

- 1900–1974 (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), p. 4.
- 13 Craig, *Manifestos*, pp. 5–6.
- 14 Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, consumption, and civil society in modern Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 15 Craig, *Manifestos*, pp. 12–13.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 17 Aram Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History: From colonialism to the sustainable development goals* (Routledge, 2016), p. 29.
- 18 Craig, *Manifestos*, p. 51.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 86.
- 20 Peter Sloman, *The Liberal Party and the Economy, 1929–1964* (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 43–7.
- 21 *Britain's Industrial Future: Being the Report of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry of 1928* (Ernest Benn Ltd., 1928) pp. 370, 376.
- 22 Sloman, *Liberal Party and the Economy*, pp. 54–5; Michael Dawson, 'Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall, 1910–1931: "The Old-time Religion"', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 425–37.
- 23 'Mr. Lloyd George's Address', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Oct. 1931.
- 24 Craig, *Manifestos*, pp. 93–4.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 109–111.
- 27 David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 148.
- 28 Craig, *Manifestos*, p. 132.
- 29 S. R. Mehrotra, 'On the Use of the Term "Commonwealth"', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 2 (1963), pp. 1–16.
- 30 Craig, *Manifestos*, p. 132.
- 31 Malcolm Baines, 'The Liberal Party and 1945 General Election', *Contemporary Record*, 9 (1995), pp. 48–61.
- 32 Craig, *Manifestos*, p. 166.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- 35 Michael McManus, *Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire* (Birlinn, 2001), p. 184.
- 36 Craig, *Manifestos*, p. 280.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 322.
- 38 Ward, *Untied Kingdom*, p. 281.
- 39 Sloman, 'Jeremy Thorpe', p. 1467.
- 40 'Liberal party's policy on immigrants', *The Guardian*, 27 May 1968; David Steel, 'A man for Ladywood', *The Guardian*, 25 Jun. 1969; Peter Joyce, 'Wallace Lawler', in Duncan Brack (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (Politico's Publishing, 1998), pp. 216–7.
- 41 Craig, *Manifestos*, p. 371.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 420.
- 43 F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos, 1959–1987* (Parliamentary Research Services, 1990), p. 319.
- 44 See, for example, 'Tariff Reform & the Unemployed', Liberal Publications Department leaflet no. 2068, 1906. Copy available at <https://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/HKW/6/3>.

# Reviews

## From rebellion to emancipation

Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (Vintage, 2021)

Review by Andy Cabot

Michael Taylor's *The Interest* – and its even more pointed subtitle: *How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* – achieves

something quite unique in just about 300 pages: the book provides a comprehensive synthesis of the critical period in the debate on British slavery between the

Demerara rebellion in 1823 and the passing of emancipation in parliament in 1833. Taylor's work is notable for its examination of the era and its key figures, making it

accessible not only to academia but also to a broader readership. For the present reviewer, who also has an academic background in the study of slavery and slave societies, Taylor's ability to produce a work of history that is not only enjoyable but also genuinely engaging is a stark success in itself.

The book has a short preface centred on David Cameron's 2015 visit to Jamaica, one introductory chapter, and eighteen chapters of roughly equal size dealing with the emergence and evolution of the debate on slavery in the British empire from the Slave Trade Act in 1807 to the Abolition Act in 1833. There is an epilogue entitled 'Who Else Must Fall?' dealing with the long-term repercussions of emancipation and contemporary debates about reparations, global racial inequalities, and Britain's imperial past. The edition reviewed here also contains all the author's footnotes placed at the end, a bibliography listing all the key primary sources used, and an index. Finally, there are also two distinct sections in the book of nineteenth-century images and visual materials representing all the major players and locations described in the book.

The book's first two chapters provide a large contextual introduction to the rise of slavery and abolitionism in Britain prior to the campaign for ending slavery that started during the early 1820s. Chapter 3 is where the book's central narrative arc starts in earnest, as it documents the formation of the Anti-Slavery Society before offering a sweeping portrait of the West India Interest in Britain at the start of the emancipation campaign.

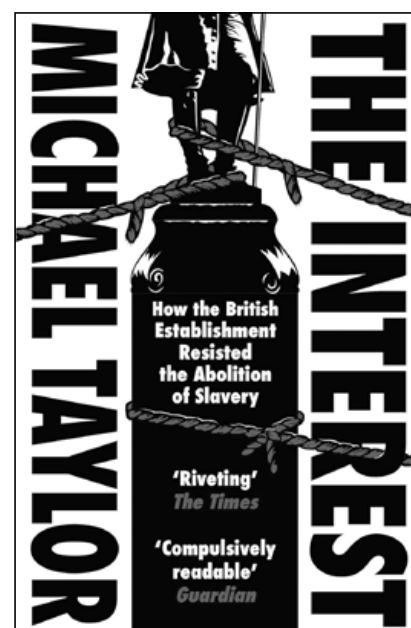
The next four chapters deal with the repercussions of the Demerara rebellion on parliamentary and public debates about slavery, with a particular focus on the deft legislative manoeuvring of Georges Canning as he proposed a series of 'amelioration' resolutions in 1823, ostensibly aimed at ensuring the gradual abolition of slavery in the colonies. However, in reality, these resolutions served to indefinitely postpone the actual 'amelioration' process.

