# Slavery and British Industrialisation: The ‘New History Of Capitalism’ and Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*

I

Historians know that slavery was an important part of the eighteenth-century British Empire. They have wondered about its influence on the economic development of Britain, especially upon Britain’s transition, first in the world, to a highly developed industrial economy in the late eighteenth century. The historian who gave the most compelling answer to this question was the Trinidad scholar, and later Prime Minister, Eric Williams. Williams wrote a hugely influential book in 1944, *Capitalism and Slavery*, which suggested that the link between West Indian slavery and British industrialisation was real and substantial.[[1]](#footnote-1) Williams never made an argument that slavery “caused” the Industrial Revolution, but he suggested, as Barbara Solow was later to note, that it “played an active role in its pattern and timing.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Anyone interested in the relationship between the growth of slavery in the early modern Americas, especially the British Caribbean, and the origins of the Industrial Revolution, is well aware of the Williams’ thesis and its galvanising effect on scholarship. The Williams’ thesis (or, rather, his several overlapping theses about West Indian growth and decline) attracted an avalanche of scholarship among historians of the British West Indies, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. That outpouring of scholarship settled into a general consensus that Williams’ arguments were more provocative than persuasive.[[3]](#footnote-3) David Eltis and Stanley Engerman produced an important article in 2000 which provided a lucid refutation of the more dramatic claims made by Williams, notably that Britain would not have been able to industrialize without slavery. They also cast doubt on Williams’ assertion that slave-produced sugar was more important than any other British product in the build-up to industrialization.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Recently, however, support for the Williams’ thesis has had a fresh lease on life as a result of a historiographical movement among United States historians of the Early Republic and antebellum periods with the self-penned title of the New History of Capitalism. One sign of how prominent the movement has become is that it recently was the subject of a lengthy conversation in one of the most important journals in American history.[[5]](#footnote-5) The proponents of this movement take as apodictic the central role slavery played in creating modern capitalism.[[6]](#footnote-6) Indeed, slavery is capitalism’s “beating heart.” They trumpet the novelty of their view– one claim being that “for too long historians saw no problem in the opposition between capitalism and slavery.” They argue that historians before themselves depicted the history of American capitalism as developing without slavery– although the more careful cheerleaders for the New History of Capitalism movement have admitted that discussions of slavery and capitalism are not new.[[7]](#footnote-7) Their claims are sweeping, highly polemical and rooted in present day politics, seeking to wrest away the study of capitalism from economic historians, who, they argue, “naturalise” the subject and thus minimise its negative consequences, especially for poorer people. Though they are reluctant to define what capitalism is,[[8]](#footnote-8) they stand opposed to capitalism as a positive force and see it, much as Williams did, as a cause of much of the unhappiness in the world.

They set their face in particular against the many interpretations of the origins of the Industrial Revolution that see it as a product of bourgeois virtues, unexplained Enlightenment or the happy coincidences of a Glorious Revolution in 1688 which guaranteed private property. This reading of their work is implied rather than stated, as they largely ignore the extensive literature on bourgeois dignity and on the institutional consequences of the Glorious Revolution. It seems clear, however, that their approach is opposed to culturally based interpretations explaining Britain’s precocious industrialization and that they support interpretations of capitalism in Britain and in the United States that emphasise how economic growth was fostered by the formation, integration and enhancement of the financial capacities of states geared for commercial activities.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The proponents of the New History of Capitalism are unabashed fans of the Williams’ thesis and wish to extend its insights backward and especially forward in time. Seth Rockman, for example, argues that while the Williams’ thesis can be criticized as an explanation for British economic growth, his “famous juxtaposition of slavery and capitalism still warrants consideration for the United States.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Unlike Williams, however, the advocates of this new movement concentrate on the nineteenth rather than the eighteenth century. They argue that in that century slavery “was at the core of the American economy” and was inextricable from the development of modern industry in the United States. They emphasise cotton – “king cotton” as southerners falsely believed when contemplating secession in 1861– as key to establishing the United States in the global economy, creating markets not just for southern but also for northern agriculture. But, like Williams, they argue that accumulated profits from slavery had a lasting impact on a range of industries, “re-animating profits in other sectors of the global economy.” And, like Williams, its proponents make extravagant claims for the global impact of New World plantations based on enslaved persons’ labour. Slavery, it is contended, was central to the emergence of modern capitalism and integral to the Industrial Revolution. As a result of slavery, it is claimed, Europe “was able to escape the constraints on its own resources” developing “innovations in long distance trade, investment of capital over long distances and the institutions in which this new form of capitalist globalization were embedded.” These were all derived, it is suggested “from a global trade dominated by slave labor and colonial expansion.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

That money derived from West Indian slavery, and even more so profits accumulated from slave-based labour in the antebellum South, influenced how factories developed and thrived in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution is a fundamental theme. This essay will look once again at the relationship between slavery and capitalism, especially in the development of British industry in the second half of the eighteenth century, in the light of new assertions of a revised and enhanced Williams’ thesis. It will concentrate on the wide-ranging and very influential book by Harvard historian, Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (2014), which is to date the major achievement of this new historical movement.

Beckert extends Williams’ argument backwards in time through his invention of a new form of economic organisation, which he calls “war capitalism” (defined as “slavery, the expropriation of indigenous peoples, imperial expansion, armed trade, and the assertion of sovereignty over people and land by entrepreneurs at its core.”)[[12]](#footnote-12) Williams’ concern was mostly with the British West Indies, not the United States of America. He thought the American Revolution an event that marked the end of a mercantile capitalism favourable to planters and the start of an industrial capitalism where planters, at least in the British West Indies, became expendable. By contrast, Beckert largely ignores the American Revolution. He contends, moreover, that War Capitalism was not supplanted by industrial capitalism but that several forms of capitalism coexisted until well after the end of the American Civil war. He argues that there was a seamless shift from the dominance of West Indian planters in the production of cotton to the rapid growth of cotton planting in the United States in the nineteenth century. The United States brought War Capitalism and industrial capitalism together but such coexistence did not work elsewhere in the world in the late nineteenth century. In an echo of Williams’ argument that slavery started mercantile capitalism but that industrial capitalism killed it, Beckert argues that after War Capitalism had created the modern world, including industrial capitalism, European colonialism in the second half of the nineteenth century prevented places outside Western Europe and the United States from making the next step towards industrialization. Thus, “colonialism allowed industrial capitalism in some parts of the world while making it less likely elsewhere.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Does this argument breathe new life into the Williams’ thesis?

II

Eric Williams based his arguments from his understanding that the slave trade was highly profitable and that the British West Indies was central to Britain’s mercantile economy between the Restoration and the American Revolution. The British West Indian plantation system reached its eighteenth century height around the time of the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War. It did so just at the time that Britain was in the early stages of an explosive growth in industrial innovation, including the development of a distinctive factory system, heralding the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. The British American plantation system involved badly exploited workers, overwhelmingly enslaved persons of African descent, producing tropical goods, like sugar, cotton and tobacco, for European markets. The number of slaves involved was considerable – around 555,000 in 1750, of whom 295,000 lived in the British Caribbean and 247,000 in British North America. Plantation profits reached an all-time peak during the Seven Years’ War, averaging 13.5 percent return on capital. Profits still averaged around 9 percent between the Peace of Paris and the start of the American Revolution. Profits from the slave trade were less, below 10 percent, but they were still healthy, given that returns on government bonds were 3-3.5 percent and returns from agricultural land was between 4 and 6 percent.[[14]](#footnote-14) This impressive economic performance encouraged Williams to argue that slavery contributed to the remarkable economic transformation that propelled Britain to the industrial leadership of the world beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Indeed, his argument was stronger than just that historians had not realised that the British West Indies was a vital part of empire in the eighteenth century before the start of the American Revolution. He argued, first, that slavery was key to the Industrial Revolution in so far as “the profits obtained [from slavery] provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital which financed the Industrial Revolution.”[[15]](#footnote-15) In addition, he argued that wealth derived from slavery was important to the social, cultural and political fabric of eighteenth-century Britain.[[16]](#footnote-16) Third, he insisted that the West Indian slave-economy went into decline from 1783, possibly as early as 1763. Here, he was repeating an argument made by the pioneering American scholar of the British West Indian economy, Lowell Ragatz, the man to whom Williams dedicated his book.[[17]](#footnote-17) Finally, he argued that West Indian planters changed from being progressive forces within mercantilism to becoming a reactionary and backward looking group, opposed to industrial capitalism and increasingly abandoned by industrialists as protectionists and economic misfits with no place in modern Britain. In a famous formulation, he contended that West Indian planters provided the material basis which allowed industrialisation to occur but were then cruelly abandoned by an industrialising British state which no longer had any need for them. In short, “the capitalists had first encouraged West Indian slavery and then helped to destroy it.” Indeed, “When British capitalism found the West Indian monopoly a nuisance, they destroyed West Indian slavery,” despite having “ignored or defended” slavery when “British capitalism depended upon the West Indies.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

