Slaves, Workers, and Women: Constructing the Boundaries of Humanitarian Reform in Great Britain and the United States, 1750-1870

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It is possible to argue that material progress in the western world has usually required the exploitation of some vulnerable group. But almost inevitably the injustices that accompany material progress provoke an outcry, and those outcries often lead to the redefinition of moral boundaries. The purpose of this study is to undertake, as Thomas Kuhn did for scientific revolutions over a half century ago, a comparative study of the processes involved in these redefinitions.[1]

Humanitarian reform may be defined as those points when various groups and individuals decide that certain behaviors are unjust whatever their benefits might be. Opposition to injustices must be organized, the behaviors in question must be eliminated, and a new set of moral boundaries established. It is not possible to study all humanitarian reform movements in the space of an article, so this study will focus on four humanitarian reform movements that emerged between 1750 and 1870. These include the movement to abolish the African slave trade and slavery itself, the Chartist campaigns to improve conditions for industrial workers, and early attempts in the United States to secure suffrage rights for women.

It is surprising how little comparative work has been done on humanitarian reform. Entire libraries could be stocked with works on individual movements, especially antislavery, but works of synthesis on humanitarian movements are relatively few. No doubt the formidable bibliographical problems inherent in keeping abreast of the literature are the principal impediment.

David Brion Davis and Seymour Drescher have produced comparative works on Atlantic slavery and antislavery. But these works are limited to those issues, although Dresher has also produced interesting work comparing antislavery with working-class reform in Britain. Oliver MacDonagh and Brian Harrison have proposed thoughtful, but similarly limited, syntheses of nineteenth-century British reform.

But in 2010 the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah published *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*, a much broader work. Appiah's book offered a comparative analysis of the reasons behind the end of dueling in Great Britain, bandaging the feet of Chinese women, and slavery in the British Empire. And it stressed the processes by which opposition to these practices came to be considered honorable.[2]

Prior to Appiah, the closest thing to a general synthesis appeared in Thomas Haskell's two articles on "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility" which appeared in 1985 in the *American Historical Review*. While Haskell's work had many purposes and suggestive angles, it was most notable for its thesis on the "starving stranger," which Haskell used to advance a theory of the conditions that must obtain before people will be moved to take humanitarian action.

These conditions include the existence of ethical precepts that make assisting a starving stranger the right thing to do. It is also necessary for individuals to feel causally involved in the stranger's plight. And there must be a clear path on which to act, which Haskell calls "recipe knowledge." The final essential precondition is that, given the gravity of the situation, individuals must recognize that failure to act itself constitutes a moral failure. Haskell cited the case of Quaker abolitionist John Woolman as an example of a reformer who fit the pattern he described.[3]

But all humanitarian reforms are not alike, and several different kinds can be distinguished. In this essay, moral rather than humanitarian reform refers to the call made by persons usually certain of their own moral virtue for others to reform aspects of their personal behavior.

Examples of these movements include the Puritan desire to build a "City upon a Hill" in the seventeenth century, the Great Awakenings in Great Britain and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and various nineteenth century schemes for the improvement of society in the United States. Their leaders usually call for a general revival of religious fervor and for a massive, popular commitment to behave in a more virtuous manner.[4]

Closely related to this are movements that seek to redress specific kinds of supposedly immoral behavior. Temperance movements are the most obvious example of this kind of moral reform, but campaigns to convince people to refrain from dueling, gambling, drug use, breaking the Sabbath, or illicit sexual behavior, can also be included. These kinds of reform movements have tended to flourish in the United States, though they are by no means limited to it.[5]

Leaders of evangelical movements often believe they are acting out of genuine humanitarian conviction, and they usually base their arguments on Christian conviction mixed with nationalistic overtones. An otherwise virtuous nation stands poised on the precipice of perdition, if it succumbs to the siren songs of Catholic priests, avaricious Jews, savage Indians, polygamists, sexual predators, or drug users, all of whom seek to lure innocent persons into a life of decadence. These fears are compounded by the additional conviction on the part of the virtuous that if they live surrounded by sinful people, their own salvation might be jeopardized.

The nineteenth century also saw a wave of what may be called humanitarian interventions, where particularly the British public became riveted by the plight of certain peoples outside Britain. In the 1820s the Greek struggle for independence from the Turks aroused intense national interest; the poet Byron championed their struggle and died in Greece on its behalf in 1824. In the 1870s the public was horrified by news of the massacre of Christian Bulgarians by Turkish troops. Nothing seemingly captured the British public's sympathy more than the plight of defenseless Christians tormented by Ottoman oppressors.[6]

In a sense most reform movements have humanitarian implications. Even major intellectual shifts, such as the Protestant Reformation or the Scientific Revolution, ostensibly with goals other than saving humanity, had moral implications. Luther certainly believed his reforms were directed to the benefit of humanity. In his address to the German nobility, published in 1520, Luther wrote that "in this matter we are not dealing with men, but with the princes of hell." He concluded by listing twenty-seven areas in which reform was most urgently needed, including the monasteries, the convents, the universities, and the legal system. In 1620 Francis Bacon urged Europeans to reject most received wisdom and to trust their senses in order to begin a "Great Instauration" in which a wondrous, new world of knowledge and reason might be realized.[7]

The great western political revolutions, especially in Britain in the 1640s and France in 1789, assumed at times the messianic nature of a crusade. In 1641 at the beginning of the English Revolution, Thomas Case declared that "Reform must be universal…Reform all places, all persons, and callings…Reform the universities, reform the cities, reform the counties, reform the inferior schools of learning…You have more work to do than I can speak."[8]

Roughly one-hundred and fifty years later, the English poet William Wordsworth, looking back on the excitement he experienced as he traveled in France in 1791, wrote the famous lines, "bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was the very heaven." The revolutionaries themselves found several ways to celebrate their rejection of a decadent past and the dawning of an age of rights and equality. Among other things, they changed the calendar, renaming the months and making 1792 Year One of the new and glorious future. To further reinforce the idea of a world begun anew, serious consideration was given to tearing down Chartres Cathedral and building a new temple of wisdom in its place.[9]

This study, however, as noted earlier, will focus on a series of humanitarian reform movements and their contexts appearing between 1750 and 1870. In each case the goal of reform is the permanent improvement of the material, political, and/or legal condition of specific oppressed groups, and not simply opposition to existing institutions such as the papacy, scientific orthodoxy, monarchy, an Old Regime or various immoral practices.

Admittedly, there are several points where humanitarian reform merges with moral reform. As we will see, most humanitarian movements develop in times of evangelical fervor and thus have a strong Christian component. Much of the early British opposition to the slave trade was derived in part from the influence of Quakers and Evangelicals both of whom believed all human beings are equal in the eyes of God.

It is also an irony of humanitarian reform that even the most despicable human practices have been defended on moral grounds. Slave owners defended their institution with ideas derived from historical precedent, Aristotle, and *The Bible*. They sneered at the Jeffersonian notion that all men had been created equal and predicted the immediate moral collapse of the nation if the slaves were freed. Factory owners defended their labor practices with equal tenacity.

