

A. Forrest

**THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA
AND THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE**

***Abstract.** The article studies the consequences of the slave trade prohibition by Britain in 1807 and the influence of this Act on the elaboration of the joint declaration condemning the slave trade during the Congress of Vienna and its role in the Anglo-French relations from 1807 to 1830-s. The other key issues are obstacles of the slave trade ban enforcement, regional economic changes, and the Atlantic politics of the main maritime states.*

***Keywords:** slavery, abolitionism, slave trade, triangular trade, commercial diplomacy, Caribbean, maritime states, West Africa, maritime traffic.*

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А. Форрест. Венский конгресс и трансатлантическая работорговля

***Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются последствия запрета работорговли Великобританией в 1807 г. Оценивается влияние данного закона на выработку совместной декларации на Венском конгрессе, а также на англо-французские взаимоотношения до 1830-х годов. Отдельное внимание уделяется трудностям реализации запрета, региональным экономическим изменениям и атлантической политике ведущих морских держав.*

***Ключевые слова:** рабство, аболиционизм, работорговля, треугольная торговля, торговая дипломатия, Карибы, морские державы, Западная Африка, морское сотрудничество.*

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The Congress of Vienna was seized upon by British abolitionists as an unrivalled opportunity to advance their cause in Europe. Since 1807, when Britain had abolished its own Atlantic slave trade, reformers had pressed hard to end

slaving entirely; for many, like Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce, theirs was the supreme moral cause of the age and one which it was Britain's duty to press on other European leaders. Abolition was seen as a potent symbol of Britain's protestant morality, and abolitionists clamoured for action, unwilling to be «answerable for the guilt» of doing nothing [18, p. 125]. At the Congress of Vienna British ministers did try, though without great success, to impose their moral view of the world on all the signatory nations, driven by abolitionist demands in parliament and by public opinion at home [20, p. 46]. In particular, the British were eager to impose the cause of abolition on France, traditionally their most bitter rival in the North Atlantic, and now that they had, as they saw it, taken a full part in Napoleon's defeat, they were reluctant to allow the French to profit from a trade which Britain had voluntarily disavowed. For Wilberforce, Clarkson and other leading abolitionists the issue became the touchstone by which the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, and the entire ministry would be judged. Would they impose Christian values on the French, or would they risk being seen in Britain as having been outmanoeuvred by Louis XVIII and Talleyrand? It was a public relations issue at home before it was a diplomatic issue abroad.

For the abolitionists there was little room for compromise. In April 1815, at the moment of Napoleon's abdication, they were already planning for total abolition across Europe. In a private letter Wilberforce wrote that he was «extremely occupied, both mind and thoughts, with considering about, and taking measures for effecting a convention among the great powers for the abolition of the slave trade» [12, p. 356]. Samuel Whitbread, speaking to the Commons on April 28, expressed the hope that «in the pending congress a decisive declaration would be made by all the allies against the continuance of this nefarious traffic; and that this declaration would be followed up by efficient acts on the part of each of those allies; at least, that the utmost influence of this country would be used to promote this desirable and desired end» [14, p. 576, House of Commons, 28 April 1814]. Wilberforce went further, arguing before the House on 2 May that «there never was a period when the general circumstances of all nations were more favourable to such a motion than the present, and when there existed such powerful motives for them to accede to its object». It was surely, he continued, an unrivalled opportunity «when all the great powers of Europe were assembled in congress to consider and discuss the very elements, as it were, of their own political rights». He then, not uncharacteristically, got carried away by the religious import of the moment, concluding that, when he examined the «extraordinary succession of providential events which had placed the world in its present state of hope and security, he could not but contemplate in them the hand of the Almighty stretched out for the deliverance of mankind» [14, p. 637; 2 May 1814].

Wilberforce's view found many echoes in the churches and meeting houses of Methodist, Baptist and Quaker Britain where some of the most committed

abolitionists congregated. Many believed – in the words of Dissenters in Derby – that it was a specifically Christian cause, and that slavery was «a system full of wickedness, hateful to God, and a curse and disgrace to Britain» [19, p. 31; 32, p. 155–156]. They convinced themselves that with the defeat of Napoleon it was now only a matter of time before the Atlantic slave trade would be abolished. But if they thought it would happen overnight, they were to be disappointed. Abolition would be the subject of extended diplomatic negotiation, first at Paris, then at Vienna, and during Castlereagh's ministry between 1815 and 1822 [25, p. 192].