One of his subsidiary aims was to attack the imperial school of British historians who had taught him at Oxford in the 1930s. He disliked them for their ethnocentric celebration of abolitionists as altruistic humanitarians. He argued instead that abolitionism was based on more base economic motivations. Another aim was to contribute to a developing “Third World scholarship” of nationalistic anti-colonialism, with a West Indian audience more in mind than a European or American one.[[19]](#footnote-19) A more pressing imperative, however, was to counter the assumptions made by Adam Smith that the West Indies was less a source of wealth than a drain on British resources with the large capital outlays of Britain put into plantation agriculture in the country being a major misallocation of funds. Smith argued that the “overflowing” of capital from Britain to the colonies showed that the empire concentrated in the West Indies was “a project which has cost, which continues to cost, and which, if it is pursued in the same way as it has been hitherto, is likely to cost immense expence, without being likely to bring in any profit.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

For Smith, the problem was one of monopoly profits and the excessive protectionism demanded by West Indian planters for their products within the British Market.[[21]](#footnote-21) Williams denied that money flowed mainly from Britain to the colonies as Smith suggested but he accepted that Smith was an important figure in pushing British politicians, influenced by the new class of British industrialists, away from a protectionist mercantilist regime towards free trade and away from slavery in favour of wage labour. Williams argued that Smith was “the intellectual champion of the industrial middle-class and the major proponent of the idea that slavery was more expensive than free labor,” thus treating, Williams believed, what “is a specific question of time, place, labor and soil” as “an abstract proposition.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Williams’ book was thus as much an argument about political economy as about economic history: he wanted to connect the decline of the West Indies after 1783 to new ideas about free trade and industrial capitalism and to the discarding of policies of mercantilism in which West Indian planters had heavily invested.

Williams overestimated Smith’s influence in policy making in the late eighteenth century. He saw the move from mercantilism to industrial capitalism as a compressed process when in fact free trade did not become a serious feature of British political life until after the abolition of slavery in 1834. But Williams made an important point that West Indian prosperity rested very much upon vested interests in Britain, including colonial merchants, slave traders and the unreformed House of Commons. Those vested interests, he argued, could not maintain West Indians’ privileged economic position after the end of the American Revolution. British consumers were increasingly unwilling to support special interests advocating for protection when new industries created by Britain’s technological prowess looked less for protection from competition than access to new export markets.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The part of the Williams’ thesis that has stood up least well to empirical investigation is his assertion that the West Indies were in economic decline after the end of the American Revolution, leading to a diminishment of planters’ political power in Britain at the same time as the power of industrial capitalists was growing and as British imperial policy turned eastward to focus upon India. Historians no longer see such a “move to the east” in British imperial policy after 1783. The British Empire in the Americas remained central to imperial policy and to the imperial imagination until at least the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and probably for some time after.[[24]](#footnote-24) It was vital to imperial geopolitics, especially during the long Napoleonic Wars and during the conflagration of the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s and 1800s.[[25]](#footnote-25) In addition, the British made several new acquisitions in the southern Caribbean and South America as a result of war between it and France and the Netherlands.

Britain had good reason to covet Caribbean territory. The West Indies, despite a small economic dip during the American Revolution, remained a highly profitable part of the empire at least until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.[[26]](#footnote-26) Indeed, some of Britain’s new acquisitions, notably Trinidad and what became British Guiana, formed a new frontier of high plantation profits for the first thirty years of the nineteenth century.[[27]](#footnote-27) The profitability of the plantations did not decline, despite Williams’ predictions, after the end of the American Revolution. The abolition of the slave trade, as Seymour Drescher argued in a famous intervention against a major plank of the Williams’ thesis, was not in the economic interests of Britain but was a variation of “econocide.” This abolition occurred in a period when planters were usually making good money from slavery. The one exception to this general tale of plantation prosperity from around 1790 is a short-term period of economic difficulty around 1805-7 which had, David Ryden tells us, a significant effect on the politics leading directly to the abolition of the slave trade.[[28]](#footnote-28)

III

Sven Beckert’s prize-winning global history of cotton presents a version of the Williams’ thesis that is stronger than anything Eric Williams considered. It has been a highly praised book, garnering the sort of laudatory reviews most authors can only dream about. The argument evades easy synopsis as it is a grand undertaking that covers a large range of topics and many countries, although it is decidedly United States-centric. Even critics acknowledge that his account of the global history of cotton is highly readable, engaging and a comprehensive book. Most commentators have been more generous than this in their judgements. For Eric Foner, it is “global history as it should be written.” For Thomas Bender it is “masterly” and an “astonishing achievement.”[[29]](#footnote-29) At the very least, it is the book that is setting the pace in the New History of Capitalism movement. It also makes the Caribbean pivotal to the making of the modern world and reinvigorates the Williams’ thesis in a remarkable way.

The Williams’ thesis is central to how Beckert conceptualises the development of War Capitalism and its eventual morphing, as he sees it, into industrial capitalism. He believes that the plantation system created there provided the necessary institutional innovation allowing for what he calls “the re-creation of the countryside through bodily coercion, something only possible under war capitalism” Cotton grown by slaves in the Caribbean “motivated and financed the unprecedented incorporation of newly depopulated territories into the world economy,” Beckert asserts. The results of such cotton production “created the expansive, and elastic, global cotton supply network necessary for the Industrial Revolution, and with it the mechanisms through which the needs and rhythms of industrial life in Europe could be transferred to the global countryside.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Beckert is drawing here on Marx’s famous dictum that “slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

One problem with this argument about the importance of the Caribbean to British industrialization is that Beckert is not a good guide to the Caribbean. For example, he argues that due to an ant invasion and hurricanes Barbados’s traditional crop, sugar, had been “decimated” by the 1770s. The result, he argues, is that Barbados was “transformed essentially into a huge cotton plantation.” Caribbean historians will raise their eyebrows at this suggestion. Certainly, cotton production increased greatly in Barbados during the 1780s, peaking in the years after the 1780 hurricane and after peace with America had been declared. Nevertheless, sugar always remained king in Barbados during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, employing 49.5 of all slaves in 1834 as compared to 5.8 percent in “cotton and other agriculture.”[[32]](#footnote-32) A more serious error is Beckert’s treatment of Samuel Greg, an early cotton industrialist and the owner of Quarry Bank Mill, a pioneering cotton factory established in 1784 with a “few newfangled spinning machines, so-called water frames, a collection of orphaned children, putting-out workers from surrounding villages, and a supply of Caribbean cotton.” Beckert emphasizes that what Greg did in developing a machine to process cotton was because he was a slave owner, in Dominica, who got cotton from merchant relatives in Liverpool and used the finished product to clothe his own slaves. “From this local spark,” Beckert claims grandly, “industrial capitalism would emerge and eventually spread its wings across the globe. From this local spark, the world as most of us know it emerged.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The one problem with this soaring rhetoric is that Samuel Greg was not, in fact, a Caribbean planter when he established his cotton manufacturing mill. It was his uncles who owned a slave-run plantation in Dominica called Hillsborough, which Samuel only took control of as sole proprietor in 1819 following the death of his aunt, who had a life interest in the property from 1795.[[34]](#footnote-34) Thus, Greg was not, as Beckert claims, sending his manufactured cotton to dress his own slaves in Dominica. Given the crucial role Beckert assigns Greg as a revolutionary shaping the future, this otherwise small error takes on large significance.

Where the Caribbean is really important to Beckert is that it was where Christopher Columbus landed in 1492, thus setting off a chain of unfortunate developments that led to War Capitalism and the rise of Europe and the United States to a global dominance they have yet to relinquish. Beckert’s use of “war capitalism” to describe what was behind a long process of change in the cotton industry is both precise and also vague, with little attention paid to its theoretical roots. In a book that is replete with footnotes and generous about other scholars’ influence, it is noticeable that in the theoretical sections of the book dealing with War Capitalism Beckert does not footnote the works to which he is intellectually indebted.[[35]](#footnote-35)

War Capitalism is a form of economic organization intimately tied to the series of transformations of the Americas unleashed in the aftermath of the Columbian Encounter and what Beckert calls “the recreation of the world.”[[36]](#footnote-36) His central tenet is that after Columbus “Europeans united the power of capital and the power of the state to forge, often violently, a global production context.” Europeans, who were the active agents in the process of the recreation of the world, developed “new ways of organizing production, trade and consumption” through slavery, land expropriation and imperial expansion. These processes were rooted in violence and “flourished not in the factory but in the field,” with the victims Native Americans and Africans. He argues that War Capitalism lasted from the sixteenth century until well into the nineteenth century and was based “not on free labor but on slavery.” It involved a bifurcation of the world into an “inside” Europe in which rules of law operated and where “state enforced order ruled.” By contrast, in “outside” and colonized parts of the world “frontier capitalists” could act with impunity, even when behaving criminally, such as when they engaged in large-scale theft of land and resources, when they involved themselves in the decimation of indigenous peoples, and when they employed the untrammeled use of violence in order to exert dominance over less fortunate people.