Even more remarkable was the view of Nazi Germany expressed by Magda Goebbels in 1945 in a letter to her son from her first marriage. Writing as she, her second husband, and their children waited in an underground bunker with the Fuehrer as the Russians advanced toward Berlin, she steadfastly defended the Nazi legacy. "Our splendid, noble concept is perishing," she declared, "and with it goes everything beautiful, admirable, noble, and good that I have known in my life. The world which will succeed the Fuehrer is not worth living in and for that reason I have brought the children here, too."[10]

Given that the legacy which she was defending included starting a world war that would result in the deaths of at least 35-40 million people and the extermination of six million Jews, one is justified in wondering how anyone could see the Reich as beautiful and noble. But, unless she had completely deluded herself, Magda Goebbels was only rehearsing a fairly standard line. In the minds of many Germans, not simply his closest supporters, Hitler had rescued Germany from the unjust Treaty of Versailles and economic depression, to assume its rightful place in the world. He was further exacting a wholly justifiable revenge on those whom he believed had unfairly contrived Germany's ruin. One man's genocide is another's moral crusade.

We can avoid moral relativism, however, by remembering that there is a fundamental difference between the defenses of slavery, appalling conditions in the workplace, or Nazi policy and humanitarian reform. Whether it concerns slavery, industrial oppression, or Nazi policy, their defenders are claiming the right to impose their law and inflict physical injury and suffering upon others in the name of a supposed higher good.

At the same time, it must be admitted that almost all humanitarian movements, even those generally admired, are fraught with ambiguity. In almost every case the leaders of humanitarian movements make carefully calculated choices about which outrages should be opposed and how their abolition will be undertaken. In the 1500s the Spanish priest, Bartolomeo de las Casas, was among the first to call attention to the crimes performed by Spanish settlers in Central America. Las Casas reported heartbreaking stories of the atrocities perpetrated by Spanish conquistadores and waged an uncompromising campaign for more humane treatment of indigenous peoples.

According to Las Casas, Spanish soldiers slaughtered everyone they found there, including small children, old men, pregnant women, and even women who had just given birth. Furthermore, he continued, "they laid wagers among themselves, who should with a sword at one blow cut or divide a man in two; or which of them should decapitate or behead a man with the greatest dexterity."[11]

Las Casas' sympathy for the oppressed natives, however, was tainted by his solution. In 1518 he proposed substituting African slaves to perform the labor then being performed by native peoples, although he subsequently decided that the enslavement of "Negroes" was as unjust as that of slaves. However, despite his burning sense of injustice over the treatment of the native population, there is no record of him taking up the cause of African slaves, and he apparently owned slaves himself as late as 1544.[12]

The movement in Great Britain to abolish the slave trade is perhaps the first great humanitarian crusade, and many of its characteristics would be repeated in subsequent movements. Some of these characteristics include its origins in a period of religious and demographic change and the transmission of ideas, the emergence of charismatic leaders, and the presence of several existing ideologies that could be used to challenge the slave trade. As the movement progressed, other common themes emerged, including the use of occasionally deceptive tactics, the deployment of multiple means to deliver the message, and carefully calculated choices concerning what other injustices should be opposed.

If we look first at the conditions and circumstances during which the reform movement began, Britain in the eighteenth century was experiencing a demographic upheaval. Population was growing dramatically, from less than six million in 1700 to over nine million by 1800. Population growth is almost always accompanied by urbanization, and London alone rose from a population of about 675,000 in 1700 to over one million by 1800. Unprecedented increases occurred in other towns. Birmingham, a tiny village in the seventeenth century, saw its population quadruple between 1675 and 1760, and double again by the end of the century. The population of Manchester tripled in the thirty years before 1800.[13]

The increasingly urban nature of British society in the second half of the eighteenth century made it easier to transmit ideas. By 1702 London had its first daily newspaper, and a half dozen dailies along with numerous thrice-weekly papers had appeared by the 1730s. Half a century later, over fifty newspapers were published outside London. Travelling in Britain, the French philosopher Montesquieu was stunned to observe a roofer on top of a house reading a newspaper. In addition to newspapers, a wide variety of magazines, journals, and novels were available, along with a new place, the coffee house, to read and discuss them. By the 1780s there were 500 coffeehouses in London. The new culture of print, news, and the coffee house created a massive new means of disseminating ideas and information beyond the control of the government.[14]

At the same time, improvements in transportation and communication made the transmission of ideas outside London much easier. In 1754 it took 254 hours to get from London to Edinburgh; by 1792 that figure had been reduced to 75. In 1740 there was one coach a week from London to Birmingham; by 1783 there were thirty, and by 1829, there were more than 200. By 1780 letters could be sent overnight, and mail coaches carried London newspapers to provincial cities.

Demographic transformation combined with improvements in transportation and communication to create a new world of markets and enterprise. Innovations in manufacture enabled many entrepreneurs to realize immense profits. Others, unable to compete against newer, more efficient technologies, were devastated by the changes.[15]

In the eighteenth century the slave system was an established feature of British life. Not only did it seem morally unobjectionable to most people, but it provided the labor that brought cheap cotton and sugar to Britain. Slave labor kept the domestic cost of goods down and was thought to be essential for the prosperity of the British economy.

In addition to its evident contributions, the slave system underpinned many of Britain's cultural treasures and philanthropic activities. The magnificent library at All Souls' College, Oxford, was financed by a plantation in Barbados. Edward Colston, a member of Parliament for Bristol and the community's most generous philanthropist, was a slave trader.[16]

Ironically, Europeans had already drawn some moral boundaries regarding slavery. As David Eltis pointed out nearly two decades ago, Europeans clearly rejected the possibility of enslaving certain vulnerable, but expedient white groups, including convicts, vagrants, and prisoners of war. The enslavement of any or all of these groups would have been quite feasible economically. No difficult and expensive trip to Africa would have been involved, and their enslavement would have spared European society of the cost of incarceration and rid them of inconvenient groups. Yet Europeans appear to have arrived at a moral decision that only non-whites could be enslaved.[17]

While no powerful anti-slave trade or antislavery ideology had appeared before the American Revolution, many lines of thought which could be used as standards by which the slave system could be judged had appeared. The issues brought about by the English Civil War had implications for slavery, since many members of Parliament believe that Charles I was engaged in a conspiracy to take away their freedoms as Englishmen. During the Ship Money case of 1637, Oliver St. John, who undertook the case against the crown, contended that if Ship Money was legal, "then our birthright, our ancestral right, our condition of living as free citizens is lost, that of late, there has been an endeavor to reduce to the state of villeinage, nay, to a lower." A few years later, the Levelers were stating the case for equality. "The poorest he is equal to the greatest hee," Thomas Rainsborough famously declared at the Putney Debates. The writings of several of the eighteenth century "Commonwealth Men" had egalitarian elements.[18]

Moreover, the power of Christian teaching, previously used by some authors to justify slavery, was slowly being mobilized against it. American Quakers had already initiated their own campaign against slavery. And, while evangelical religious movements in Britain and the United States could erupt into clan warfare among themselves, they were united in the broad conviction that all humans were equal in the eyes of God.[19]

The disputes between Great Britain and the American colonies following the Seven Years' War exposed several of the fault lines on which both colonial and British society were based. As early as 1765 James Otis noticed the hypocrisy of the colonists declaring themselves free men oppressed by English tyranny while at the same time holding slaves. When the colonies were lost, many British observers believed that the loss was God's punishment on Britain as a slave trading and holding nation.[20]

At roughly the same time, two legal cases in Britain brought more attention to slavery. In 1772 Granville Sharp, an early abolitionist and antiquarian, won a favorable verdict in the Somerset case. The case involved a slave who had been brought to England and was badly beaten and abandoned by his owner, who later tried to reclaim his property. The judge found in favor of the slave, and, though it was not necessarily the judges' intent, the verdict was widely interpreted to mean that once anyone, even a slave, set foot on British soil, they were free. Slavery was therefore illegal in Britain. Sharp was soon corresponding with the American abolitionist and Quaker Anthony Benezet, who supplied Sharp with many documents and pieces of evidence describing the horrors of the trade. In 1781 Sharp helped to draw attention to the infamous *Zong* case in which the owner of a slave ship attempted to collect insurance for the 133 slaves he had thrown overboard after a viral epidemic claimed the lives of sixty Africans and seventeen crew members. Both the *Somerset* and *Zong* cases seemed to reveal a total indifference to human suffering on the part of the slave owners and traders.[21]