The abolition lobby at Westminster – «the Saints» in the slightly sarcastic language of their contemporaries – made no attempt to hide its ambition to force through abolitionist measures in France and the other slaving nations of Continental Europe, whether or not their rulers acquiesced. They believed that the colonies which Britain had captured during the war, from France and Spain in particular, would now provide London with excellent bargaining counters in the negotiations to follow. Britain, it was implied, had won its war with France, on land in the Peninsula as well as at sea and in the colonies, and it followed that the peace should be Britain's, too. They urged the government to press home its diplomatic advantage, first recruiting those countries which had no direct interest in the slave trade (Russia, Prussia and Austria), then putting pressure on the Dutch to heed «the wishes of the British nation», before trying to wrest concessions from Spain and France. Some wanted to link the return of captured colonies to commitments to abolish slaving. Others were intent on stopping France, Spain and Portugal from trading in slaves with immediate effect. Clarkson, believing that Louis XVIII was broadly sympathetic, suggested that the cession of an additional West Indian island to France could be the price of immediate French abolition. Talleyrand, who resisted any such immediate legislation for France, remarked that for the English the slave question had become «a passion carried to fanaticism and one which the ministry is no longer at liberty to check» [26, p. 132–135]. This perception was widely shared, and it could be a handicap for British diplomacy when it sought to press the abolitionist cause. Castlereagh remarked to Lord Liverpool in October 1814 that the extent of domestic pressure that was being exerted on this single issue restricted his diplomatic flexibility, and he complained of «the display of popular impatience which has been excited and is kept up in England upon this subject» [1, p. 388].

Interestingly, only seven years after Britain's own abolition the Atlantic slave trade, few voices were raised to challenge the wisdom of abolition. In 1806–1807, of course, in the run-up to abolition, there had been protests and petitions, notably from the Atlantic slaving ports and the great industrial cities; but they were always, as in the case of Liverpool or Manchester, couched in economic terms. And for that reason, argues Seymour Drescher, they had been unable to muster much popular support. «Because it hung on the single thread of capital alone», he argues,

«the allegiance to the slave trade virtually died with abolition» [10, p. 189]. In contrast, the abolitionists were formidably well organised, ready at any moment to stir up the public's sense of moral outrage. In 1806, for instance, among the cotton interests in Manchester there were many who, not unreasonably, were anxious for the future of their trade and their city's prosperity. When a petition circulated by the anti-abolitionists in Manchester obtained over 400 signatories, many protesting that their livelihood would be threatened if abolition were to pass into law, Clarkson leapt into action, circulating an abolitionist petition in the city that overnight gained 2300 signatories. The names were collected swiftly, since the petition had to reach the Lords in time for the second reading of the bill; with an extra day's campaigning, the abolitionists were confident that they could have secured twice that number. With the wider public, it seemed, trade could always be trumped by non-conformist zeal [4, p. 142–144].

The slave traders themselves were not so easy to win over. In the years between Britain's Act of Abolition in 1807 and the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1814, British slaving had not been completely suppressed: Zachary Macaulay, the secretary of the African Institution, listed 36 suspected slave ships leaving Liverpool alone in 1809 [31, p. 298]. But over time Britain's slaving ports had been able to diversify and to take full advantage of the new commercial opportunities that her overseas empire provided. By 1814, when the abolitionists were able to claim a high level of support in Liverpool, commercial interests had not been entirely silenced, but, with a few exceptions, they were no longer directed towards the restoration of the slave trade. Rather they feared a resurgence of French trade on the back of slaving which would be to Britain's lasting disadvantage. At a Liverpool petition meeting at which John Gladstone put the merchants' case, he sought to end the slaving activities of Britain's rivals. «Not only would France benefit by the lack of competition in Africa», he argued, «but it would thereby win the European market for tropical staples, restoring the pre-war British inferiority on the Continent» [10, p. 190]. The solution was to stop French slaving rather than restore the trade in England. But overall what is most notable is that trading concerns played such a minor part in what was, even in Liverpool, overwhelmingly perceived as a moral debate.