Slavery was the emblematic institution of this War Capitalism. It remained so, even as War Capitalism mutated into “a new different form of integration of labor, raw materials, markets and capital in huge swaths of the world.” The “true importance of Caribbean planters,” he argues, was not the cotton (or sugar) that they grew “but the institutional innovation that the Caribbean experiment produced.” That innovation involved “the recreation of the countryside through bodily coercion, something only possible under war capitalism.”[[37]](#footnote-37) There are several problems with this definition of War Capitalism. The main problems are in large part due to its origin in World Systems theory rather than the more expansive and more naturally global perspective of capitalism and material life devised by Fernand Braudel. Braudel treated the whole world as if it was a matter of course, evoking global history as a series of encounters between different “world-economies” where a world-economy was economically autonomous and self-sufficient entity whose connections and internal exchanges gave it a certain organic unity. Each world-economy, by interacting with other world-economies (as in the Indian Ocean World with Western Europe) might then produce further integration or frictional conflict, in a remarkably open-ended way with no outcome necessarily historically inevitable.[[38]](#footnote-38) Such a model does not assume a priori the triumph of one part of the world over another.

By contrast, Beckert’s adoption of Wallerstein’s model of global change has a teleological orientation common in all World-Systems approaches to world history. It assumes that modern capitalism is the work of active European agents over passive non-Europeans in ever widening spaces. Europe and neo-Europes, such as the United States, are core regions while other parts are peripheries.[[39]](#footnote-39) The Western European economy from the fifteenth century onwards is dynamic and ever changing and was dominated by a powerful merchant class, supported by European military power. Beckert’s formulation gives a great deal of weight to the ability of Europeans to shape and direct the rest of the world through their manipulation of various institutions and sometimes, it seems, by willpower alone. Europe acts; the rest of the world reacts. It is only the West, for example, that develops any form of War Capitalism and only the West that engages in slavery, land expropriation and imperial expansion. It might be that such a rise of Europe and North America is to be lamented rather than praised but that Europe and America were the centres of action for War Capitalism is in little doubt. War Capitalism as a theory thus shares the same problem of Wallerstein’s work which, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam notes, “represents the apogee of an unapologetically Eurocentric world history, which is dismissive of the dynamic potential of most non-European societies, whose fate seems to be to await more or less their formal conquest or informal ‘incorporation’ by European agents.” These non-European societies seem to be assimilated into “a sort of historic slumber of homeostasis from which only contact with Europe will awaken them.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

War Capitalism as defined here is thus an overstatement that undermines an otherwise commendable insistence that European overseas expansion was crucial to European and especially British economic development. The work of a host of economic historians, notably Patrick O’Brien, Nuala Zahedieh and Kenneth Pomeranz, have shown that “the acquisition of new lands in America dramatically raised Britain’s productive capacity; it unleashed its potential for extensive growth.”[[41]](#footnote-41) But none of these historians go as far as Beckert in arguing that it was slavery and the plantation system that alone created capitalism.

IV

The numbers are too small to make the conclusions that the proponents of the New History of Capitalism movement want to make, at least for the early modern period. Atlantic trade made up only a small percentage of European gross national product, even in Britain, where the Atlantic trade was largest and most dynamic. The relatively small size of overseas trade before the late eighteenth century means that we cannot argue that plantation agriculture was all that decisive in driving economic growth. That proposition remains correct, even if it is acknowledged that Atlantic trade was growing faster than other sectors of the economy, that it was becoming more and more important within the overseas trade sector of the British and possibly the French economy after the Seven Years’ War, and that Atlantic trade encouraged considerable feedback effects and linkages and “invisibles” like shipbuilding, insurance and other international services. Until the late eighteenth century, Atlantic trade was always subsidiary, often very subsidiary, to inter-European trade both for exports and imports. In addition, overseas trade was continually dwarfed by the domestic economy. Foreign commerce was important for the Industrial Revolution but it was nowhere near as important as the New History of Capitalism claim, or as Williams suggested.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Moreover, what money came from colonial trade only sometimes went to the state. The early modern European state – which Beckert describes as central to building War Capitalism in the early modern period– was not the powerful state of the nineteenth century, let alone the twentieth century. Until at least 1815, almost all states were concerned less with profit than with power and with securing the authority of rulers over the ruled when there was few coercive possibilities available to enforce that authority. Their other ambition was to use what money they could raise to pay armed forces to keep their territory safe. One reason why early modern states were so weak and comparatively inefficient is that few had a decent fiscal base to provide the economic capacity to make and enforce political decisions. What fiscal base they had seldom came from overseas trade. Patrick O’Brien – a notable advocate for the importance of colonial trade for the development of the British economy- comments that the “total flow of ‘colonial’ tribute into state coffers “cannot be depicted as important for the construction of productive and viable fiscal systems for the long term growth of metropolitan economies.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Only Portugal and Spain “succeeded in sustaining notable increases to the flow of fiscal resources to support centralizing states by way of conquest, annexations, and colonization” though Spain’s imports of expropriated American silver was expended on religious warfare and debilitating European conflicts that reduced rather than increased its economic potential. In general, it seems that European states received but minimal tax flows from imperialism.[[44]](#footnote-44)

More profits went to individuals, of course, and some of those profits ended up in the hands of the state through excise taxes on colonial “luxuries.” But, as O’Brien argues, states became fiscally powerful not though colonial expropriations but through constructing “fiscal and financial regimes with sufficient powers and organizational capacities to penetrate deeply into local economies for purposes of taxation, and to obtain access through loans and credits to the incomes, wealth, and expenditures of the populations over which they claimed sovereignty.”[[45]](#footnote-45) War Capitalism and the growth of powerful European states went together, as Beckert argues, but not in the way that he suggests. It was not external wars in the Americas but internal wars in Europe that pushed the state, at least in Britain, into greatly enhancing its revenues from taxation.

O’Brien connects the rise of the fiscal state in England (later Britain) with the furnace of conflict in the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. In part the fiscal state arose because England had been expelled from Europe since 1453 and thus had become a semi-independent island-realm relatively uninvolved until the eighteenth century in European power politics. The main factor, O’Brien insists, in why Britain came to be a high-taxing, fiscally powerful state was that the wealthy elites were so devastated by the destruction of the Civil War that they were prepared after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 to support enhanced taxation. They were willing to make a government fiscally powerful in order that this government would pass legislation that secured individual property rights. Thus, England was able to develop a fiscal state in which revenue from taxation was much higher than anywhere else in Europe and in which the burdens on the populace were correspondingly large. As O’Brien notes, it was fortunate that this domestic reconstruction of the state occurred “when England’s domestic economy began to generate the kind of accelerated commercialization, colonization, urban concentration, and proto-industrialization that facilitated the collection of duties on domestic production and imports.”[[46]](#footnote-46) He concludes that “in the wake of Civil War and the restoration of monarchical and aristocratic government, the British state established, promoted, and sustained institutions that turned out to be more promotional for a precocious transition to an industrial market economy than for social welfare or for the maintenance of federal-style fiscal and political constitutions that led to a greater devolution of power and dissipation of rents on the [European] mainland.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

The New History of Capitalism project has another problem that arises from assumptions that Europeans and Americans were the only active players in the transformation of the world through War Capitalism and from an assumption that most of these players were men. It has a problem with women. The heroes, or more precisely the villains, in this story are planters and merchants, both of whom coded male, and supported by the leaders, all male, of European states which were uniquely powerful and able to impose their will on others pretty much as they pleased. There are nods to women but they are just that, nods rather than a true engagement with gender.