At roughly the same time the ideas of the cultural outpouring known as the Enlightenment were spreading across western Europe. While the Enlightenment was a diffuse and complex movement, most Enlightenment thinkers were frustrated with religious dogma and with a society that largely conferred position and privilege on the basis of birth. Enlightenment thinkers were eager to apply the lessons of scientific and mathematical discovery to social and political problems, to challenge existing orthodoxies and to spread their ideas to as wide a public as possible.[22]

The spread of Enlightenment ideas contributed to an unprecedented wave of humanitarian sentiment in the middle of the eighteenth century. Movements to end judicial torture, improve conditions in prisons, provide assistance to the poor, end cruelty to animals, and offer better education, were only some of the humanitarian sentiments that gained popular attention.[23]

At the same time, in what was sometimes called the Radical Enlightenment, serious discussion arose about the nature of political rights. Should they be reserved only for those who supposedly possessed the wisdom, education, and property to use them prudently, or did there exist a natural law by which everyone was entitled to rights simply by virtue of their humanity? At the core of the entire discussion was a new conception of personhood, by which certain groups of human beings were oppressed by unfair conditions when in fact they should be treated equally. "Man is born free," wrote Rousseau, famously, "and he is everywhere in chains." The Scot Robert Burns, perhaps the first great poet born in a house with a dirt floor, declared, "it's coming yet for a' that, that man to man the world o'er shall brothers be."[24]

Thus, by the beginning of the American Revolution a number of individuals had expressed concerns and even opposition to the slave system. And, equally important, a number of ideologies had appeared offering new and rigorous standards by which any number of existing institutions could be judged, including slavery.

In 1783 British Quakers founded committees to oppose the slave trade, present petitions to parliament, and to win over public opinion by writing tracts exposing the evils of the trade. In 1787 the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded. Its leader was Thomas Clarkson, who had won a prize in an essay competition in 1785 as a student at Cambridge, on the subject of "Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?" In the following year the essay was published, and Clarkson decided to devote his life to eradicating the trade. He went to work full-time at the Society, was the first paid, professional abolitionist, and his work was invaluable. By his own estimation he travelled over 220,000 miles, gave thousands of speeches, and, at great personal risk, visited the docks to gather evidence of the evils of the trade. He numbered Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jane Austen, and Ralph Waldo Emerson among his admirers.[25]

Clarkson and other British abolitionists believed that they lived in a time that would see all evils eradicated. In the case of the slave trade, they intended to win over public opinion, which would, in turn, put pressure on Parliament to abolish it. They sought to utilize every possible means available for conveying their message, including the establishment of local anti-slave trading societies, newsletters, boycotts on goods produced by slave societies, posters, public readings, buttons, and mass mailings to public officials, with published report cards on their performance.[26]

The grassroots campaign succeeded beyond the abolitionists' wildest dreams. In 1792 the government received 519 anti-slave trade or anti-slavery petitions, with some 390,000 signatures. More than 400,000 Britons declared their refusal to consume Caribbean sugar. Sales of Wedgwood china with the famous image of a slave encircled with the question, "Am I not a man and a brother?" skyrocketed.[27]

Political success, however, was another question. In 1789 William Wilberforce, an M.P. from Hull, and a close friend of Prime Minister William Pitt, introduced a bill outlawing the trade in the House of Commons. It failed, but Wilberforce continued to press the issue. In 1792 he secured the passage of a bill outlawing the trade in the House of Commons, only to see it fail in the more conservative House of Lords.

Searching for political success, the early British abolitionists made several strategic decisions about how their campaign against slavery should be conducted that were highly deceptive. Acutely aware that many members of Parliament were tied economically to slavery, they consciously based their initial campaign solely against the evils of the slave trade rather than slavery itself. This choice was made for several reasons. First, they feared that it would be harder to convince Parliament to abolish slavery, and, second, they believed that if they could eliminate the trade in Africans, slavery itself would die, although they turned out to be naïve in this regard. They also deliberately downplayed the humanitarian arguments in favor of abolishing the slave trade. Instead, they usually undertook a practical approach, contending that free labor rather than slave labor would be more cost effective.[28]

Wilberforce, one of the early leaders of British abolitionism, has usually been regarded as the shining paladin of moral reform. To an extent this view is justified. Wilberforce devoted more than four decades to the struggle to abolish slavery. A member of the landed aristocracy at a time when that class was usually known for its raucous, epicurean life style, he renounced his own pursuit of pleasure at an early age and embraced evangelical religion. In addition to opposing the slave trade, he campaigned against a wide range of other injustices and did not stand to benefit materially from his opposition to slavery. He also lived an exemplary personal life apart from his anti-slavery. By all accounts, he was a loyal husband, a devoted father of six children, and a paternal landowner, who charged scandalously low rents to his tenants and retained house servants well beyond their usefulness. Wilberforce probably squandered a considerable part of his personal fortune to the cause of anti-slavery. When the House of Commons passed its bill outlawing the slave trade in 1807, he received a standing ovation in its chambers.[29]

But, despite the many admirable components of his personality and his uncompromising opposition to slavery, Wilberforce was blind, even hostile, to the need for other reforms. By the time of his campaign against the slave system, the Industrial Revolution and the factory system had dramatically altered the conditions of British society. Factories and mines depended upon child labor and wretchedly paid adults to keep consumer prices low and profits high. In a famous passage, written in 1944, the historian Eric Williams, later prime minister of Trinidad, condemned Wilberforce on the grounds that he "was familiar with all that went on in the hold of a slave ship, but ignored what went on in the bottom of a mineshaft."[30] Wilberforce supported the Corn Laws, was a member of a secret committee which investigated and repressed working class discontent in 1817, opposed feminine anti-slavery associations, and thought the Great Reform Bill was too radical.[31]

In short, with the exception of his anti-slavery and several other humanitarian convictions, Wilberforce embraced many of the views of the commonly narrow-minded and staunchly conservative members of his class. His opposition to social reform in England appears to have based upon both expedience and principle. The expedience was based upon his awareness that advocacy of industrial reform might alienate potential supporters in Parliament and a fear that the anti-slavery cause could be marginalized if he devoted equal time to other causes. But he also genuinely believed that the lower classes constituted a threat to the social order.

Wilberforce was also resolute. Despite very difficult economic conditions, he succeeded in securing the passage of a bill outlawing the slave trade in 1807, and in 1833, he helped persuade Parliament to outlaw slavery itself in the British Empire, emancipating nearly 800,000 slaves. In a sense Wilberforce and the abolitionists succeeded in winning the wars on public opinion and the political struggle. But, as is true of most humanitarian reform, it was one thing to win hearts and minds and even secure political victory, but quite another to win the battle for enforcement.

When Wilberforce and his followers achieved passage of the bill against the slave trade in 1807, they hoped it would bring an end to slavery without further legislation. Cut off the trade, they contended, and slavery will die. Unfortunately, slavery and even the trade continued. Slave owners simply brought slaves from slave ships from countries where the trade was still legal, and it was impossible to interdict all the British ships that continued to be involved with it.