In France, the debate between abolitionists and anti-abolitionists was more evenly-balanced. Nor was the cause of anti-slavery widely linked to religion in a country where the voices raised against slavery more commonly resorted to the language of enlightenment in the manner of Montesquieu or the Abbé Grégoire [20, p. 96]. For many the slave trade appeared an economic necessity if the country was ever to recover its former prosperity or to be able to compete commercially with Britain. Abolitionism spelt decline and decay, especially in the port cities of the Atlantic. Some apologists went further, arguing that there was nothing immoral about agricultural slavery, that Britain was acting not out of moral outrage but

in order to impose her commercial dominance, even that Britain's sole interest in abolishing the trade was as a means of finding extra manpower to fight her American wars. Nationalist outrage played too: there was understandable opposition to Britain's claims to board French commercial ships at will. As for the Bourbon monarchy, while Louis XVIII might seek to appease Britain in the diplomatic context of 1814 and was prepared to make general, if unspecified, commitments to the future abolition of the slave trade, he had no interest in standing in the way of France's economic recovery or in antagonising his Iberian neighbours. There was also widespread resentment of what was seen as British bullying on the question, its attempts to introduce in peacetime a practice that had only been sanctioned in international law in war [9, p. 345]. Besides, anti-slavery as a moral cause did not arouse the same level of indignation in Catholic France as in Protestant England. Perhaps it was because the great Catholic nations of Iberia were so deeply involved in the slave trade; perhaps because the Pope did not get round to condemning slavery until 1839. In any case the movement for religious anti-slavery developed only slowly, largely through the work of the *Société de la morale chrétienne* in the 1820s¹. Only then do we see a flurry of works condemning the slave trade, while influential English publications, like Thomas Clarkson's *Le cri des Africains*, became available in French translation [4].

Clarkson enjoyed an unusual level of popularity and exposure in France, and not just because he was a well-known English abolitionist. He had, amongst the English anti-slavery campaigners, a unique knowledge of the French Antilles, and had championed the cause of those black insurgents in Haiti who had thrown off their colonial shackles and had ended the bondage of their fellow citizens. He also, between 1816 and 1820, would sustain a regular correspondence with the Haitian king, Henry Christophe, offering his advice on diplomatic and political matters. That correspondence, which was maintained until the King's death, had begun when Christophe contacted Clarkson seeking his advice. The English abolitionist had already an established reputation, and his anti-slavery society – the African Institution – had followers throughout the Caribbean. As Clarkson recounts the receipt of Christophe's first letter, it was a moment to savour: «The King wrote me a letter in which he was pleased to say that “he had heard of my exertions to abolish the Slave Trade, for which he, in common with those of his race, could not feel too thankful; that he had a just abhorrence of it; and would do all he could do suppress it, either by subscription to the society [the African Institution] in London, or by anything he could do at home; that he should forever love the English nation

1. [23]. *The Society was one of the few specifically Christian organisations in France to play an active role in the campaign against the illegal slave trade after 1820.*

for their generosity towards Africa; and that he would endeavour, by degrees, to introduce their laws and constitution into Haiti”»².

Clarkson, Wilberforce and other English abolitionists were gradually able to influence French public opinion, too, arguably to more effect than the diplomatic manoeuvrings of the British government at Vienna.

France was, of course, only one of the major European players in the Black Atlantic. Spain and Portugal continued to operate fleets of slaving vessels between Africa and South America. Nor should we forget that this debate was only about European involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. It did not concern the institution of slavery in the colonies of the Latin America and the Caribbean, where all European powers, Britain included, continued to operate slave economies until at least the 1830s. Nor did it affect the slave states of the United States, where slavery remained in force until the Civil War in 1861. In the Caribbean, Cuba would prove a valued place of refuge for planters and their slaves fleeing the violence in Saint-Domingue³. Not even Britain thought of abolishing the institution of slavery in 1815: Africans remained enslaved in Britain’s American colonies until the mid-1830s. As a consequence, slavery and abolition would remain at the heart of Atlantic politics not only during the Restoration but across much of the nineteenth century. Little could be achieved immediately.

