations between classes and races in Britain. It also provided a minimal analysis between race relations in Britain and race relations in the United States.

The work that was done by William Wilberforce in support of the Quaker movement and subsequent antislavery committee led to the abolition of slavery in the worlds largest empire. It created the first steps for equal footing for the minorities within the British Empire, thus establishing an international precedent that will soon lead to the abolition of slavery in various other countries including the United States of America. Through the expert interviews I was able to delve into the modern day sentiments regarding race in the United Kingdom.

6. References

3. British Parliamentary Papers, session 1837-38 (215), volume XLVIII. The manuscript returns and indexes to the claims are held by The National Archives.