Moreover, after slavery itself had been abolished in the British Empire in 1833, the slave owners and their parliamentary allies found many means to perpetuate injustice. The abolitionists hoped that, theoretically deprived of slaves, Caribbean planters would find it difficult to obtain cheap labor. But the British government permitted the use of several questionable devices to prevent the planters from being ruined. In 1840 they allowed planters to make "contracts" with freed slaves. In 1843, after heated protests from abolitionists regarding contracts, they tried to persuade the American government to participate in a plan to transport American slaves to the Caribbean. When this scheme failed, the British turned to importing hundreds of thousands of Asian immigrants in an attempt to return the planters to prosperity.[32]

The role of women in British abolitionism is instructive. The movement attracted many women, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, and Elizabeth Heyrick, and their role was consequential. Women gave speeches, collected signatures, wrote antislavery poems and pamphlets, and formed antislavery associations. Heyrick's *Immediate Not Gradual Abolition* played an important role in convincing abolitionist leaders to pursue more aggressive policies.[33]

But women's participation in antislavery activities was hampered by continuing tensions between what women themselves believed about the spheres in which they should be permitted to operate. Many abolitionist women considered antislavery as simply the first step in a general campaign against injustice, including those perpetrated against women. But other abolitionist women saw antislavery in more limited, if feminist terms, stemming from the need to protect slave women from brutal masters. For those women, the abolition of slavery to protect slave women was a legitimate expression of dissent; but challenging sex and gender roles was a step out of their sphere.[34]

This tension came to a head at the 1840 meeting of the World Antislavery Association in London, when duly elected delegates were denied their seats at the meeting. This episode, according to Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her memoirs, helped crystallize the emergence of a women's movement in the United States in the 1840s; it did not have the same effect in Britain.[35]

The Abolitionist movement in the United States differed in several regards from its British counterpart. The slave trade, the first target of British abolition, was not a target of the American abolitionists; it had already been prohibited after 1808 by the Constitution. Slavery in Great Britain was confined in the far reaches of empire; in the United States it existed conspicuously in the southern states and even in the nation's capital.[36]

More importantly, British abolitionism had the force of British law and recent legal precedent on their side. In the United States the political and legal system afforded slavery considerable protection. Perhaps for this reason, many American abolitionists, unlike their British counterparts, elected not to work through legislative or judicial channels, which they considered corrupt. Instead, they would pursue a campaign of relentless advocacy until the country was awakened to the nature of the evil flourishing in its own backyard.

But, for all their differences, the similarities between the two movements are instructive. Like British antislavery, American abolitionism arose in an era of demographic upheaval. In 1800 the population of the United States was about five million; by 1860 it was over thirty million. At the same time a more urban culture was also emerging. In 1800 there were only three cities of more than 25,000 people; in 1860 there were over thirty. Transportation and communication were also revolutionized. The turnpike, the steamboat, and the railroad made travel exponentially faster. In 1800 a trip from Lexington, Kentucky, to Washington took three weeks; by 1846 it could be done in four days.[37]

As was the case in Britain, these changes expanded markets and helped bring about new methods of production and distribution of goods. The new market economy conferred enormous profits for those who could produce and distribute goods the most efficiently, but were disastrous for those unable to adapt to changing times.[38]

The dramatic growth in population and improvements in transportation coincided with similar transformations in communication. In addition to the spread of information by steamboat and railway, by 1860 27,000 miles of telegraph linked the United States. At the same time the early United States Post Office was large and effective, dispatching mail to even the smallest and most remote villages and hamlets.[39]

Moreover, while the printing press had been in existence in the West for several centuries, its technology had changed little. But, in 1811 Friedrich Koenig invented a cylinder press driven by a steam engine.

A few years later, Thomas Gilpin, discovered how to print a continuous roll of paper rather than single sheets, which gave rise to the rapid development of newspapers. In 1828 New York City alone had 161. Newspapers thrived because they answered the needs of an increasingly literate public, and they expedited the dissemination of information. And it was now possible for someone to make a living by publishing a newspaper.[40]

These transformations also changed the audience to which the Abolitionists were communicating. What was once a largely isolated, rural population without a great deal of literacy had become increasingly urban and literate, making it far easier to disseminate ideas and information.

Like British abolitionism, American abolition, appeared in an age of reformist zeal. "In the history of the world," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1841, "the doctrine of reform has never had such hope as at the present hour."[41] Americans vigorously pursued campaigns to reduce the consumption of liquor, end the delivery of mail on Sunday, expand public education, reform prisons, improve the conditions of wage laborers, and replace competitive individualism with institutions based on communal values.[42]

American abolition also emerged at a time of religious revival. As the United States expanded beyond the Atlantic coast and industrialized, many observers believed that much of its population moved beyond the reach of traditional communal and religious values. Many of these observers feared that a once virtuous nation was succumbing to temptations of avarice and alcohol. Only a religious revival could save it. But in addition to its fierce attacks on the acquisitive society and the evils of demon rum, that revival, known as the Second Great Awakening, emphasized the equality of all human beings in the eyes of God. The Awakening offered the possibility of salvation for all those, black or white, rich or poor, who chose to accept that Christ had died for their sins and to behave in accordance with God's commandments.[43]

Beyond Christianity, by the 1820s there were numerous ideologies that could be selected by those opposed to slavery. British abolitionism provided not only ideology, but clear examples of slavery's injustice. Perhaps more importantly to Americans, the principles of the Declaration of Independence, celebrated by many Americans as the true founding document of the Republic, indicated that slavery was wrong. Thomas Paine, perhaps the most profound of the early American radicals, had transformed seemingly diffuse ideas on rights, democracy, and equality into a coherent ideology.[44]

But, before the 1830s one might, with Gibbon, be scandalized by the timidity of the American abolitionists rather than by their boldness. The evils of slavery weighed only marginally upon the American conscience. Most critics of slavery, fearing social disruption if the slaves were suddenly freed, favored trying to convince slave owners to free their slaves gradually. The most concrete plan for eradicating slavery was that advanced by "colonizers" who raised large sums of money to deport slaves to Africa. Colonization had attracted the support of many in positions of influence, including Thomas Jefferson, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay.[45]

But, beginning with the publication of David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* in 1829, a new and aggressive opposition began to materialize. Walker, a free black man, sneered at the paternalism of the colonizers; he invoked the "Declaration of Independence" to justify slave resistance. More importantly, he was able to advance an argument which combined the power of Christian principle and faith in the beliefs upon which most Americans believed their nation had been founded. "Are we men?" he demanded, "have we any other master but Jesus Christ alone?" Evangelical religion thus merged with Jeffersonian political ideals.[46]

Under Walker's influence and that of several other antislavery radicals, a young printer named William Lloyd Garrison concluded that slavery was an unjust violation of the laws of God and nature. In 1831 Garrison founded his own anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, and, in its first issue, continued Walker's fiery rhetoric. Rejecting the idea that freeing the slaves might disrupt the social order, Garrison demanded immediate abolition. On this subject, Garrison wrote, "I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." He also declared his rejection of politics, and his desire to raise a national brotherhood of reformers willing to unite behind the "great cause of human rights."[47]

Garrison further concluded that American government and society was thoroughly corrupt. Like Walker, he incorporated the power of evangelical religion with progressive political principle. To Garrison, slavery was a burning symbol of American corruption, violating Christian teaching and the vision of the founders. It was so manifestly evil, it must be abolished immediately, and Garrison offered a now-famous analogy where he compared slavery to a house on fire. No one would urge moderation in the case of the house on fire, and no one should in the case of slavery, either.[48]