Britain’s campaign to force abolition on France was already stagnating at a moment when Europe’s diplomatic efforts – and, indeed, Britain’s own priorities – were concentrated on other, more pressing issues. After a quarter of a century at war, the continent needed to establish the basis for a lasting peace. Carving up Napoleon’s annexed territories in Europe, building buffers between the great powers and organising dynastic settlements occupied centre stage, and Castlereagh’s moral concerns over slavery were quickly relegated to the periphery. The Treaty of Paris in May 1814 proved a disappointment for the abolitionists, as it addressed only the future of the French slave trade, excluding mention of any of the other slaving powers. And it did not give them the clear victory they sought. Under the terms of the Treaty, France was given back her Caribbean colonies but was not forced to agree to an immediate suspension of slaving. Instead, she was to be allowed a five-year period of grace during which to run down the slave trade and realign her commerce, five years in which slaves from West Africa would continue to repopulate the plantations in the West Indies and restore a flourishing slave economy to the islands [3, p. 195].

This outcome was seen by the more fervent abolitionists as a failure, an opportunity that had been shamefully allowed to pass, and in the wake of the

2. Clarkson’s unpublished *Autobiography*, quoted in: [18, p. 63].

3. For a discussion of the impact of events in Haiti on the plantation economy of Cuba, see: [35].

Treaty they collected over a million signatures from some 850 communities across the British Isles for a petition calling for universal abolition which they presented to Parliament just before the visit of the Tsar and the King of Prussia to London in June 1814 [3, p. 196]. Wilberforce was even granted an audience with Alexander, and the abolitionists were able to provide both the Russian emperor and the Prussian King with bound copies of the evidence they had collected on the evils of the Atlantic slave trade [18, p. 125]. They hoped for their support when they met at Vienna, the meeting which they saw as their greatest opportunity to remove a moral stain from the European continent.

Again they were to be disappointed. France was not alone in rejecting Britain's demands. The other European slaving nations, which included Holland and Denmark as well as Spain and Portugal, were equally resistant, observing that Britain's attempts to police her own slaving voyages had been less than whole-hearted. For in the years following the Act of Abolition, British slave ships had continued to ply the Atlantic, taking their human cargoes illegally to Jamaica or the American South, or quite legally to Cuba, which rapidly turned into a major *entrepôt* for the entire Caribbean region. Some took to smuggling slaves; others concealed their identity beneath foreign flags, most commonly those of Spain and Portugal; while British bankers, insurers and manufacturers all connived in the trade to a greater or lesser degree [31, p. 293–295]. Despite British protestations, the trade was not stamped out in Britain, though the number of slaves transported was greatly reduced. In a Commons debate in April 1815, another anti-slavery campaigner, Dennis Browne, made it clear that in his opinion ministers needed extraordinary powers if even the British slave trade were to be effectively halted. To this end he wanted the capitalization and insurance of slave ships to be made a criminal offence. For, he noted, «it was a well-known fact that at the present moment a large British capital was employed in British ships in this trade, to which practice there was now a much stronger temptation than at any former period, the price of slaves being from 250 to 400 pounds each» [15, p. 658, 14 Apr. 1815].

Europeans also noted the role which Britain had played in the war years since 1807, when it had taken upon itself to police the Atlantic shipping routes and prowl around the west coast of Africa, claiming the right to board and arrest the vessels of other nations, including neutrals, which were engaged in slaving. These initiatives centred on the Court of Vice-Admiralty that was established in 1807 at Sierra Leone, whose Chief Judge, Robert Thorpe, a British barrister and a committed abolitionist, showed quite exceptional ardour in prosecuting ships' captains caught with slaves on board their vessels, regardless of where the ships were intercepted and with little regard to their nationality. He claimed a jurisdiction that extended far beyond the African coastline, and applied the law to all the prizes brought in by the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron, the small naval force charged with the defence of the West African coast. Spanish and Portuguese, Dutch and Danish

ships were intercepted and arrested, along with a large number of American vessels, their captains were condemned, and the ships and their cargoes seized and sold, leading to a predictable outcry in the foreign ports concerned and to judicial appeals, some of which were upheld. For those countries that held territory in West Africa did have a legal right to trade; in Portugal's case, and in some others, this was confirmed in a bilateral treaty with Britain. Thorpe effectively took the law into his own hands, inventing norms based on a mixture of British law, treaty law and such laws as were laid down by humanity and natural justice. The result, as Tara Helfman reminds us, served to place British jurisdiction above the international law of the sea. In her words: «The resulting judicial policy was expansive in its grasp, rendering any slave ship not explicitly protected by treaty with Britain open to capture by British ships and condemnation by British courts. It put the Royal Navy and the Court of Vice Admiralty at Sierra Leone in the unique position of being the enforcers of a near-universal ban on the slave trade» [17, p. 1138]. Even in Britain itself judicial opinion on the right of arrest was unclear [20, p. 63].