Thus, Beckert, in his only references to the commodity often seen as even more central to the Industrial Revolution as cotton – coal – frames it within gender terms. He attributes what he considers the “invisibility” of cotton to accounts of the Industrial Revolution to gender bias. Historians have preferred to concentrate on “male-dominated coal making, iron-making, and railroading industries” rather than cotton where women and children dominated the workforce. Women’s labour, he notes “largely created the cotton of empire.” It was work concentrated, moreover, in the countryside rather than the city and in economically peripheral parts of the world. When historians ignore rural women to focus on urban men and “giant steelworks” they contribute, Beckert implies, to the erasion of “the realities of slavery, expropriation and colonization from the history of capitalism” demonstrating “a craving for a nobler, cleaner capitalism.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Leaving aside the odd suggestion that coal can be thought of as “cleaner” than cotton, this statement ignores the whole debate around coal, initiated in particular by Tony Wrigley, who linked Britain’s fortunate reserves of coal to an argument about how Britain used coal to escape the Malthusian trap of rising population outstripping available food resources. This argument is connected closely to Wrigley’s hugely significant work on British demography, work in which female age at marriage, fertility and mortality rates and women’s work and standard of living were central.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Beckert’s problems with gender are based on how he frames his work. He concentrates on male actors – cotton manufacturers and planters – and when he considers women, thinks of them only as workers. In his book men play the active part (it is them who are denoted as dynamic risk-takers) while women are passive and when workers, often victims.[[50]](#footnote-50) His diminishment of women as active players in cotton may be inadvertent but it is telling. He starts generally each chapter in the book with a vignette, or quotation, from an individual. In twelve of fourteen chapters these initiators of action were men – Christopher Columbus in chapter two and Samuel Greg in chapter three all the way to Ranchodlal Chhotalal in chapter 13 and Martin Luther King in chapter 14. No person is noted in the start of chapter 11 but the illustration chosen to start the chapter is an all-male photo of Indian cotton merchants. In his introduction, under a reprint of a painting by Edward Degas of male cotton merchants in New Orleans in 1873, he starts his book with a story about 68 men who were rather self-satisfied cotton merchants in Manchester. The choice of illustration is typical: many of the illustrations in the book, especially those chosen at the start of chapters depict men. When women are depicted they are shown as nameless workers in mills or as slaves on plantations. The only woman depicted as an individual is Hannah Lightbody, the wife of Samuel Greg and noted as “bringing war capitalism home” in her role as wife and daughter. At least Lightbody is named: the only woman in a set of four illustrations of nineteenth century entrepreneurs in four countries stands besides her husband and is mentioned as “Ludwig Knoop and his wife.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

Compare by contrast how women are depicted in two recent books dealing with cotton and consumption. In Giorgio Riello’s *Cotton*, illustrations of women abound, either spinning or weaving cotton in India, wearing Indian-inspired designs as petty merchants or as enslaved women, or as consumers of cloth in its many forms. Robert Duplessis’ *The Material Atlantic* not only has a handsome portrait of female shoppers in the West Indies on the cover but is focused on women throughout the text. It contains many coloured illustrations of West Indian, Brazilian, Native American, Dutch, Angolan and Haitian women. References to cotton and gender and woolens and gender are constant.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In these books, women are not just passive victims. They are actively involved in shaping the cotton industry as consumers and as arbitrators of fashion. Women played a leading role in fashioning demand for cotton products and for determining how those products should look and feel like. Indeed, Riello shows that one reason for the initial success of Indian cottons in Europe and Africa and then their replacement by European produced goods was strong female preference for certain types of clothing that Indian suppliers over time proved reluctant or unable to provide. It was not just the increased easiness of supply of cotton from America after 1794 which shaped changing global patterns of production. Changes in supply reflected changes in demand. As Riello notes, the integration of markets in the nineteenth century brought about a visual and aesthetic convergence of taste that favored European manufactured goods. As men and especially women adopted European dress and as Europeans proved more adept that Indians in producing fabrics that appealed to local tastes, European manufacturing prospered and Indian manufacturing declined.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Consumption mattered. The New History of Capitalism movement, however, has been focused, mainly because of its fixation with slavery in the American South and with a pattern of globalization which is more about how America integrated with the rest of world than about international economic convergence, on production. New History of Capitalism scholars give little attention to consumption or to taste or fashion and they concentrate overwhelmingly on studying the supply side of the equation rather than looking to demand patterns. This leads these scholars to ignore women as consumers and taste-makers and to consider women mainly as exploited workers or as abused slaves.

Another issue here may be how the practitioners of the New History of Capitalism, a project rooted in the history of the nineteenth antebellum South, see global history. They envision it in a spatially limited way – as the history of America-in-the world rather than the history of the world with the United States as part of it – and also read back from the present to earlier times, thus overstating the extent to which states and individuals were able to exert their will in purposeful ways. Beckert’s book on global cotton is really an American history work (which is why it was awarded the Bancroft Prize in American History). His theme is constant: an investigation over the longue durée of how labour exploitation and state formation worked together to industrialize both agriculture and manufacturing. And his presentist, United States-focused and polemical intentions are also clear. It is argued most baldly at the conclusion of his book. Capitalists, he argues, have created the world today, acting hand-in-hand with a state that serves their interests rather than those of the people. Occasionally workers revolt – “we know,” he states, “that the increasing emancipation of capital from particular nation-states has dramatic consequences for the world’s workers.” But such actions are generally thwarted as “worker’s successes in improving their conditions almost always lead to the reallocation of capital.” And, with the inevitability suggested by a discourse that assumes that capitalism is essentially illiberal, Walmart enters the scene. Beckert tells us how Walmart moves its production from one poor country to another “lured by the promise of workers even more eager and even more inexpensive.” The “empire of cotton,” in its essence, is just a “giant race to the bottom. Limited only by the spatial constraints of the planet.” The polemics are a natural outgrowth of two simplistic notions – that capitalism is morally flawed and that capitalists tend to have evil intentions.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Here is where the problem of insisting that capitalism is the same everywhere and at all times in its essential principles causes a problem. As Barbara Hahn notes in a critical review of Beckert’s book, one question that the practitioners of the New History of Capitalism find difficult to answer, given their theoretical assumptions and adherence to world-systems teleology, is whether there is any alternative to this vague form of capitalism. If War Capitalism and industrial capitalism are the same, only with a more powerful state determined to protect capitalist interests, then after industrialisation was established what can ever change? As Hahn asks, “if capitalism and the modern nation-state developed hand in glove, how did that connection emerge from or oppose the older relationship between guilds and local governments?” She believes that “`capitalism’ is not an entirely satisfactory answer” especially in regard to explaining how slavery embodies capitalism even as it draws on old hierarchies and structures (a question, of course, crucial to Marxist analyses). Is the alternative socialism? If so, how would this make things better, given what we know of the patchy history of socialist experiments? There is a decided feel of old-fashioned social history about Beckert’s approach: before the arrival of the Europeans, everything was better and people lived in happy communities where they controlled their own labour and persons. As Hahn states there is a romantic and nostalgic view to pre-capitalist behaviour. It is noticeable, for example, that Beckert’s opening chapter starting with cotton growing in Aztec Mexico is singular in not mentioning violence. Violence, it seems, only arrived with Columbus and Cortes,[[55]](#footnote-55)

Moreover, the process Beckert describes seems inevitable, bound to happen in the way that it in fact happened. Williams does much the same thing, not stopping to engage in counterfactuals which might complicate a relatively simple story. It was never inevitable either that Europe (which knew little about cotton before it began to manufacture it) would become dominant in this product’s production and consumption or else that only cotton would have led to industrialization in its particular British manifestation. The end result would have been different, and perhaps less satisfying for Britain, but neither sugar nor cotton needed to be among the raw materials that Britain needed for industrialization. Britain could have industrialized using woolens (exploiting Australia’s great possibilities for sheep) or through linen (assuming that Russia produced enough flax to make the process worthwhile).[[56]](#footnote-56) We need to be careful not to assume that the patterns of plantation development and British industrialization that developed in the eighteenth century had to develop that way. Riello is right to emphasize that there was no one factor that explains Europe’s comparative economic advantage over other parts of the world by the nineteenth century. Rather, he suggests that Europe’s economic path after ca. 1750 was the result of a ‘layering’ of different factors and circumstances, some of which were peculiar to Europe, some of which came from the Americas and some of which arose from trial and error over many years. These factors produced synergies and catalyzed change. But these changes did not lead to predetermined results. The Industrial Revolution did not have to happen in the way that it did. Certainly, one can imagine ways that it could have developed without slavery being essential.[[57]](#footnote-57)

VI

What is especially curious about the agenda of the New History of Capitalism movement is that it depends on war in general for its interpretative position but ignores wars in particular when describing historical causality.[[58]](#footnote-58) This criticism is the sort of criticism that a “splitter” gives to a “lumper” but is worth indulging in anyway. If War Capitalism is to have any real interpretative power, then it should be connected to particular wars as a means of showing that violence and war-making were indeed fundamental elements in what connected Europe, specifically Britain, to slavery and the plantation system in British America and the United States (the French Empire is neglected in Beckert’s book, except for the cataclysm of the Haitian Revolution).