The aggressive language Garrison employed was, however, a deceptive tactic. He was an avowed pacifist and repeatedly stated his commitment to "moral suasion," the idea that the freedom of the slaves could only be secured by convincing the public, North and South, of slavery's inherent evil and the need for its immediate abolition. Yet, by his abrasive rhetoric, he clearly hoped to make slave owners fear that an army of righteous abolitionists would be marching south at any moment to liberate the slaves. When Nat Turner's Rebellion erupted in Virginia not long after the appearance of the first issue of *The Liberator*, most southern observers blamed abolitionist agitation and took additional steps to control the slave population.[49]

In one sense "moral suasion" succeeded, as antislavery societies sprouted quickly. The New England Antislavery Society was formed in 1832. In 1833 delegates from several states gathered in Philadelphia to form the American Antislavery Society. By 1838 the AASS claimed a membership of over a quarter of a million members, and over a thousand auxiliaries. American antislavery was further strengthened when it received the support of escaped slaves, such as Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman, who could give eloquent testimony to the evils of the slave system.[50]

Garrison insisted that the evil of slavery was that it deprived the slave of his freedom, and, like the British abolitionists, he and many other American abolitionists were willing to support other groups who they felt had been similarly deprived. The importance of the deprivation of freedom led him to two decisions of significance.

The first of these decisions was that he would not support efforts to reform the conditions of white industrial workers as a matter of principle. While many workers labored in conditions that were in some cases more deplorable than those of the slaves, the workers, in Garrison's view, at least had a choice. They were not being deprived of their freedom; they could quit their jobs and go work somewhere else; the slaves could not.[51]

The same standard, however, led Garrison to support the idea of equal rights for women. In the United States the legal system manifestly discriminated against them. They were denied the right to vote as well as access to education and most employment. Upon marriage, they surrendered their property and legal rights to their husbands and custody of their children to them in the event of divorce. In short the legal system of early America contrived to restrict a woman's personal independence and limit her activities to the "domestic sphere."[52]

But support for women's rights was a line in the sand that few male abolitionists were willing to cross. Samuel Gridley Howe thought women's participation in Abolitionist activities caused them to neglect their domestic duties. The antislavery poet John Greenleaf Whittier feared that a comparison might be drawn between the outspoken Abby Kelley and Eve, Delilah, and Helen of Troy.[53]

Women were not the only issue on which Garrison alienated his followers. Like Luther in the German Reformation, Garrison was convinced of his own rectitude, and frequently had as much difficulty with his own followers as he did with slave owners. Among other things, not everyone agreed with his demands for immediate abolition or that moral suasion was the most effective means of protest. Working through the political system, however flawed it might be, might be more realistic. And there were a host of minor irritations. Garrison questioned whether it was proper to hold Sunday as the Sabbath day and criticized leading ministers who refused to take up abolitionism for their "moral cowardice." Moreover, his justification for nonviolence involved repudiation of all forms of force, including laws and government.[54]

Thus, by the 1840s, Garrison had alienated many of his followers. In 1840 about half of the members of Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society abandoned it in favor of the more moderate American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, led by Lewis Tappan.[55]

It seems fairly clear that American abolition emerged in a similar demographic, communicative, and reform context as that in which British Abolition appeared. The two movements attracted dedicated and charismatic leaders who were selective about which causes they would support. They also struggled to keep their followers together, and were on occasion willing to be deceptive about their tactics. Neither of the main leaders, Wilberforce or Garrison, was interested in the problems of the working class.

And neither fully succeeded. While the slave trade and slavery in the British Empire had been abolished by 1833, slave owners found ways to keep many of their slaves under control. In the case of American slavery, slavery was not ended legally until the Civil War and blacks were not freed until the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. And, even with its passage, some historians have argued that for freed slaves the post-slavery South, especially after the end of Reconstruction, was not much of an improvement.[56]

But American abolitionism did contribute to the birth of an American women's rights movement. Women's issues had already been central to the formation of the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance in 1826. Not only did Americans consume astonishing amounts of alcohol, but drunken husbands, either for the violence they perpetrated while under its influence or for the money they squandered purchasing it, were considered by many to be the greatest threat to women.

Reform movements offered women an opportunity for involvement in intellectual and morally redeeming activities. And they were conspicuous in both the Temperance and Abolitionist movements. The crusade against slavery in particular offered a relentless logic that could be applied to women's rights. In 1833 Angelina Grimke contended that anti-slavery was not simply about slaves' rights; it was about human rights. "Since I engaged in the investigation of the rights of the slave," Grimke continued, "I have necessarily been led to a better understanding of my own."[57]

As we have seen, in 1840 Lucretia Mott, despite being a duly elected representative to the World Antislavery Conference, was one of several female delegates denied her seat on the floor. The episode crystallized the need to fight for women's rights as well as for those of the slaves. Mott met Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the wife of another delegate, and two began to discuss the need for a public campaign for women's rights.[58]

There was already an abundant literature on women's rights to serve as an ideological base. Ideologically, women's rights emerged partly through the same process by which the "Declaration of Independence" became a formidable tool of abolitionism. The French Revolution, with its claims of universal rights expressed in 1789 in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen," aroused women's awareness of the possibilities. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 792, was an answer to Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man.* Wollstonecraft's work served as another reminder that universal rights could not be considered universal unless they included women. When revolutionary leaders in France failed to address women's issues, Olympia de Gouges wrote "A Declaration of the Rights of Women," which parodied the original declaration.[59]

In 1848, Stanton and Mott organized a women's conference at Seneca Falls, New York, where the issue of women's suffrage emerged as a pivotal issue. Stanton seized the opportunity to write a statement of purpose, the "Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments." Like de Gouges' declaration, Stanton's work was partly parody. Stanton used the "Declaration of Independence" to point out that its universalist message had been subverted by discrimination against women. While suffrage was the main issue behind the "Declaration of Sentiments," it went on to condemn the entire body of discriminatory laws that forced women into a status determined by men.[60]

Thus, the women's rights movement in the United States began in ways similar to Abolitionism, emerging from roughly the same context and utilizing many of the same rhetorical techniques. Discussion of human rights, as they were proclaimed in the "Declaration of Independence," or as they pertained to slaves, fostered in women a deeper understanding of their own predicament. They naturally asked if rights were universal, why shouldn't women have them? They also recognized that if the promise of rights, justice, and equality in the "Declaration of Independence" were lies for the slaves, they were also lies for women.

The Seneca Falls meeting energized the Women's movement. Similar meetings followed in other cities, with a national meeting in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850. The movement also attracted many new members, including Susan B. Anthony, a veteran of Temperance and Abolitionism. Anthony allied to Elizabeth Cady Stanton to fight for women's rights. They bombarded the New York State legislature with petitions, listing their primary demands, suffrage, control of earnings, and custody of children following a divorce. In 1860 their efforts paid off. New York passed what was probably the most advanced legislation in the world on behalf of women. Women gained the right to sue, to keep their own wages, and received greater control over their husband's property at his death.[61]

The end of the Civil War held the promise of being a golden moment for reform in which all the flaws of the original Constitution could be corrected. But many abolitionists believed that the rights of the slaves took precedence and that trying to include women's rights would only jeopardize the chances for the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which stated that the right to vote could not be denied on the basis of race. The "Negro's Hour," as some put it, had at last arrived.[62]

But, to Stanton and Anthony, the Fifteenth Amendment was tragically flawed; it did not include discrimination on the basis of gender. Thus, they opposed its passage, breaking bitterly with other female abolitionists, such as Abby Kelley and Lucy Stone.