It is therefore unremarkable that in much of continental Europe the debate swung from the immorality of the Atlantic slave trade to the legal rights of shipping in neutral waters and on the high seas, and focussed increasingly on the role played by the Royal Navy and its West Africa Station⁴. For what Britain was claiming was nothing less than the right to police the seas and to arrest ships of other countries which were suspected of engaging in the slave trade, a right that was not intended to be reciprocal. In wartime it may have been possible to claim and exercise this right against the ships of belligerent powers or those suspected of working for the enemy: that was more or less acceptable under international law. But to extend these powers to peacetime and to the normal conditions of trade was unprecedented, and for other rulers to accept Britain's claims in this domain would imply a diminution of their own sovereignty, which might easily be regarded – as it was by Louis XVIII – as something of a humiliation, international recognition that he was subservient to Britain and in no position to insist on complete sovereignty. In the eyes of his own people he would seem weak and diminished, with the consequence that he was not prepared to discuss maritime rights at Vienna a sentiment shared with monarchs across Europe, not just by France. Britain's position was not favourably viewed by any of her continental allies, even those, like Prussia and Russia, which had little at stake in the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. Since 1807 they had watched as Britain exercised her right of search on the high seas, tried and imprisoned ships' captains suspected of slaving, and ordered that their cargoes be freed, only in many cases to find themselves recruited

4. For an overview of the Navy's role, see: [33].

into the British army or navy. In their eyes the right of search for the purposes of slave trade abolition could not be divorced from the related question of maritime rights, and though Britain was in a strong diplomatic position in 1814, her aspirations in this domain were viewed with intense suspicion by all the other powers, who perceived British claims as an abuse of her position of maritime supremacy [28, p. 235].

In 1815 things changed, as the Hundred Days gave new impetus to the campaign against the Atlantic trade in slaves. Almost immediately on his return to Paris, on 29 March 1815, Napoleon issued a decree from the Tuileries abolishing the slave trade. From that date, it stated, no expeditions would be authorised either from French ports or from those of France's colonies. And though slavers who had already left were authorised to complete their voyages and sell their cargoes, they would be the last. In future no blacks could be taken legally into France's colonies for sale, whether by French ships or by others⁵. The terms seemed incontrovertible and appeared to indicate a remarkable change of heart by the Emperor. Yet Napoleon was no abolitionist; he had already restored slavery to other French Caribbean possessions, in Guadeloupe and Guyane, and his apparent conversion to the cause of abolition must be understood as a political manoeuvre rather than a gesture of principle, part of an attempt to change his image and reinvent himself as a man of the people in the tradition of the French Revolution [16, p. 44]. Besides, he showed little interest in enforcing abolition, and within a week of the decree's promulgation a slave-ship from Nantes was already on the high seas, sailing with apparent impunity to the coast of West Africa. But for British abolitionists it seemed propitious. They might not trust Napoleon to deliver on his promise. They might equally work for his overthrow by voting military credits for the Allied armies. But the moment had a crucial symbolic significance for them. France had joined Britain in abolishing the trade, something they had been demanding since 1807, and their main concern now turned to the second restoration that was to follow. Could Louis XVIII be trusted to outlaw the traffic? Would the Bourbons respect legislation that had been passed by the Usurper? In Vienna the British government signed a proposed clause for the final treaty that promised immediate abolition north of the Equator. But Talleyrand was already taking steps to protect his King's freedom of manoeuvre, inserting a revised wording whereby Louis would give his consent only after he was assured that «the actual state and needs of his colonies ... permitted him to do so». His aim was purely diplomatic: as he assured Louis, «we ceded nothing and nevertheless the English are content with us» [20, p. 53].

5. *Imperial decree abolishing the slave trade, 29 March 1815* [2, p. 345].

