Visualizing Abolition
A Digital History of the Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 1808-1900

Dr. Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, Department of History, dominguesd@missouri.edu
Dr. Linda Reeder, Department of History, reederls@missouri.edu

General project synopsis and timeline: The suppression of the African slave trade marks a watershed in human history. It not only ended what we consider today as an abominable trade, but it also changed the way we view slavery, from a widely accepted institution to a morally wrong practice. Since Great Britain was the leading nation in this process, the British have received far more attention than any other nation. However, given the duration and geographic scope of the campaign, it is unlikely that such men acted alone. This project builds on ongoing research with the Slave Trade Series of the British Parliamentary Papers to map the suppression of the traffic and examine how British abolitionism evolved during the nineteenth century. It will expand a database of approximately 30,000 records of letters composed by British officials, commissioners, naval officers, diplomats, and representatives of foreign nations involved in the campaign and provide an analysis of these letters in a digital exhibition available online.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, we will assemble a team of undergraduate students (August-September) who will access the British Parliamentary Papers; add on to the database of letters, analyze the data collected, create a website (September-March); and report the research findings at several academic events (February-November). Students will have a unique opportunity to work with two professional historians, gain research experience, master new skills in the growing field of digital history and collaborative research, and develop materials for their professional portfolio. The project will also enhance the History Department's new Public History Emphasis, where students will build on a foundation of traditional research to make these findings accessible to a wide audience. Public History training makes students more well-rounded and versatile, existing at the crossroads of research, education, archiving, and, in our case, web design.

Brief description of student majors and skills required: This project requires 8 undergraduate students. Preference will be given to students interested in history and public history with an emphasis on the digital humanities, though other majors will be considered. Some of the main skills required include critical thinking, writing, managing time, working within a team, and website building. We hope to attract students interested in both conducting research outside the classroom and presenting their work professionally. We will recruit students enrolled in the PIs' classes and through announcements distributed to the History Department and other relevant departments such as Black Studies, English, Strategic Communications, Geography, etc.

Project description: The suppression of the African slave trade represents a dramatic moment in history. It not only ended one of the world's largest forced migrations, but it also changed the way we view slavery, from a well-established institution to a morally wrong practice. Great Britain played a key role in this process. In 1808, a year after the Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act ending the British involvement in the trade, Great Britain engaged in a campaign to suppress the entire traffic. It signed treaties with foreign nations aimed at gradually abolishing the trade, established international courts to adjudicate vessels accused of violating those agreements, and deployed a naval squadron to patrol the coasts of Africa and the Americas. Never before had a commercial activity of global proportions been attacked in such a consistent way.

Although many more people contributed to the suppression of the trade, early historians of abolition have focused mainly on the role of the British. As early as 1869, W.E.H. Lecky boasted, "the unwearied, unostentatious, and inglorious crusade of England against slavery may probably be regarded as among the three or four perfectly virtuous acts recorded in the history of nations."[1] Others argue that the British were economically interested in the suppression of the trade. Eric Williams, for example, believes that slavery and the slave trade helped finance the Industrial Revolution in England but, when industrialization reached maturity, "the British West Indian monopoly, prohibiting the importation of non-British plantation sugar for home consumption, stood in the way."[2] Other historians have rejected this explanation, noting that not only plantation slavery in the West Indies was expanding during abolition; the British were actually committing an economic suicide by retreating from the business. Seymour Drescher points out, "Economic interests cannot account for either the timing, the occurrence, or the maintenance of the abolition of the slave trade between 1787 and 1820."[3] Still others, like David Brion Davis, emphasize a cultural explanation, claiming that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "an increasing number of of men on both sides of the Atlantic, saw modern slavery as a moral contradiction, as a force incompatible with natural law, Christianity, the progress of scientific enlightenment, or the mission of American democracy."[4]

More recently, some historians have criticized these explanation as too naïve and Eurocentric. They have also sought to challenge the self-congratulatory frame in which British politicians cast the bicentennial of the 1807 Abolition Act. Consequently, these historians expanded their scope of analysis to examine how British intentions and objectives changed over time and by the nations and governments they encountered. Robin Law, for example argues that abolitionism was, "inherently imperialist, since it involved a proposed alternative course for the development of Africa."[5] Christopher Brown traces the origins of this proposal to the imperial desires and

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[1] W.E.H. Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869).

[2] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 154.

[3] Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 183.

[4] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 29.