Kelley and Stone insisted that the Fifteenth Amendment should pass despite its flaws, and it might not pass if women's suffrage was included. The result was a bitter division in the suffrage movement, and the creation of two rival women's rights organizations, The National Women's Suffrage Association, led by Stanton, and the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone. The associations would not reconcile until the 1890s.[63]

If the origins of antislavery and women's rights were similar, so, unfortunately, were their patterns. As they become more energized, they became more fractious. How they should proceed with the process of reform and which other groups were deserving of reforms were the most divisive issues.

Like Wilberforce and Garrison, only a few of the leaders of the women's movement were interested in addressing the plight of industrial workers. Yet the condition of the working classes in Britain and the United States was desperate, perhaps more visibly in Britain.

Industrialization and the Napoleonic wars had bequeathed wretched working conditions to the British working classes. And the French Revolution made the British ruling class fear working-class mobilization and pass severe laws repressing it. Working-class misery was compounded by subsequent legislation, such as the Corn Laws, which were designed to protect the landed classes by keeping the price of grain high.[64]

Enraged by government repression, workers formed corresponding societies, and a steady stream of agitators, including William Cobbett, Francis Place, and Henry Hunt, tried to raise public consciousness regarding the plight of the working poor. Cobbett, whose *Weekly Political Register* became the *Bible* of the working class radicals, believed that abolitionism deflected attention from the more serious problems of workers. In his view the English poor were "wage slaves," the group that most urgently required attention. Although he would later support the abolition of slavery, for several decades it was an endless source of frustration to him that the plight of slaves aroused far more public interest than the plight of workers.[65]

To demonstrate the urgency of the worker's predicament, in the early 1830s a parliamentary investigation under the direction of Michael Sadler gathered testimony from hundreds of workers, many of whom had been working in factories since they were five or six years old. The testimonies told a chilling tale of beatings, long hours, wretched working conditions, and suffering humanity.[66]

In 1830 the Birmingham Political Union, formed to address working class issues, drew 15,000 people to its initial meeting. At the same time, several hundred cheap, largely unregulated newspapers, including the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the *Voice of the West Riding,* appeared expressing working class points of view. By 1832, reform speakers were attracting enormous crowds. Riots and attacks on the homes of opponents of reform, including the Duke of Wellington, accompanied many demonstrations. To some observers, Britain seemed to be on the brink of revolution.[67]

Those pressing for workplace reform hoped that Parliament would take action, as it had against the slave trade and slavery itself. But parliamentary leaders thwarted the reformers at almost every turn. The Great Reform Bill of 1832, theoretically intended to correct blatant inequalities and abuses in the electoral system, stopped far short of meaningful reform and denied members of the working class admission into the electorate. The Factory Act of 1833 provided only minimal relief. Children under nine were prohibited from working in the textile mills, and children under thirteen were limited to nine hours of work a day with those between thirteen and eighteen no more than twelve. Adult workers who had pinned their hopes on Sadler's initial bill for an across the board ten-hour work day were bitterly disappointed. Moreover, the Poor Law of 1834 appeared to be designed more to punish the poor than to alleviate their suffering. It assumed that the poor were idle and vicious, and tried to make the workhouses in which they were housed as uninviting as possible.[68]

At the same time, employers tenaciously opposed attempts to organize workers into trade unions, from which they would be in a stronger position to demand standard rates of pay and limits to the working day. One particularly effective tool for employers in this regard was forcing new employees to sign a contract in which they renounced any association with Trade Unionism.[69]

In a final insult the government took steps to repress the unstamped press, which had played a key role in nurturing the radicalism of the early thirties. It taxed newspapers heavily to prevent the poor from reading them and used the Blasphemous and Seditious Libel laws to prosecute their editors.[70]

In 1836 the London Working Man's Association was founded by William Lovett, who had a long-standing involvement with worker's issues, and several others. Two years later, Lovett joined with five other working men and six members of Parliament to issue the *People's Charter*. The authors of the *Charter*, of whom Lovett was the most influential, decided against agitating for the passage of legislation reducing hours and improving conditions. Instead, they staked everything on winning universal manhood suffrage. "Self-government, by representation," Lovett contended, "is the only just foundation of political power." If all men were allowed to vote and districts were fairly proportioned, working men could elect candidates sympathetic to their interests.[71]

Supporters of the *Charter* came to be known as Chartists, and, in the bleak atmosphere of the late thirties and "hungry forties," Chartism might have been a last resort for beleaguered workers. If Parliament would not take legislative action to relieve the suffering of the workers, one answer might be to change Parliament. The Charter was by no means an original document. It was based in part upon the principles on which "Old Corruption," the English system of privilege, had traditionally been attacked. But it also drew upon ideas of justice and equality with which most Englishmen would be likely to consent. "Am I not a man?" the Chartists repeatedly asked, echoing the "Am I not a man and a brother?" slogan and early Abolitionists. Chartism also employed the techniques of pressuring Parliament, petitioning, and mass platform agitation that had been perfected by the Abolitionists.[72]

But the campaign to secure electoral reform was necessarily deceptive, since once the working class had secured its parliamentary majority, it would take steps to improve conditions and wages. More distressingly, like other reformers, Lovett found himself trying to plug his fingers in the holes of an increasingly leaky dyke. Artisans and factory workers, for example, did not necessarily have the same issues. Artisans in certain trades were thriving; others had lost their jobs to unskilled factory workers. In addition, different regions and localities around Britain were more committed to reform than others. Chartism in London was particularly divided. Workers in the cotton districts of Lancashire and the industrial areas of the West Riding and the East Midlands appeared to be more radical than in other areas.

More seriously, early on Lovett's leadership role had been challenged by the fiery Irish radical Feargus O'Connor.[73] Like Garrison, O'Connor wanted to push the envelope, to arouse working class consciousness and make the ruling classes tremble before the possibility of working-class revolution. O'Connor encouraged torchlight parades and military-style drilling by workers. In contrast with Lovett, he opposed any alliance with middle-class reformers. Chartist leaders were further divided on the issue of whether or not violence should be employed if the Charter was rejected.

In November, 1839, an organized force of about 7,000 workers from South Wales marched toward Newport, carrying swords and pikes. They were easily dispersed by local authorities, who left twenty-two dead and scores of wounded, with death sentences passed upon the leaders.[74]

The Newport Rising left Chartism in disarray. The threat of violence underscored the Charter, and the government had now demonstrated that it could it handle violence easily. In 1842 there were a series of worker strikes, but no major demonstration until 1848. In the confusion Chartist leaders searched for new answers. Some joined the Anti-Corn Law League. Robert Lowrey took up the cause of temperance; Lovett placed his hopes on educating workers; and O'Connor devoted himself to schemes for redistributing land. While a Ten-Hour Bill was passed in 1847 and the franchise was expanded in 1867, it was not until the 1880s that serious improvements in working class conditions were implemented.[75]

Women were active participants in the Chartist Movement, but found themselves trapped in the same conceptual boxes as the women who participated in abolitionism. While some male Chartist leaders championed female suffrage, their position was undermined by a more recurring theme in Chartist literature. To expose the desperate need for reform, many Chartists placed their emphasis on the damage that poor conditions and meager salaries had done to the family. A good man, they argued, provided for his family, and, for its good, women must remain in the home. When large numbers of men were out of work or could not provide adequately for their families, or when women entered the workplace, the patriarchal basis of society was threatened. As Jutta Schwarzkopf, the historian who has studied the role of women most carefully, notes, "Chartist advocacy of female domesticity was intimately bound up with the preservation of male dominance."[76]

After such an extended narrative, it may be useful to summarize the arguments that have been advanced about humanitarian movements and how they should be understood.