Following Waterloo and Napoleon's second abdication, Britain's diplomatic hand was considerably strengthened, while abolitionists at Westminster sensed that their moment had come. In the peace negotiations that opened in Paris Britain sought to impose on the French an undertaking to abolish the trade and an acceptance of Britain's *droit de visite* on French commercial shipping. This would prove difficult to enforce, of course, and various compromises were agreed which meant that abolition would not take place right away, to allow French ports and French merchants a period of adjustment, but the deal satisfied Wilberforce and the abolitionist lobby in the British Parliament. For France it opened a period of much-reduced profits, with merchants and ships' captains forced into an illicit trade that was policed at sea by the British, and soon also the French, navies, and was exposed to both moral obloquy and criminal prosecution. But the French were lax in enforcing the law, and before 1831 – when an Anglo-French agreement was finally signed – arrests were comparatively rare [5, p. 430]. And it did not kill the French triangular trade. For the British abolitionists this was a bitter disappointment. The French, they felt, had been allowed to regain Martinique and Guadeloupe without being held to a clear abolitionist agenda. Others continued to resist, or to seek a prolongation of their trade [9, p. 343–358]. Spain and Portugal prevaricated and imposed their own conditions, so that south of the Equator the Congress of Vienna had little impact.

Castlereagh and the British delegation did not leave Vienna empty-handed: it was just that most of what they achieved consisted of promises for the future, of statements of intent rather than clear political commitments. In a recent study of the Congress settlement David King tries to portray this achievement in as positive a light as possible, given that the diplomats and political leaders present had more pressing matters to settle with regard to the balance of power on the Continent. «On February 8, 1815, just days before his expected departure», he writes, «Castlereagh could finally point to some success», when the Great Powers issued a joint declaration condemning the slave trade in seemingly unequivocal terms, describing it as «repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality». They further agreed in the importance of ending a scourge that had so long «desolated Africa, degraded Europe and afflicted humanity», though there was no clear commitment as to quite when that would happen. The slave trade should be abolished as soon as possible; but only the Dutch could be pressurized into immediate abolition. France promised to do so in five years, Spain and Portugal agreed on eight years. Yet it was a start, and Britain took some satisfaction from it: human rights, for the first time, had been made a subject of a peace conference, and it looked as if anti-slavery had become a moral force that was difficult to counter [21, p. 217]. Indeed, Wilberforce admitted privately, after meeting Castlereagh on his return from Vienna, that «I believe all done that could be done» [20, p. 54].

But if slaving could not be policed, then that achievement was only relative, and arguments over the right to board suspect vessels dragged on. Castlereagh was not wholly averse to some sort of compromise here, since he was well aware of the sensitivities the policy could cause. With the Americans – who had already abandoned the slave trade – that compromise was easier to achieve: in 1817 he offered the new American ambassador to London, Richard Rush, «a reciprocal right of search for slaves, and a limited number of the armed vessels of each of the maritime states to be empowered to search» [1, p. 446]. But France presented the British government with an altogether more difficult problem. Louis XVIII had domestic concerns to address, especially in the merchant ports of the Atlantic coast, and he could not be seen to be giving in to British pressure while an army of occupation remained on French territory, as this would give the impression that Britain was simply dictating terms to him. Castlereagh had to make do with statements of intent which he could present to the British Parliament as a more limited diplomatic triumph. A further conference called for 1816 in London also failed to produce binding agreements. But the assurances given by the French at least had the result of diverting the main thrust of abolitionist attack from France to Spain, which refused to take any action until 1823, and then only north of the Equator. A series of bilateral treaties with Holland, Spain and Portugal placed limits on their liberty to trade (in the cases of Spain and Portugal, Britain paid out £700,000 each in compensation [1, p. 447]). But Britain's right to stop ships which were suspected of slaving remained contested and had no basis in international law until it was finally recognised by an agreement signed between Britain and Louis-Philippe's France in 1831.