Chapters 8 to 12 highlight the successful resistance mounted by the pro-slavery interest in basically neutralising any advance towards amelioration or emancipation until the final downfall of Wellington's government in late 1830.

Chapters 13 to 15 then review how the Baptist war in Jamaica, in late 1831, and the passing of the Reform Act in 1832 dealt a crucial blow to the pro-slavery establishment, paving the way for the arrival of a Whig majority in the Commons and the all-but-certain passing of an emancipation bill.

Chapters 16 to 18 conclude Taylor's book with the passing of the Abolition Act of 1833, but they cautiously move away from any celebratory interpretation of the Act, instead analysing how the financial compensation awarded to slaveowners and a six-year apprenticeship system imposed on liberated slaves made the British emancipation process a decidedly conservative one.

As its subtitle indicates, Taylor's book also wishes to demonstrate how an organised pro-slavery interest resisted abolition during



this pivotal decade. Placing the history of slave emancipation within the larger history of the British slave economy and empire is one of the author's most important achievements. It complicates the traditional understanding of abolitionism as a cultural and political movement based on 'Moral Capital' – to borrow from the title of Christopher Leslie Brown's important book published in 2006. Instead, it follows the influential research initiated by scholars like David Beck Ryden, Nicholas Draper or Catherine Hall, which explores the individuals and groups who directly profited from the slave economy. The decision to draw from this specific research guides Taylor's narrative of emancipation.

Although it dwells on historical debates and events, the book also relies on a gallery of individuals for its story. And if the actions of antislavery parliamentary leaders like Thomas Fowell Buxton and government figures like George Canning or Charles Grey do take centre stage, there

## Reviews

is more than enough space for less familiar faces who nevertheless played a significant part in the debates around emancipation: the examples of Edward Jordon, the free black journalist from Kingston who 'founded the *Watchman* newspaper to expose the misdeeds of the plantocracy' (p. 193), or of Elizabeth Heyrick's determined campaign against West Indian sugar in 1825, come to mind. All these various members of the British antislavery movement receive their deserved recognition, as they helped reinforce the broader parliamentary fight against slavery.

Some of the major arguments proposed in the book are illuminating. This is particularly true when it examines the career of Alexander McDonnell. Originally an Irish-born merchant and colonist, McDonnell turned secretary to the West India Merchants in 1820 and produced perhaps the strongest case for the superiority of slave labour over free labour in his *Considerations on Negro Slavery*. While quoting some of McDonnell's main arguments in favour of the plantation economy's benefits, the author connects together these pro-imperial views on tariffs, duties and mercantile restrictions as part of a larger 'conservative economics' that 'were really pro-slavery economics' and which 'constructed one of the earliest and most cogent British cases for protectionism' (p. 134). This and the other numerous developments offered throughout the text on the actions of leading Tory statesmen concerning slavery shed a much-needed light on

how British West Indians managed to put the preservation of slavery at the centre of the post-Napoleonic conservative consensus in Britain. In other words, and to borrow from the author's more provocative formulation, slavery had been central to British identity and 'national life' until 1833 'as much as the Church of England, the monarchy, or the liberties granted by the Glorious Revolution' (p. 275).

Since it develops a historical narrative largely devoted to the post-1823 period, some of Taylor's arguments tend to downplay the existence of pre-existing trends on certain occasions. In one of the concluding remarks of Chapter 14 dealing with the aftermath of the Baptist war, the author states that the 'Jamaica Rebellion of 1831 and its aftermath now persuaded Whig ministers that slavery itself was the root cause of the violence' (p. 231) to underscore the fact that slave rebellions played a decisive role on the road to emancipation in Britain. If domestic reactions to large slave revolts were far from positive before 1831, this conclusion seems to brush off the boost given to British abolitionism during the Haitian War of Independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century which was instrumental in bringing about the slave-trade abolition in 1807.

As for the reader's experience, I did find it peculiar to find a rather frequent use of historical anecdotes about political figures like Lord Liverpool or William Huskisson. These did not in any way damage the many persuasive and important arguments laid out in the book. Yet,

as a general observation, I found it more enjoyable to learn about the little-known antislavery pamphlet by Henry Whitely, *Three Months in Jamaica*, or the formation of the central negro emancipation committee in 1834 under the supervision of former 'apprentice' James Williams, than about the horrific train accident suffered by William Huskisson in 1830.

Apart from these minor criticisms, Michael Taylor's *The Interest* stands out as an impressive work of history. It will satisfy readers who are looking to learn about the impact of slavery on British society in the nineteenth century and today. Additionally, the book will also be an important contribution to ongoing research on the weight of the slave economy in nineteenth-century Britain and its lasting effects. It will also be valuable to researchers working on the relationship between slavery and empire in nineteenth-century Britain, as well as those interested in the diverse facets of the abolitionist movement in Britain during the same period.

I highly recommend this book for all historians interested in these themes, and for all readers wishing to understand the importance of slavery in British history. ■

**Andy Cabot is a History PhD from Université Paris Cité in France. He defended his thesis, entitled 'Slavery, empires and diplomacy (France, Britain and the United States): abolishing or consolidating slavery in the Atlantic world after Saint-Domingue? (c. 1791 – c. 1815)', in 2021. The work was awarded the thesis prize from the Foundation for the Remembrance of Slavery in France in 2022.**