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Admittedly, much of what has been presented here will be known to those who are specialists in one and perhaps more than one of the movements. Specialists in, for example, American abolition, are unlikely to discover anything new.

But if the argument put forth here has any value, that value lies in its broader, comparative perspective rather than new information about particular movements. History has of course become increasingly specialized over the last few decades, making it difficult for scholars to keep up in their own fields, much less in several others. The enormity of the reading required to keep pace with research tends to defeat attempts to see common themes and patterns across different movements. The present essay is an attempt to move beyond the barriers of specialized practice to attempt such a synthesis.

And it is clear that the humanitarian movements considered here have many common characteristics and follow many of the same patterns that have not been noticed by historians. In the movements studied in this essay, the eighteenth century provided a context of natural rights and evangelical religion, both of which implied a new conception of personhood and a new standard by which human activities could be evaluated. "Am I not a man and brother?" asked the English abolitionists; "am I not a man?" asked the Chartists.

The eighteenth century in Great Britain was also a time of rapid demographic, economic, and communicative change. These changes transformed not only the ways information can be disseminated but the audience receiving it. In the early nineteenth century, similar changes appeared in the United States. At the same time, both areas were also experiencing a generalized reform ethos and demand for action in other areas. The leaders of humanitarian reforms movements are also willing to be selective in terms of the injustices they oppose, squabble among themselves, and are willing to be deceptive in advancing their cases.

The achievements of the reformers, however, are somewhat mixed. British antislavery succeeded in abolishing the slave trade and slavery itself, but it took forty-five years to accomplish it, and slave owners still found ways to subvert the system. Slavery was abolished in the United States, but more because of the Civil War than the abolitionists. Suffrage, the main goal of the early American women's movement, was not passed until 1919. And the Chartists failed to bring about significant reform.

If, however, success is reckoned in terms of being able to attract a wide spectrum of support, beyond those who would benefit from the reforms, the antislavery movements appear to have been more successful than those for workers and women. While both British and American antislavery attracted African leaders and supporters, the majority of their support came from whites, who would not benefit materially from abolition's success. On the other hand, suffrage movement and the Chartists consisted mainly, though not exclusively, of women and workers.

What seems to be essential in permitting a movement to expand beyond its initial core of supporters is the recognition that certain practices clash with the values that at least a significant segment of a nation's population perceives itself as possessing. This quality can be glimpsed most conspicuously in the importance to American reform of the "Declaration of Independence," a document every bit as revolutionary as *The Communist Manifesto*, though not necessarily in ways its authors imagined or intended. In the case of American antislavery, whether it was in the hands of Walker, Garrison, or any number of others, the Declaration served as a kind of Ockham's razor, demonstrating with compelling simplicity how utterly incompatible slavery was with the ideals on which a significant number of Americans wished to believe their nation was founded.

In the same way, antislavery movements in Britain took off when several court decisions exposed the ways in which slavery violated the constitutional principles that most Britons believed separated them from the rest of the world. Moreover, as Christopher L. Brown has shown, the loss of the American colonies was clear sign to many British observers that, because of slavery, they had lost God's favor. By contrast, the movements to provide relief for workers and liberate women did not succeed in convincing a significant part of the public that their conditions, however unjust, constituted a betrayal of a cherished national sense of identity.

It also appears that humanitarian reforms are most effective when they appeal to a combination of political and religious impulses. The two movements most able to bridge class and cultural barriers, British and American antislavery, drew deeply from the reservoir of ideas regarding justice and equality provided by rights theory and evangelical Christianity. The two least successful movements, women's suffrage and Chartism, while not without religious inspiration, were less able to utilize religious ideas. The Charter, for example, says little about religion.

Eileen Yeo, the historian who has undertaken the most serious investigation of Christianity and Chartism, concluded that "although a Christian consciousness was evident, nascent Chartist culture contained few religious forms or observances."[77] In the case of American women, invoking Christian teaching was even counterproductive, since *The Bible* contained many injunctions against the cause of female equality.

Reform ideology in this sense appears most effective when it is delivered as a series of intellectual scud missiles. Those who responded to antislavery because they perceived it as a violation of natural rights, did not necessarily respond to antislavery as a movement to uphold God's laws or vice versa. Both ideological threads, however, appear to be critical in capturing support, and the more missiles that can be launched the better.

Another crucial factor in the success of antislavery over women and workers was the popular sense that slaves were defenseless. We know now that slaves were actually quite resourceful in adapting to their circumstances and in some cases had even acquired clear notions of rights.[78] But in the abolitionist perception they existed in an intolerable condition, the personal property of another human being, shackled, whipped, and imprisoned in an unceasing nightmare of brutality with no chance to escape their fate.

By contrast industrial workers and women, however deplorable the conditions under which they lived and toiled, at least had options. Workers, male or female, could try to find work elsewhere. And, while it is easy today to see nineteenth century women as "domestic slaves;" it was hard for many at the time to see affluent women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton as people in need of protection.

Women also emerge as a particularly troublesome issue in humanitarian reform. Humanitarian reformers often welcomed their participation, and many women were eager to experience the sense of purpose and intellectual stimulation reform movements offered. Some male leaders, like Garrison, even sympathized with women's issues and saw women as the equals of men. Yet other male reformers did not regard them as equals and even some of the women reformers themselves feared stepping out of their traditional roles. The role of women proved to be one of the most consequential lines of division in American abolition. Chartist leaders never embraced women's issues, and, in the United States women themselves were divided on the best ways to secure reform.

Finally, on the basis of the argument presented here, it can be argued that Thomas Haskell's example of the "starving stranger," while no doubt useful in individual cases, is too narrow to explain much about the bigger picture. Humanitarian reforms do not arise simply because people recognize an injustice, discover ways to oppose it, and realize that inaction would be itself a moral failing. Humanitarian reforms arise in contexts that provide new information, ideologies, as well as new religious and political values. These contexts also alter the audiences receiving them, and expose previously acceptable practices as unacceptable. Once in progress, however, humanitarian movements are subject to the usual human failings. Their leaders practice deception, squabble with each other, and ignore other examples of injustice. Stubbornness, ego, and prejudice prevail. Those in need, starving strangers or otherwise, can still fall between the humanitarian cracks.

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[1] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition,* with an introduction by Ian Hacking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); for the cyclical nature of reform, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991).

[2] To the great benefit of students of shifts in humanitarian sensibility, the two most two distinguished and prolific scholars of slavery and abolition, David Brion Davis and Seymour Drescher, have recently published synthetic works, summing up a lifetime of study and reflection. For Davis, see his *Inhuman Bondage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and his other works, including *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) and *Slavery and Human Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); for Drescher, see *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and his *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Drescher has also studied the problems of industrial workers in *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Synthetic works on nineteenth-century reform in Great Britain include Oliver MacDonagh, "Nineteenth Century Reform: A Reappraisal," *Historical Journal,* 1(1958): 52-67, and Brian Harrison, "A Geneaology of Reform in Modern Britain," in Christine Bolt and Stanley Engerman, *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone: Archon, 1980), pp. 119-48; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Recently, there has

also been a lot of interesting work on the emergence of human rights. See Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Mark Mazower, "The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933-1950," *Historical Journal* 47, 2(2004): 379-98.

[3] Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *American Historical Review,* 90, 2(April, 1985): 339-361; Idem, "Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2, *AHR*, 90, 3(June, 1985): 547-67. Haskell's work also raised issues about the relationship between slavery and capitalism and generated an interesting debate. The relevant texts and main contributions were collected in Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolition as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). See also Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). In the end Haskell's critics rejected the idea of a connection between the two.