How effective was it? Ships were rarely stopped on the high seas, or in mid-Atlantic. Rather, searches were concentrated around the African coast, at those points like the Bight of Benin or the Bight of Biafra that were the centres of trade with African kings and slavers; in the waters off the French Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique; or on the approaches to Cuba, where many French planters from Saint-Domingue had fled to resume their slave economy in Santiago de Cuba and its hinterland, and where, in the east of the island, they formed an important ethnic community [27; 22]. Off West Africa the British had the added advantage of a string of forts, whereas the French had only one, on Gorée [13, p. 227]. Here a number of French slave ships were stopped and arrested, and the volume of French slaving diminished as a consequence. But the trade was not eliminated; rather, the presence of British patrols off traditional slaving regions of West Africa, like Seregambia and the Gold Coast, had the effect of pushing the slave ships further south, to West Central Africa and the Bight of Biafra. From there ships of all the European slaving nations continued shipping Africans to the Caribbean; it was just that Cuba had replaced Saint-Domingue as their favoured slave market. In the twenty years to 1835 nearly 40,000 captives were shipped

from the Bight of Biafra into slavery in the Americas [24, p. 184]. In this context Britain's supposed victory on the issue at Vienna and in the bilateral treaties that followed must have seemed insignificant.

Many merchants in Nantes and Bordeaux sought to resume slaving as soon as the years of war and blockade were over. Some tried to conceal the identity of their vessels, or sailed back into foreign ports like Hamburg or Antwerp to avoid the waiting warships [6, p. 97]. Others sailed with false papers. Nantes – a port city whose wealth before the Revolution had been made through the slave trade – found it especially difficult to adapt to the new world order, and many businesses now sought to recoup the losses of the war years by returning to the trade in black ebony. As early as January 1815, we know of three ships – the *Cultivateur*, the *Bonne-Mère*, and the *Sénégalaise* – fitted out in Nantes, crewed with men from Brittany, from Nantes and Pornic, Lorient and Paimboeuf, which sailed for West Africa, loaded with silks and guns and all the usual accoutrements of the African trade. Their somewhat mixed fortunes reflect the precarious nature of the times. Of the three, only the *Sénégalaise* completed its voyage unimpeded. The *Bonne-Mère* was at anchor in Guadeloupe on 10 August 1815 when the island capitulated to the British; it was seized in the roads off Pointe-à-Pitre and treated by the British admiralty courts as an enemy ship, even though the war between France and Britain had ended nearly two months earlier at Waterloo [30, p. 155]. The *Cultivateur* was arguably even more unlucky as it in turn fell foul of British efforts to police the Atlantic. When it left Saint-Nazaire on 1 April it was respecting both French and British law at the time; and it also respected the restrictions that had been placed on African trading. But this did not prevent its being arrested by a British schooner at Bonny, or being taken back to Plymouth for trial. On 16 November the ship was finally released by the High Court of Admiralty, and an indemnity paid. It set out again for the coast of West Africa in May 1816 on a second slaving voyage [8, 11].

The numbers tell their own story. French involvement in the *traite* diminished as the hustling and interception increased, and more and more captains decided that the risk of capture was simply too great. But it cannot all be put down to the effect of British pressure. The loss of Saint-Domingue had greatly reduced the demand for slaves in the Caribbean, with the consequence that the economics of the slave trade was now less certain. And there is evidence that the moral campaign against slavery was having an effect, as abolitionist tracts were published in ever-greater numbers and English campaigners like Thomas Clarkson were more widely read in French. As alternative commercial opportunities were found – in the Levant, North Africa and the East Indies, for instance – the popularity of the African slave trade fell away, most particularly in ports along the Mediterranean littoral like Marseille. But during the Restoration the abolitionists could claim only a partial success. The illegal slave trade of Bordeaux and Nantes did not wither overnight.

No comprehensive figures exist for slave voyages in these years, as they were necessarily clandestine, but such statistics as we do have are suggestive of a much wider flouting of the law. Between 1814 and 1826 Eric Saugera lists more than forty vessels leaving Bordeaux alone for the African coast, heading to Calabar, or Gorée, or Senegal – with one firm responsible for five different voyages [29, p. 361–362]. And French slave voyages were just the tip of a much larger iceberg. For the ships' owners and their sea captains the risks were still worth taking. During the Restoration years some 3000 slave ships were still plying the Atlantic, most between West Africa and South America or the Caribbean. The abolitionists in London had relatively little to cheer about: indeed, Serge Daget concludes rather bleakly that «all the conditions of the traditional slave trade are still present in this period, scarcely diminished by illegality and repression» [7, p. 90].

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