The omission of individual wars is unfortunate because war is central to how slavery in British America and in the United States evolved.[[59]](#footnote-59) The transition to African slavery occurred first in Barbados during the British Civil Wars in the mid-seventeenth century. The Nine Years’ War and the War of the Spanish Succession around the turn of the eighteenth century solidified support for slavery and consolidated the essential features of mercantilism which lasted until the American Revolution. Wars between Britain, Spain and France from 1739 to 1763, including the Seven Years’ War which was the first major war between European powers fought largely in the Americas, arose out of imperial competition for an Atlantic trade in which slavery was essential. All of these wars are important in respect to the Williams’ thesis, especially the Nine Years’ War. This war supports a moderate version of the Williams’ thesis in demonstrating that Williams was right in pinpointing overseas trade based on plantation slavery as essential to the development of the financial revolution. That revolution, in turn, played an important role in consolidating the major features of the emerging fiscal-military state that underpinned the remarkable growth of plantation agriculture and the British economy in the half century before the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution.[[60]](#footnote-60)

State support for planters, the plantation complex, slavery and the slave trade in Britain and British America was far from constant. There was just one period – from the Glorious Revolution in 1688 until the end of the Seven Years’ War in 1763 – in which Britain supported the planter interest almost without reservation. Williams got absolutely right how much support West Indian planters received from the state in this period. Planters in the West Indies and the American South enjoyed healthy profits, an increasingly effective and efficient slave trade, favorable imperial legislation, and minimal public opposition to slavery.[[61]](#footnote-61) It is important to note, however, that this support was due mainly to the power of the West Indies, which was more to the forefront of imperial attention than was the American South, especially given the strength of the West Indian interest in parliament in the middle of the eighteenth century.[[62]](#footnote-62) We need to remember, also, that the West Indies and the American South belonged to the same polity – the British Empire in the Americas. The plantation interest was thus much more powerful than it was to become in the aftermath of the American Revolution when planters divided between a section that stayed loyal to Britain (a country that from the 1780s had a substantial abolitionist movement) and another section that joined the American North (a region also increasingly hostile to slavery).[[63]](#footnote-63)

State support for the plantation complex was not immediate. In the first half of the seventeenth century, state involvement in the establishment of slavery in English America was minimal. The colonies were a long way away, were economically marginal and the most significant changes, notably in Barbados, occurred during the British Civil Wars in the 1640s and 1650s, when the English and Scottish states imploded and when colonies were largely left to their own devices.[[64]](#footnote-64) The Western Design of 1655, in which Jamaica was conquered from the Spanish, meant that more attention was focused on the value of the plantations to imperial growth.[[65]](#footnote-65) The implementation of the Navigation Acts from 1651 and the creation of a new Royal African Company and a new Committee of Trade and Plantations in 1672 showed that the Crown was intent on making the colonies conform to metropolitan wishes and to pay their own way. The spectacular growth of the West Indian economies in particular and those also of the Chesapeake and Carolina low-country from 1600 to 1700 made that wish more of an imperative.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The British state began to really support the plantation system after William and Mary took power in 1689. Nuala Zahedieh has provided the political economy arguments to support this claim while Richard Dunn has explained the partisan politics. Zahedieh shows that while by 1700 England’s transoceanic trade was not overwhelmingly large, it had a significance greater than its ostensible value. Not only was Atlantic trade growing rapidly, thus making it seem key to developing prosperity, it was essential for new industries, like copper, and for sustaining industries, like shipbuilding, that were vital for British defense. Moreover, it was central in encouraging the financial innovations that we consider essential to what it termed a commercial ‘revolution’ in the period. In short, Zahedieh argues, the endogenous responses to the market opportunities created by imperial expansion led to advances in London’s commercial leadership in Europe, better transport networks, improvements in early manufacturing capacity, and the increase in “useful knowledge” as people acquired mathematical and mechanical skills necessary for complicated trading relationships. Many of the advances were hindered by vested interests diverting capital and enterprise into rent-seeking activities but what the state realized from around 1700 was that the success of the American plantations, especially in the West Indies, showed that mercantilism worked. As Zahedieh concludes, the highly performing plantation trade not only outperformed other sectors, it stimulated “adaptive innovations which took the country to a new plateau of possibilities from which Industrial Revolution was not only possible but increasingly likely.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

Unsurprisingly, such an important trade, in the absence of antislavery sentiment, attracted government support, as Williams insisted. Planters chose the right side in the Glorious Revolution, supporting protests against James II. They proved highly effective in persuading the new government of William and Mary to modify Crown colonial policy in their favour. West Indian planters, the richest men in the colonies, benefited most of all, and got many items of legislation that they wanted during the difficult years of the 1690s, as well as greater military aid. In particular, along with London merchants, they convinced parliament to allow private traders to supplant the Royal African Company, meaning that the volume of the slave trade to the islands immediately doubled. Sugar planters, whose authority had been challenged between 1675 and 1688, were firmly in charge from 1689. They asked William III for reduced Crown taxes, expanded slave imports, better military support, and full protection against foreign slave competition and got most of these requests granted. As Dunn argues, “the revolutionary settlement gave them these things, crystallizing their dependent status.” That dependent status, as Williams rightly discerned, was perfectly satisfactory as long as the parent government let them do as they pleased in the colonies and as long as it protected them within the imperial system.[[68]](#footnote-68)

The result of these multiple changes was that planters had an influence in imperial counsels and the support of the British state in ways that they were never to receive again. In the period between the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714 and the Peace of Paris in 1763, slave colonies in both the West Indies and British North America were nurtured within an empire that gave them ample support through generous land grants, state-sponsored negotiations with Native Americans which provided temporary peace, massive incentives for private trading in the slave trade, and markets for slave-produced products. Britain used its growing naval power to defend colonial slave societies that were especially vulnerable to invasion or to slave rebellion and legitimized hierarchies of local power by accepting local political assemblies. It supported, in particular, the claims by a wealthy planter ruling class that they had the authority and ability to legislate on most things that they wanted to do that did not conflict markedly with imperial policies. That right to legislate included, importantly, the right to make laws on colonial slavery. Britain also facilitated colonial leaders’ access to imperial power brokers and metropolitan merchants and it cultivated a political system that systematically favored colonial commerce. Moreover, it used its state power to validate slavery in the courts at a time when the vast majority of Britons were either comfortable with or indifferent to the system of racial domination that sustained planter rule and enabled plantation wealth.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The Seven Years’ War marked, in retrospect, the peak of planter power within the Empire. It was not fought over plantations but protecting the plantation sector, especially in the British West Indies, was a major factor in the outcome. And in the Peace of Paris, in part at the behest of the West Indian planter elite, the British gave back Guadeloupe to the French in return for getting Canada. Williams was right to say that the Peace of Paris was another victory for the West India interest.[[70]](#footnote-70) He was also right, however, in thinking this a pyrrhic victory. The Seven Years’ War marked a turning point for the plantation colonies. They did not decline economically. West Indian planters continued to make great profits in the West Indies at least until the 1820s and perhaps beyond, though many planters in the American South, especially the Old South, as discussed below, never really recovered from the American Revolution.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Where West Indian planters started to lose out was in that Britons came to realise that West Indian wealth was based upon cruelty towards Africans. The image of the West Indian planter went into decline just as the first stirrings of abolitionism began in the 1760s. And the American Revolution led to a split in the planter class, with West Indians staying loyal and many southern planters opting for rebellion. Those Americans who left the Empire and who wanted the federal state they helped to create a pro-slavery state made the right choice. In contrast, and in part due to the defection of the greatest number of slaveholding whites who had belonged to the eighteenth-century British Empire, by the late eighteenth century and certainly into the nineteenth century Britain was defining itself as an antislavery nation.[[72]](#footnote-72) But their continued ability to persuade a state to protect their interest in slaves and to foster the westward expansion of slavery came at considerable cost. Economic ascendancy increasingly shifted to the North and, as in Britain, a strong abolitionist movement began to develop in that part of America that was increasingly the most economically dynamic, the most culturally powerful and eventually the most politically dominant part of the Union.[[73]](#footnote-73)

VI

Thus, although Williams was insightful about the extent to which American and West Indian planters were supported before the end of the Seven Years’ War, his arguments about later periods become increasingly less convincing. It was in looking at the American Revolution, in particular, where Williams went astray. The American Revolution did not lead to more than a temporary decline in the profitability of West Indian plantations. But Williams was right about the American Revolution being bad for plantation profitability for another part of the British American plantation empire. That region was the American South. Historians are starting to realise that the American Revolution was an economic catastrophe in the American South, especially in lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia.[[74]](#footnote-74) Jeffrey Williamson and Peter Lindert suggest that real income per capita in the British North America generally and in the American South in particular dropped precipitously between 1774 and 1790. They argue that the American Revolution in the Thirteen Colonies was “America’s greatest income slump ever, in percentage terms.” The revolutionary war hit the South especially hard. Its commodity exports fell in real per capita terms by 39.1 percent in the Upper South and 49.7 percent in the Lower South. They conclude that “the South Atlantic underwent a reversal of fortune between 1774 and 1840, dropping from the richest American region to the poorest.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

As Lindert, Williamson and Allan Kulikoff have shown, the predominance of the North in the American economy predated the beginnings of American industrialization and arose from the conflict that Boston initiated but in which the South suffered. In the colonial period, it was the plantation colonies of the American South and even more so the British West Indies that were the centres of wealth in America. In 1774, the richest British American regions were plantation areas. Their economies were based on slavery and their white residents treated their enslaved property with enormous amounts of violence and crass callousness, especially in the West Indies.[[76]](#footnote-76) But these were wealthy places. Southern and West Indian whites were not only the richest people on average in the British Empire but they lived in societies marked by considerable equality within white populations and limited white poverty. Lindert and Williamson, working on data provided by Peter Mancall, Joshua Rosenbloom and Thomas Weiss, claim that virtually no white male household heads in the southern colonies in 1774 were very poor.[[77]](#footnote-77) They show, however, that in the years between 1774 and 1800 the American South endured a prolonged depression, with gross personal income in 1840 prices plummeting from $91.77 in 1774 to $64.46 in 1800. They conclude that the South Atlantic suffered what Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson have termed a “reversal of fortune,” where they went from being the richest to the poorest region in the United States.