[4] Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (2nd ed., New York: Longman, 1999); Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesley* (Westmont, Il.: IVP Press, 2004); John Wolfe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers, and Finney* (Westmont, Il.: IVP Press, 2007).

[5] For a study of this kind of movement, see James A. Morrone, *Hellfire Nation: the Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

[6] Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

[7] Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian State* in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Selecting Writings of Martin Luther, 1517-1520* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 259-353; Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration* (London, 1620).

[8] Thomas Case is quoted in Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 10-11.

[9] For these points see Kenneth Clark, *Civilization: A Personal View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 296.

[10] Magda Goebbels is quoted in Modris Ecksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) p. 330; for a broader perspective, see Claudia Koontz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[11] Bartholome de Las Casas, *The Destruction of the Indies*, pp. 15-6.

[12] Davis, *Inhuman Bondage,* pp. 169-70.

[13] For a study of developments in eighteenth-century England, see Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); the information summarized in this section is presented in Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), pp. 213-20.

[14] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[15] Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820* (London: Routledge, 1985).

[16] For Colston, see Hochschild, *Bury the Chains,* p. 15.

[17] David Eltis, "Europeans and the Rise and Fall of African Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation," *AHR,* 88, 5(December, 1993): 1399-1423, see especially 1404-8.

[18] Oliver St. John, *Mr. St. John's Speech to the Lords…January 7th 1640 Concerning Ship Money* (London, 1640); A.S.P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1964), p. 53; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), esp. pp. 111-21. This is also the argument in Palmer, "How Ideology Works: The Case of British Abolitionism," *The Historical Journal* 52, 4(December, 2009): 1039-53.

[19] Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 152-3; Langford, *A Polite People,* pp. 248-50.

[20] James Otis, *The Rights of the American Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston, 1764) in Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965)*;* see also Palmer, "How Ideology Works," p. 1049, and Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke," in his *Puritanism and Revolution: The English Revolution of the 17th Century,* (New York: Schocken, 1958), pp. 50-122. More generally, see David Underdown's Ford Lectures, delivered in Oxford in 1992, and published as *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[21] Stephen M. White, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial that led to the End of Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2000); Davis, *Inhuman Bondage,* p. 234.

[22] Useful material on the Enlightenment can be found in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: Vol. I: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965) and *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: Vol. II: The Science of Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969). Gay attempts to connect the Enlightenment with humanitarian movements in *The Science of Freedom,* pp. 406-23. More recently, see Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[23] Haskell, "Capitalism and Humanitarian Sentiment," p. 339; see also Kathryn Shevelow, *For the Love of Animals: The Rise of the Animal Protection Movement* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008) for a study of the many movements that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century.

[24] Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Major Political Works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)*;* Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns,* edited by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 4 vols., 2: 762-3. Burns was by no means the first to proclaim a brotherhood of man, another idea whose political roots may be traced back at least to the English Revolution of the 1640s. See Christopher Hill, "The English Revolution and the Brotherhood of Man," in his *Puritanism and Revolution,* pp. 123-52.

[25] The narrative of British abolition can be followed in Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave Trade by the British Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1808)*;* Hochschild, *Bury the Chains;* Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 231-49; Drescher, *Abolition*, pp. 205-91.

[26] On the remarkable popular impact of antislavery campaigns, see Seymour Drescher, "Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and Ending the British Slave Trade," *Past and Present* 143(May, 1994), pp. 136-66; J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Antislavery: The Mobilization of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1878-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

[27] The figures cited here are in Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, p. 236.

[28] This is the main argument in Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1975).

[29] The paradoxes of Wilberforce's character are discussed in Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 124-6, 314-16.

[30] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* with a new introduction by Colin Palmer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 182.

[31] Hochschild, *Bury the Chains,* p. 124.

[32] Davis, *Inhuman Bondage,* pp. 234-8.

[33] Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* (Philadelphia, 1837); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1880* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 116.

[34] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery,* pp. 200-5.

[35] Ibid., pp. 161-2; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 82. The reasons why British and American women's movements diverged are too complex to explore here. Midgley cites the work of Kathryn Kish Sklar about why the events of 1840 Convention persuaded American but not British women to add feminism to their issues, see Sklar, "'Women who Speak for an Entire Nation;' American and British Women Compared at the World Antislavery Convention, London, 1840," *Pacific Historical Review* (1990): 453-99.

[H] For some general studies of American abolitionism, see Ronald Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)*;* James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976)*;* Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[37] For excellent, broader studies of these developments, see George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution* (New York: Rinehart, 1951)*;* Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought? The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 564.

[38] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[39] Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995)

[40] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought?* p. 227.

[41] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "A Lecture Read Before the Mechanics and Apprentices Library Association, January 25th, 1841" in Emerson, *Collected Works: Vol. I: Essays and Addresses* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 146.

[42] Ronald Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

[43] Morrone, *Hellfire Nation;* Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[44] Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings,* ed. By Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); see also David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[45] For a recent study of colonization schemes, see Eric Burrin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 2005).

[46] David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), p. 16.

[47] William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator,* January 1, 1831. For a biography of Garrison, see Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

[48] Garrison, *The Liberator,* January 1, 1831.

[49] Mayer, *All on Fire,* pp. 121-23.

[50] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought? p. 416.*

[51] Eric Foner, "Abolition and the Labor Movement in Antebellum America," in Holt and Engerman, *Essays in Memory of Anstey,* pp. 254-71, esp. pp. 258-63.

[52] For instructive works on early American women's movement, see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Anne M. Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism, 1797-1840* ((Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); an Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984); I have followed Clinton.

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[54] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought?* pp. 648-50.

[55] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), pp. 190-1, 197-200.

[56] See such classics as C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) and George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1952).

[57] Angelina Grimke, "Letter to *The Liberator,"* August 2, 1837.

[58] Clinton, *Other Civil War,* p. 74.

[59] Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010)*;* "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen," and Olympia des Gouges, "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman," can be found in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford, 1996), pp. 77-79 and pp. 124-29.

[60] Clinton, *Other Civil War, p. 76*

[61] Ibid., p. 79.

[62] Ibid., p. 93

[63] Ibid., p. 94; see also Ellen DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

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[71] For Lovett and the origins of the *People's Charter,* see *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett* (New York and London, 1984), pp. 164-70. The quotation may be found on p. 166.

[72] George Kitson Clark, "Hunger and Politics in 1842," *Journal of Modern History* 25(1953): 355-74. Chartism has also generated a vast and interesting theoretical literature. See, for example, Asa Briggs, "The Local Background of Chartism," in Briggs, ed., *Chartist Studies* (London: MacMillan, 1959; Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (London and Basingstoke, 1971); Gareth Stedman Jones, "Rethinking Chartism," in his *Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History, 1832-1860* (Cambridge, 1983): pp. 90-178; Geoffrey Claeys, "The Triumph of Class Consciousness in Reforming British Radicalism, 1790 to 1860," *Historical Journal* 4(1983); 969-85; Miles Taylor, "Rethinking the Chartist Movement: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism," *Historical Journal* 2(1996): 479-95; Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1979).

[73] James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1842* (London: Croon Helm, 1982); see also the interesting article, John Belcham and James Epstein, "The Nineteenth Century Gentleman Leader Revisited," *Social History* 22, 2(May, 1997): 174-93.

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[76] Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), pp. 268-9.

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[78] For a superb discussion of the slaves' concept of rights, see Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 61-4. Her view of the steps by which the Demerara slaves decided to rebel, closely parallels the argument presented here about what influenced white men to oppose slavery, namely, the converging of ideas of political rights and equality with ideas of religious rights and equality.