[5] Robin Law, "Abolitionism and Imperialism: International Law and the British Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade," in *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, ed. Derek R. Peterson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 150.

ideas of early eighteenth-century profiteers and speculators, who had, "the capacity to imagine the future as radically different from the past, a vision for enterprise in Africa centered on agricultural exports, the ability to argue in the language of national interest."[6] Derek Peterson notes that, although the British played an important role in the suppression of the trade, abolitionism was more than an extension of British liberal ideas. It was a "theater in which a variety of actors - slaves, African rulers, Caribbean planters, working-class radicals, African political entrepreneurs, Christian evangelicals - played a part."[7]

Visualizing Abolition: A Digital History of the Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 1808-1900 seeks to map for the first time the spread of British abolitionism around the world and examine how it changed over time. The project has built a database of nearly 31,000 records of letters composed by British officials, commissioners, naval officers, diplomats, and representatives of foreign nations involved in the campaign. The database currently provides information on the names of the letters' authors as well as their receivers in addition to the letters' date, place of origin, and source. This information allowed us to identify some of the main patterns in the geographic and chronological distribution of the letters, such as the peak in the correspondence exchanged in the mid-1840s and the shift in the campaign from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean in the 1860s. We had the pleasure of presenting these preliminary results in a paper Dr. Domingues presented with an undergraduate student, Ms. Katelyn Ziegler, at the 58th Annual Missouri Conference on History.[8] Ms. Ziegler later presented some of our research findings in a poster presentation at the Spring 2016 Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievements Forum at the University of Missouri.[9] However, there is still plenty to learn from both the material we collected and the data we intend to collect.

The Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (ASH) Scholars Program grant will allow us to further explore the British Parliamentary Papers and expand our database of letters. We will first collect information on the delivery date and destination of the correspondence. Second, since many of the letters provide a summary of their content, we will transcribe those summaries to our database and author our own where these are absent. Every British commissioner stationed abroad had to send an annual report on the state of the slave trade at their site. We will thus flag these reports from the pool of thousands of letters and transcribe them. These efforts will enable us to enrich our database, create more comprehensive digital maps of the suppression of the traffic, and trace the network of correspondents across the globe. They will also allow us to move beyond quantitative analyses and examine the campaign efforts qualitatively, that is, through the actual content of the letters, especially the commissioners' annual reports.

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[6] Christopher Leslie Brown, "Empire without America: British Plans for Africa in the Era of the American Revolution," in *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, ed. Derek R. Peterson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 93.

[7] Derek R. Peterson, "Abolitionism and Political Thought in Britain and East Africa," in *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, ed. Derek R. Peterson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 27.

[8] Daniel B. Domingues da Silva and Katelyn E. Ziegler, "Mapping the Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1808-1880," *58th Annual Missouri Conference on History*, State Historical Society, Columbia, March 16, 2016.

[9] Katelyn E. Ziegler, "Charting the Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 1808-1880s," Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievements Forum, University of Missouri, Columbia, April 26, 2016.

We will disseminate our findings to both scholarly and general audiences. We will present our research results at various conferences, such as the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, the annual meetings of the Southern Historical Association, the Social Science History Association, and the State Historical Society. Further, we will present and request feedback from Mizzou scholars at research forums on campus, like the MU Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievements Forum and the Black Studies Department Research Roundtable. Papers produced by the team will be submitted for publication in undergraduate research journals, such as *Artifacts: A Journal of Undergraduate Writing*, academic journals, such as *Slavery & Abolition*, or in an edited volume through Mizzou Publishing or another relevant press.

Keeping with our mission of reaching general audiences, and as part of our Public History Emphasis program, we will make our research available through a digital exhibition hosted at the History Department's Digital History portal (digitalhistory.missouri.edu). The exhibition will include not only the database of letters, but also interactive maps, timelines, images contemporary to the suppression campaign, as well as descriptions of this material and analyses of the data collected. We already have accumulated significant experience in developing such projects and their digital component with undergraduate researchers. A sample of these projects is available on the Digital History portal mentioned above. Two of our favorites are "Overcoming Bantu Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa" and "Rome: From Fascism to Liberation."[10]

Visualizing Abolition provides a unique opportunity for faculty and undergraduate researchers to collaborate in an interdisciplinary project that will expand the historical knowledge of the abolition of the African slave trade. It will map for the first time the campaign worldwide, examine how it evolved over time, and identify the many individuals and parties involved, British and non-British. The project's results will be made available online through a digital public history exhibition, presentations at national, regional, and local conferences, and in scholarly publications. Undergraduates will participate in every step of the process. They will not only build a solid research portfolio, but also develop important professional skills, such as time management, team collaboration, document organization, and grant writing.

Undergraduate student roles: Reflecting the multiplicity of participants in the suppression campaign, the students will bring their own talents and ideas to the research. Undergraduates will experience all three stages of research: data collection, analysis, and reporting. They will examine typed documents of letters in the Slave Trade Series of the British Parliamentary Papers, cataloguing the destinations and dates received. Many of the letters do not directly include this information, and it will hence be inferred from the files. Additionally, they will reorganize and add data on the names of senders and recipients and write a short summary for each of the letters. Undergraduates will also retrieve the geographic coordinates of letter

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[10] Greta Weber, "Overcoming Bantu Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa." In Digital History. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2015, http://digitalhistory.missouri.edu/?q=project/overcoming-bantu-education-post-apartheid-south-afric
a and History 4085 Summer 2014, "Rome: From Fascism to Liberation." In Digital History. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2014, http://digitalhistory.missouri.edu/?q=project/rome-fascism-liberation.

destinations. Throughout this process, students will be expected to read secondary sources to familiarize themselves with both the period and the historiography of abolition.