The effects of the revolutionary war are probably greater for the South than Lindert and Williamson suggest as their dates do not separate out the decade of the 1790s, when the American economy everywhere in the United States picked up, with the south in particular benefitting from the explosion in cotton production allowed by the invention of the cotton gin in 1794. But between 1776 and 1790, the South suffered huge infrastructural damage. It was also punished by the British in trade policy. Commodity exports fell by a catastrophic 49.7 percent in the Lower South. Per capita income dropped in the United States by 18 percent overall but in the South it probably dropped much further. Kulikoff confirms such speculations and adds more empirical information on how different sectors of the white population of the American South fared from the Revolution. He estimates that the number of white labourers in the South shrank by nearly 25% between 1776 and 1780 as a result of wartime privation. Slaves ran away in large numbers, and to the financial detriment of the planters who owned them. Even if they did not run away, enslaved people proved harder to manage and more unwilling to obey orders. The overall result was that the region’s per capita wealth, exclusive of slaves, declined from 14.5 percent above the national average in 1774 to 36 percent below it in 1799. The South’s share of national wealth dropped in this period from over half to less than a third.[[78]](#footnote-78)

What Williams got right therefore was that the American Revolution caused a crisis in planter prosperity. He just picked the wrong region. It was the American South not the British West Indies that never quite recovered, at least in relative terms to the North. Of course, the South remained wealthy into the nineteenth century. As late as 1860, two-thirds of the wealthiest Americans lived in the South and the nation’s Gross National Product was only 20 percent above the value of southern-owned slave property.[[79]](#footnote-79) Yet the relative decline of the South after the American Revolution, especially if the West Indies is included as part of plantation British America, is palpable. The New History of Capitalism historians tend to focus on the booming cotton frontier of the south-west after 1820, where profits were especially high and planters particularly rich, not just in cotton but also in sugar.[[80]](#footnote-80) But the core tobacco-growing region of Tidewater Virginia and Maryland (where many more southerners lived than in the southwest) suffered enormously after the American Revolution, with endemic poverty and declining plantation profits.[[81]](#footnote-81) Lindert and Williamson suggest that the share of gross total national income held in the South Atlantic dropped from 58 percent in 1774 to 48 percent in 1800, a drop that mirrored a similar drop after the Civil War.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Southerners knew, moreover who was responsible for their relative decline. It was the British. P.J. Marshall tells us that hostility to Britain after 1783 was intense in South Carolina, which had been invaded and had its economy wrecked, and strong in Virginia. In New England, by contrast, opposition to Britain soon declined after the Peace of Paris, despite the pivotal role of Boston in starting the Revolution. And New York, steeped in Anglo-philia, became a bridgehead for British influence.[[83]](#footnote-83) Slaveholders may have held the office of United States president for fifty of the first 72 years of the nation but the balance of power had shifted to the North – and to Britain. Slavery remained profitable in the West Indies and very profitable in the American South, planters continued to make lots of money and there was always a sizeable body of people, especially in the United States, who were favourable to slaveholder concerns. But, as Williams intuited, the real money after the American Revolution was being made elsewhere, and especially in industrial capitalism in places like Lancashire and the American north-east.

And in both Britain and the American North the principal ideological orientation was away from slavery, not in support of it. Before the American Revolution, not only was the South and the West Indies easily the richest part of British America, it also faced virtually no opposition to its commitment to slavery. After the American Revolution, that was no longer the case.[[84]](#footnote-84) The paradox is that, contrary to what Williams thought, the effect on the West Indies of the American Revolution was not economic (the West Indies stayed rich) but was cultural and political (the image of the West Indian planter crashed in the 1780s and never recovered while the political influence of the West Indian lobby slowly declined). The effect of the American Revolution on the American South, especially in its major region of the Chesapeake, was the opposite – economic decline but continued political and cultural power.[[85]](#footnote-85) Eventually, however, the relative economic decline of the South made a difference, leading in 1861 to the election of Abraham Lincoln as President and the ascendancy of the Republican Party, a sectional party of the North tending towards antislavery. Southerners always overestimated the extent of their political power. Where Williams remains influential to Beckert as a guide to the changing fortunes of planters is in his recognition that countervailing forces to planters emerged from time to time. Williams got the motivation of these opponents wrong because as a material determinist he was dubious that altruism and religious conviction played any role in imperial politics. But he did acknowledge that planters faced opposition.

Ione of the ironies of the New History of Capitalism movement is that in their eagerness to reassert the importance of planter wealth and influence globally, they rely uncritically on statements from planters themselves trumpeting their power and overestiomating their capcity to determine politics. The opponents of planters – the people who eventually overcame planter pretensions and forced them to accept the end of slavery – are not given a voice in these histories. Beckert, for example, ignores abolitionism as a growing political movement and discounts, as did Williams, any explanations for abolitionism that suggest it was a movement of moral reform. Thus, Britain “bowed to a century of abolitionist pressure” when it abolished slavery in 1834 and did so largely because manufacturers could still use slave-produced cotton coming from America to obviate any short-term difficulty caused by emancipation. Moreover, any opposition in Britain to “the lords of the lash” from “the lords of the loom” was not based on distaste for how southern planters used their political muscle to degrade enslaved people. Instead, it was derived from a fear that cotton planters were growing too powerful: “raw material producers had to be politically subordinate to the will and direction of industrial capital.” [[86]](#footnote-86)

There is never any hint in the works of the New History of Capitalism movement that ordinary Britons and Americans, black and white, male and especially female, signed petitions against slavery based on their belief that slavery was a sin and a national disgrace. Many white abolitionists were inspired by African-American abolitionists who successfully established a “moral cordon” around the American South. This “antislavery wall” was intended, so Frederick Douglass argued, so that “wherever a slaveholder went, he might be looked down upon as a man-stealing, cradle-robbing, and woman-stripping monster.”[[87]](#footnote-87) Douglass’s message worked. An essential part of British self-definition in the nineteenth century was that it was an antislavery nation.[[88]](#footnote-88) The material advantages brought by cotton outweighed the moral disgust Britons from all walks of life felt against slaveholders.[[89]](#footnote-89)

Southern planters thought that what they did was so important that it was indispensable to Europe’s astonishing material advances in the nineteenth century. South Carolina Senator, James Henry Hammond, on the floor of the Senate in 1858, famously boasted that “England would topple headlong” if slave-produced cotton stopped, meaning that “No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton *is* king.” Yet the American North waged war on slave-produced cotton and it won that war, winning moreover without stopping cotton from being produced in the South, except during the worst years of northern occupation of southern land. The South produced more cotton after the Civil War than before it, and without the benefit of slavery.[[90]](#footnote-90) And Britain never stood by the Confederacy, despite Hammond’s prediction. Bumper cotton crops from just before the war might have lessened the need on American cotton (though the thousands of men left destitute in Manchester as a result of cotton slow-downs in Britain during the Civil War suggests that the pain of ceasing cotton imports from America was not inconsiderable).[[91]](#footnote-91)

But Britain was never going to support a war to defend slavery, having based its national prestige on having abolished slavery in 1834 and having expended large amounts of money on anti-slaving naval activities between 1834 and 1861.[[92]](#footnote-92) Moreover, the signs of what Britain would do if the South went to war against the North had been signaled in another war, entered into by Britain against the United States in 1812 and won decisively two years later. As with the American Revolution, the War of 1812 was not started over the American commitment to plantation slavery. Many of its most important consequences were in the North, not the South. But it originated in a catastrophic miscalculation by Jeffersonian Republicans in 1807-9 that Britain was so reliant on American raw materials like cotton that an embargo on such goods being shipped to Britain would force the greatest imperial power on earth to its knees. Britain merely moved to other markets, causing a major crisis in the American economy. Britain tended to favour America in its trading relationships, partly because it was economically beneficial for it to do so, and partly because, as Lord Palmerston argued, “commercially, no doubt we should gain by having the whole American continent occupied by an active enterprising race like the Anglo-Saxons instead of sleepy Spaniards.”[[93]](#footnote-93) But it was prepared to act against America – as in 1812 and again in 1861 – when national interest, including the national self-definition of Britain as an antislavery nation, was threatened.