Next, the students will assist in choosing a digital visualization platform for the online exhibition. This will involve testing different programs like *Palladio*, *Nodegoat*, and *Gephi* for the platform that best suits our database format and plans for the website. Our main goal is to plot the entire series of correspondence on a world map that animates the timespan. We will also make use of the various graphing techniques available in the chosen platform. The undergraduate team will then design and create an online exhibition that will include historical background on the African slave trade and its abolition, the digital maps and graphs, and the database itself. All student researchers will participate in these steps, though we will allocate tasks as the project requires based on student strengths and interests. For instance, students better inclined to the historical aspect of the project will spend more time with the documents e.g. summarizing the letters and writing the historical background for the website. Undergraduates with skills in graphic and web design will play a larger role in the actual creation of the website, though all students will collaborate with one another and the PIs in the planning process. All undergraduates will also participate in the presentation of our research.

Expected outcomes for undergraduate researchers: Research experience for undergraduates in the humanities are often few and far between. This project with its inter and intradisciplinary aspects is a unique opportunity for these students to expand their professional portfolios, work with like-minded and multi-talented peers, and make personal relationships with faculty all in the context of the developing field of digital history and the History Department's new Public History Emphasis. Working with digital history will make these students especially competitive in the job market given the increasing use of technology for interpreting and spreading information.

They will gain hands-on experience both with traditional historical research, i.e. immersion in a large document collection and secondary sources, as well as with the specialized field of public history, that is making scholarly research accessible to a wide, diverse audience both online and via multiple presentations to be discussed below. These will involve presenting research in several ways: authoring and delivering papers, creating PowerPoint presentations, and designing posters. These modes of presenting take different approaches and thus require creative adaptability for both the student researchers and the data collected.

Students will also have several opportunities to submit their research findings for print, which will be discussed below. Being published is a major milestone for any course of study or future career our undergraduates may pursue. The stipend through ASH Scholars will allow students to focus their energies on educational and career-advancing work. Student teams can also apply for scholarships and travel grants through Mizzou Advantage and the Office of Undergraduate Research. During this process, the undergraduates will gain another fundamental research skill: writing grants and conference proposals.

Undergraduate researcher presentation plan: Undergraduates will report the research findings through various modes of presenting, ranging from oral, written, and mixed media. Student presentations will start in the spring semester of 2017 and continue in the fall of that year. Although our tenure with the ASH Program will have expired, we plan to present our research findings at an important regional conference that occurs only in that season of the year. Below is a detailed list of the conferences where we and the undergraduate researchers intend to report our project's findings:

2017 February	The Department of Black Studies Research Roundtable
2017 March	The State Historical Society's Missouri Conference on History
2017 April	The National Conference on Undergraduate Research
2017 April	The Annual Meeting of the National Council on Public History
2017 April	The MU Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievements Forum
2017 November	The Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association
2017 November	The Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association

We will also coordinate a special issue with *Artifacts: A Journal of Undergraduate Writing* for the students to report the project's research findings. Papers presented at the conferences above will be revised and submitted for publication in a scholarly journal, such as *Slavery & Abolition*.

Mentoring philosophy and plan: Our mentoring philosophy focuses on leading students through the process of discovery by treating them more as research collaborators than merely assistants or spectators. We will thus work with undergraduates throughout all steps of research, from data collection to analysis and reporting. Although we will work closely with students, we will also allow them time to work by themselves to foster independent research and design skills. We are aware that this is a unique learning opportunity for the students, especially as undergraduates in the Humanities, and are prepared to accommodate different levels and fields of experience.

We will hold a general meeting for group work and reflection once a week, either at the History Department's conference room or at one of Ellis Library's study rooms, for two hours. The PIs will also work independently with subgroups of undergraduate researchers for two hours a week at the History Department, Ellis Library, or at another appropriate location. This leaves four hours per week for students to work on their own or in their respective subgroup. The PIs will introduce students to important research techniques, such as searching databases, archival materials, contemporary newspapers, and other primary sources besides the British Parliamentary Papers. They will also help them collect data and store them into different database formats, such as MS Excel and Google Sheets, examine the data collected using softwares like *Palladio* and *Nodegoat*, and report the research findings through papers and poster presentations made with MS Word, Google Docs, and MS PowerPoint.

Participation of other researchers: This project will not involve graduate students of other researchers outside the team.

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