This symbiotic commercial connection between Britain and the United States formed a “single, integrated Atlantic economy” in the nineteenth century, one in which the West Indies, as Williams noted, played an increasingly minor role.[[94]](#footnote-94) But the United States was always the subordinate partner in this relationship. And Britain was never worried about pushing its weight around. It was especially unconcerned about protecting the rights of American slaveholders over their enslaved property. Virginians received a huge shock in the War of 1812 when British military officers followed through on the threat by Lord Dunmore in 1775 and encouraged slaves to run away from their plantations and adopted a number of policies intended to harm planters and the institution of slavery.[[95]](#footnote-95)

How the British acted in Virginia in the War of 1812 showed the truth of Williams’ argument that slaveholding interests had been supplanted in the early nineteenth century by more powerful forces who were prepared to cast slaveholders overboard, even if this caused, as it did in Lancashire in the mid-1860s, considerable economic difficulty. It is interesting to speculate here on what Britain might have done in the War of 1812 in regard to protecting the interests of slaveholders if, as in the American Revolution, it had to consider how actions against slavery in North America would alarm slaveholders in the West Indies. It was a sign of West Indian slaveholders’ declining influence after the American Revolution that made Britain unconstrained in how it dealt with slave owners it was in conflict with. Such an interpretation is in line with Williams’ general arguments about West Indian political decline. It contrasts, however, with assumptions that planters in the American South had unparalleled political power in the 1810s through to the 1850s.

VII

So where are we left with the Williams’ thesis after more than 70 years debate? It remains a provocative thesis because it connects major economic change (the Industrial Revolution) to the Age of Revolutions. A new generation of scholars, notably those ascribing to the New History of Capitalism movement, have given the Williams’ thesis a new lease on life, even if, as argued above, their arguments extending Williams’ thesis out of the West Indies and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries into the United States and until at least the middle of the nineteenth century are not convincing. Certainly, their “strong” version of Williams – that slavery was principally responsible for British industrialization and that the growth of capitalism in Europe and America is inexplicable without reference to the role that colonial exploitation played in its rise – is overstated.

Nevertheless, it is a good thing that we are returning to look at Williams’ insistence that slavery, and the Caribbean, mattered to Britain at a critical time in its long history. It reminds us of the trauma of slavery and the open wounds that still remain, especially for people of African-American and African-Caribbean descent. We do not want to return to the times when slavery was invisible in British and American history and where West Indian history (where slavery was always considered important) was relegated to a cul-de-sac of historical inquiry. Even the great Marxist historians celebrated by the New History of Capitalism movement shared this indifference to race, slavery and the Caribbean. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, showed little interest in the work of Eric Williams.[[96]](#footnote-96) Such lack of interest was unfortunate and is no longer defensible today.

But we want to be careful not to redress the absence of slavery in accounts of the past by now overstating its importance. Slavery was important and so too were slave-owners. But their importance needs to be kept in perspective. We don’t want to adopt the attitude of pro-slavery spokesmen for the eighteenth-century West Indian interest or James Henry Hammond for antebellum cotton planters who made insistent claims for themselves and their value to Britain and America. It is not just New History of Capitalism historians and Eric Williams who trumpet how important slavery and slave-owning was to industrial Britain. Edward Long, the historian of Jamaica and a pro-planter voice, argued in 1774 that the sugar colonies were a source of immense wealth and power. After listing how many Britons relied on wealth from the West Indies, he argued that “we may from thence form a competent idea of the prodigious value of our sugar colonies, and a just conception of their immense importance to the grandeur and prosperity of their mother country.”[[97]](#footnote-97) While we should be prepared to rethink our histories of the beginnings of industrial capitalism so that we find more space for enslaved people, we need to remember that our efforts may end up with us sharing space with some uncomfortable bedfellows.

1. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Barbara L. Solow, “Capitalism and Slavery in the Very Long Run,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17 (1987), 732. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Roger Anstey, “Capitalism and Slavery: A Critique,” *Economic History Review* 2d ser. 21 (1968), 307-20 and Stanley L. Engerman, “The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: A Comment on the Williams Thesis,” *Business History Review* 46 (1972), 430-43 for early criticisms. For a defense, see J.E. Inikori, “Market Structure and the Profits of the British Atlantic Trade in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History* 41 (1981), 745-76. A mostly critical set of essay was Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, eds. *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a more positive view, see Heather Cateau and Selwyn H.H. Carrington, eds. *`Capitalism and Slavery’ Fifty Years Later: Eric Eustace Williams – A reassessment of His Work* (New York, 2000). An excellent survey of the historiography on the topic up until 2000 is Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29-35, 47-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, “The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain,” *Journal of Economic History* 60 (2000), 125-27, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See “Interchange: The History of Capitalism,” *Journal of American History* 101 (2014), 503-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sven Beckert, “Slavery and Capitalism,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 12 December 2014; Greg Grandin, “Capitalism and Slavery,” *The Nation*, 1 May 2015; and Seth Rockman and Sven Beckert, “How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism,” *Bloomberg*, 25 January 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Beckert, “Slavery and Capitalism.” See also Seth Rockman, “The Unfree Origins of American Capitalism,” in Cathy Matson, ed. *Capitalism and Econometrics in Early American Economic History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 335-62; idem, “Slavery and Capitalism,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (2012), ;idem, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34 (2014), 439-66 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As Louis Hyman argues, “the essential problem is not to primly define capitalism like a schoolmarm, but to think about why capitalism, which appears to be so simple, evades easy definitions. And in the last decade, there has been a renewed interest among historians in not only challenging existing definitions, but in historicizing that very untidiness.” Hyman, “Why Write the History of Capitalism?” *Symposium*, 8 July 2013. See also Seth Rockman’s comments that “scholars seem willing to let capitalism float as a placeholder while they look for ground-level evidence of a system in operation.” He applauds that the “empirical work of discovery takes precedence over the application of theoretical categories,” justifying this argument by stating that “the turmoil of the current global economy has revealed a system wildly inconsistent with theorized accounts of “pure” capitalism.” Rockman, “Why is Capitalism Noteworthy?” 442. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For institutions, see Douglass C. North and Barry Weingast, “Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing choice in seventeenth-century England,” *Journal of Economic History* 49 (1989), 803-32; Weingast, “Constitutions as governance structures: the political foundations of secure markets,” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 149 (1993), 286-312. For bourgeois dignity, see Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can’t Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For the state as an actor in promoting mercantilism, see Ronald Findlay and Kevin O’Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War and the World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Rockman, “Unfree Origins of American Capitalism,” 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Beckert, “Slavery and Capitalism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 171-2, 239 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 468; J.R. Ward, “The Profitability of Sugar Planting in the British West Indies, 1650-1834,” *Economic History Review*, 31 (1978), and David Richardson, “Profits in the Liverpool Slave Trade: The Accounts of William Davenport, 1757-1784,” in Roger Anstey and P.E.H. Hair, eds., *Liverpool, the Atlantic Slave Trade, and Abolition*. Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Occasional Series, (1976), vol. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For recent work on this area, see Catherine Hall et al, *Legacies of British slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833: A Study of Social and Economic History* (New York, 1928) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 169. For the fate of West Indian planters after the American Revolution, see Christer Petley, ed., “Special Issue: Rethinking the Fall of the Planter Class,” *Atlantic Studies* 9 (2012), 1-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hilary McD. Beckles, “’The Williams Effect’: Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* and the Growth of West Indian Political Economy,” in Solow and Engerman, *British Capitsalism and Caribbean Slavery*, 303-16; W.A. Darity, “Eric Williams and Slavery: A West Indian Viewpoint,” *Callaloo* 20 (1998), 801-16. For a recent appreciation of Williams as a politician and an intellectual, see Tanya L. Shields, *The Legacy of Eric Williams: the Postcolonial Moment* (University of Mississippi Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Cited in Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*: *An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Bridgetown: University of the West Indies Press, 1974), 5-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I do not examine here the debate around Adam Smith’s arguments as they applied to the colonies. For a useful summary, see S.D. Smith, “*Merchants and Planters* revisited,” *Economic History Review*, 55 (2002), 434-65 and Emma Rothschild, “Adam Smith in the British Empire,” in Sankar Muthu, ed. *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 184-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, 164-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. P.J. Marshall, *Remaking the British Atlantic: The United States and the British Empire after American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012),. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. David Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Selwyn H.H. Carrington, *The British West Indies during the American Revolution* (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Nicholas Draper, “The Rise of a New Planter Class? Some Counter-currents from British Guiana and Trinidad, 1807-1834,” *Atlantic Studies* 9 (2012), 65-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. David Ryden, ‘Does decline make sense? The West Indian economy and the abolition of the British slave trade’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31 (2001), 347-74. See also .G. Checkland, ‘Finance for the West Indies, 1780-1815’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 10 (1958), 461-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Reviews of the book can be found at <http://svenbeckert.com/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xv, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), I: 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 50. Beckert does not cite recent work on the production of West Indian cotton, such as Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) or David Beck Ryden, “`One of the Finest and Most Fruitful Spots in America’: An Analysis of Eighteenth-Century Carriacou,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 43 (2013), 539-70. Instead, he uses an 1848 history of Barbados for information on ant invasions and an obscure article from 1944 on cotton production. Beckert also cites Michael Edwards, *The Growth of the British Cotton Trade*, 79, although Edwards does not support his argument, and an article from 1987 by Selwyn Carrington but the pages cited (841-2) refer not to cotton production but to Britain banning American shipping from the West Indies. Carrington does mention rising cotton production in the 1780s on p. 847 but provides no figures similar to those that Beckert quotes. Selwyn H. H. Carrington, “The American Revolution and the British West Indies Economy,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17 (1987), 823-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 56-60 (quote 60). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Legacies of British Slave holding project, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/10314 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. It is very clear, however, where Beckert’s theoretical proclivities lie. His work is indebted to the world-system analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein and as such is a variant of grand Marxist narratives, although not probably a variant that more conventional Marxists would agree with. For his intellectual sympathies in respect to slavery and capitalism, imperialism, global history and commodities, see Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 450-51 fts. 7, 12, 15, and 16. For a Marxist criticism of Wallerstein, see Robert Brenner, “The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism,” *New Left Review* 104 (1977), 25-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. This summary is drawn from Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xv-xvi, 37-8, 52, 54, 92, 155, 165-66, 169, 171-3, 239 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism* trans. Siȃn Reynolds 3 vols. (London: Collins, 1981-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. For a critique, see P.K. O’Brien, “European Economic Development: The Contribution of the Periphery,” *Economic History Review* 2d ser. 35 (1982), 1-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Introduction,” in Jerry H. Bentley, Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, eds., *The Cambridge World History* vol. VI, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400-1800 CE* Part 1 *Foundations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3-5 (quote 4); Patrick K. O’Brien, “European Economic Development: The Contribution of the Periphery,” *Economic History Review* 35 (1982), 1-18; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson, “The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth,” *American Economic Review* 95 (2005), 546-79. For a counter-view, see E.A. Wrigley, “The transition to an advanced organic economy: half a millennium of English agriculture,” *Economic History Review* 59 (2006), 435-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. C. Knick Harley insists that while the Atlantic economy made a central contribution to the causes of the Industrial Revolution, the route through which this contribution came was through trade to the non-plantation colonies of British North America. These colonies wanted industrial goods from Britain and financed them by developing the burgeoning provision trade to the West Indies. Harley argues that “in the absence of slavery, the northern settlements would have found alternative goods to sell into the Atlantic economy and their growth, and their demand for British manufactures, seems unlikely to have been stifled.” C. Knick Harley, “Slavery, the British Atlantic Economy, and the Industrial Revolution,” in A.B. Leonard et al, *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy* (2015), 182. For mercantilism and empire, see Jonathan Barth, “Reconstructing Mercantilism: Consensus and Conflict in British Imperial Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *WMQ* 3d ser. 73 (2016), 257-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Patrick O’Brien, “The nature and historical evolution of an exceptional fiscal state …,” *Economic History Review* 64 (2011), 415. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, 415-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, 416; Peter Liberman, *Does Conquest Pay? The exploitation of occupied industrial societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid, 435-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 439. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xviii, 190-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. E.A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: the Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). See also P.H.H. Vries, “Are Coal and Colonies Really Crucial? Kenneth Pomeranz and the Great Divergence,” *Journal of World History* 12 (2001), 407-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. For women as workers, see Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 69, 185-88, 190-92, 406-7, 415-6. For a more expansive view of women in cotton see Maxine Berg, “In Pursuit of Luxury: Global History and British Consumer Goods in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 132 (2004), 85-142. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 149. Knoop’s wife was Louise Hoyer. http://tarisio.com/cozio-archive/cozio-carteggio/baron-knoop/ [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Riello, *Cotton*; Robert S. Duplessis, *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce, and Colonization in the Atlantic World, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Riello, *Cotton*, 278-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Barbara Hahn, “Review,” *Agricultural History* (2015), 482-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Riello, *Cotton*, 240-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Riello, *Cotton*, 4, 10; Eltis and Engerman, “Importance of Slavery.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. There is a rich literature on the connections between war and capitalism, most of which is ignored by Beckert, somewhat surprisingly given his emphasis on war as an active agent of change in the economic realm. For some themes, see Bartolmé Yun-Casalilla and Patrick K. O’Brien, eds., *The Rise of Fiscal States: A Global History, 1500-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State* (1989); Philippe Contamine, ed. *War and Competition behind States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Rafael Torres-Sanchez, ed., *War, State and Development: Fiscal-military States in the Eighteenth-Century* (Pamplona: Eunsa 2007); and Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic, and Sweden as fiscal-military states, 1500-1600* (Routledge: New York, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650-1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Nuala Zahedieh, “Colonies, copper, and the market for inventive activity in England and Wales, 1680-1730,” *Economic History Review* 66 (2013), 805-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Lorena S. Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure & Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Andrew O’Shaughnessy, “The West India Interest and the Crisis of American Independence,” in Roderick A. McDonald, ed., *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1996),. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Simon Newman, *Free and Bound Labor in the British Atlantic World: Black and White Workers and the Development of Plantation Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), chs.3 and 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Carla Gardina Pestana, “English Character and the Fiasco of the Western Design,” *Early American Studies* 3 (2005), 1-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Nuala Zahedieh, “Making mercantilism work: London merchants and Atlantic trade in the late seventeenth century,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (1999), 43-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Zahedieh, *Capital and Colonies*, 285, 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Richard S. Dunn, “The Glorious Revolution and America,” in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 1 *The Origins of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 463-65. We need to note that Britain did not dislodge France and Spain in the Caribbean and had only limited power over agents at the periphery. Nuala Zahedieh, “Commerce and Conflict: Jamaica and the War of the Spanish Succession,” in Leonard, *Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy*, 78-80. Moreover, the process of British state formation was a contested process of highly partisan politics in which compromises were repeatedly negotiated between various irreconcilable public priorities and private interests. Aaron Graham, *Corruption, Party, and Government in Britain, 1702-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves* and Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). A useful summary of the politics of slavery over the long durée is John Craig Hammond, “Slavery, Sovereignty, and Empires: North American Borderlands and the American Civil War, 1660-1860,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (2014), 264-98. Still insightful is Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936) [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 115. For the Seven Years’ War in the Caribbean, see Burnard and Garrigus, *Plantation Machine*. See also Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714-1783* (London: Allen Lane, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, and Emory Evans, *A Topping People: The Rise and Decline of Virginia’s Old Political Elite, 1680-1790* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009) and Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Slavery at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, ch. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016) and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Allan Kulikoff, “`Such Things Ought Not to Be’: The American Revolution and the First National Great Depression,” in Andrew Shankman, ed., *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic: Expansion, Conflict, and the Struggle for a Continent* (Routledge: New York, 2014), 134-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “American Incomes Before and After the Revolution,” *Journal of Economic History* 73 (2016), 725-765. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves,* ch. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Lindert and Williamson, “American Incomes Before and After The Revolution,” 747; Peter C. Mancall, Joshua L. Rosenbloom, and Thomas Weiss, “Conjectural Estimates of Economic Growth in the Lower South, 1720 to 1800,” in William Sundstrom and Timothy Guinnane, eds., *History Matters: Economic Growth, Technology, and Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), . [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Lindert and Williamson, “American Incomes Before and After the Revolution,” 741-2, 750-53; Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, “Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117 (2002), 1231-94; and Kulikoff, “‘Such Things Ought Not to Be’, 134-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. David Brion Davis, “Slavery, Emancipation, and Progress,” in Donald A. Yerxa, ed., *British Abolitionism and the Question of Moral Progress in History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 18-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Richard Follett et al, *Plantation Kingdom: The American South and Its Global Commodities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Steven Sarson, *The Tobacco-Plantation South in the Early American Plantation World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Lindert and Williamson, “American Incomes Before and After the Revolution,” 742. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Marshall, *Remaking the British Atlantic*, 77-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 2006) and John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason, eds. *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Trevor Burnard, “Powerless Masters: The Curious Decline of Jamaican Sugar Planters in the Foundational Period of British Abolition,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32 (2011), 185-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 112, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Cited in R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid; Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context, 1830-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979); and W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, *Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010); R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 103-36 and Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 202-3, 231-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Jay Sexton, “Then United States in the British Empire,” in Stephen Foster, ed. *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 320-21, 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Frank Thistlethwaite, *The Anglo-American Connection in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1959), 3-5; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 131-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Catherine Hall, “Gendering Property, Racing Capital,” *History Workshop Journal* 78 (2014), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica …* 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), I: 493-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)