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Did Slavery make Scotia great?

T. M. Devine

In his *magnum opus*, *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith famously asserted that colonies were usually a drain on the mother country. However, even Smith's authority could not lay to rest the question of whether empire in the later eighteenth century was a loss to the metropolis or a priceless resource of great material advantage to the mother country, as it developed toward economic transformation and industrialisation.

Much later in time, in 1944, Eric Williams published his seminal work, *Capitalism and Slavery*.¹ In it, he not only made a stimulating contribution to the intellectual debate which Smith's assessment had encouraged, but raised the issues to a much more polemical and controversial level. His focus centred on the role of the African people in the development of the world's first Industrial Revolution in Britain. Williams himself described his book as 'an economic study of the role of Negro slavery and the slave trade in providing the capital which financed the Industrial Revolution in England . . .'.² Ironically enough, however, despite its later fame, if not notoriety, this thesis formed a relatively small section of a much broader study which also included an analysis of how mature industrial capitalism was ultimately responsible for the destruction of the slave system. Moreover, at first, the book provoked little published reaction in scholarly circles. It was only in the 1960s that the response began. It proved to be unambiguously negative. A series of thoroughly researched and carefully argued articles stretching from the

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1 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1944; 1964 ed.).

2 *Ibid.*, p. v.

1960s to the 1980s sought to demonstrate that 'the Williams thesis' did not stand up to serious scholarly scrutiny.³ Thus, one estimate published in volume two of the *Oxford History of the British Empire* series, concluded that the slave trade, though immense in scale, might only have added a mere one per cent to total domestic investment in Britain by the later eighteenth century.⁴ Scholarship seemed to have delivered a final verdict on the Williams thesis.

But that judgement was premature. From the 1980s, new perspectives began to emerge. Most importantly, some scholars argued that the approach of the sceptics was much too narrow. Not only should the slave trade itself be considered but also (as Williams himself had implied) the total impact of the slave-based plantation economies of America and the Caribbean on Britain. These could not have existed and, even more importantly, have grown enormously in scale over time, but for the labour input of untold numbers of black slaves. If the American colonies and the islands of the British Caribbean contributed markets, profits, capital and raw materials to industrialism in the mother country, then those gains ultimately depended on the enslaved workers of those territories.⁵ It was an important shift of conceptual direction which gave a new and invigorating lease of life to the entire debate.

A stream of books and articles by Robin Blackburn, Joseph Inikori, Barbara Solow and others proceeded to place 'the Williams thesis' firmly back on the historical agenda. Even long-term sceptics, such as David Eltis and Stan Engerman, were forced to partially recant.⁶ They did not exactly swallow the

3 See, *inter alia*, R. P. Thomas, 'The Sugar Colonies of the Old Empire. Profit or Loss for Great Britain', *Economic History Review*, no. 21 (1968): pp. 30–45; S. L. Engerman, 'The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: A comment on the William Thesis', *Business History Review*, no. 46 (1972): pp. 430–443; Roger I. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London, 1965), pp. 38–57; R. P. Thomas and N. Bean, 'The Fishers of Men: the Profits of the Slave Trade', *Journal of Economic History*, no. 34 (1974): pp. 885–914; C. H. Feinstein, 'Capital Accumulation and the Industrial Revolution', in *The Economic History of Britain since 1700*. Volume 1, eds. R. Floud and C. McLuskey (Cambridge, 1981), p. 131.

4 David Richardson, 'The British Empire and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1660–1807', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Volume 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter J. Marshall (Oxford, 1998), p. 461.

5 See, *inter alia*, L. Solow, 'Caribbean Slavery and British Growth. The Eric Williams Hypothesis', *Journal of Development Economics*, no. 17 (1985): pp. 99–115; Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Durham, N.C., 1992); R. Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London, 1997); Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge, 1987).

6 David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, 'The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrialising Britain', *Journal of Economic History*, 60 (March, 2000), pp. 123–144.

revisionist view hook, line and sinker, but root-and-branch opposition was now replaced by a cautious realignment of argument: 'African slavery thus had a vital role in the evolution of the modern West, but while slavery had important long-run economic implications, it did not by itself cause the British Industrial Revolution. It certainly 'helped' that Revolution along, but its role was no greater than that of many other economic activities . . .'.⁷ Others were less restrained. In 2002, Joseph E. Inikori published a lifetime's work on the subject under the title, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England*.⁸ Inikori's conclusion, after presentation of a vast array of statistical and empirical evidence, was unequivocal: '... the contribution of Africans was central to the origin of the Industrial Revolution in England'.⁹ The critical response to his work nonetheless demonstrated that the debate was far from over.¹⁰

The Scottish dimension never really featured in these vigorous discussions. Perhaps this is not surprising given the persistent anglocentricity of modern English history, the *cordon sanitaire* between much of the historiography of England and Scotland and the continued commitment of many Scottish historians to stick to their own patch, refusing to engage in major British and international debates. This is a pity, because, as will be argued in this essay, the Scottish experience has much to contribute to the discussion of the broader issues of slavery and capitalism which currently interest a very wide audience of historians. Several of the participants in the debate refer to 'British' or 'Britain' in their analysis. Yet, in their contributions there is precious little sign of any material being deployed for and against opposing views from north of the Border.

This may not entirely be the fault of colleagues in English and American universities. There has been a traditional belief in Scotland that Glasgow, unlike Bristol, Liverpool and London, took little or no part in the mass transportation of Africans to the plantations of America and the West Indies. Even modern historiography, as recently as the early years of the new millennium, suffered from this nineteenth-century amnesia. Much more attention has been paid to the role of the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment in their intellectual destruction of the moral and economic foundations of slavery, as well as the later leadership role of the Scottish churches in the abolitionist movement and the cause of black

7 Ibid., p. 141.

8 Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 2002).

9 Ibid., p. 482.

10 'Roundtable' on Inikori's work, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 15 (2003): pp. 279–361.

emancipation.¹¹ As a result, darker aspects of the Scottish connection with the slave economies tended to be either played down or ignored altogether. In 2001, a major compendium of modern scholarship, *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, provided striking confirmation of this neglect. The index to the volume contained only one reference to the Caribbean sugar plantations, which related to the sale of Scottish linens in the West Indies. No index entry to 'slavery' appeared and the single reference to the 'slave trade' was exclusively concerned with the abolition campaigns of the early nineteenth century in which the Scots did indeed play an important and influential part.¹²

In the last few years, however, the research agenda has changed dramatically. Studies have now started to be published on the Scottish connection with the West India sugar colonies and the extent of Scottish involvement in slave trading itself or, by proxy, in Bristol, Liverpool and London. A new interest has also developed in the impact of the slave-based economies on Scotland which connects with older work on the relationship between the imperial trades and Scottish economic development.¹³ In consequence, there is now enough material, as a result of past and ongoing research, to consider, if only in a preliminary fashion, the ways in which slavery may have been a factor in eighteenth-century Scottish development.

It is unlikely, however, even if new facts come to light, that Scottish involvement in direct slave trading from Africa to the Americas was of any great significance. Current research confirms the Victorian belief that Scottish ports played only a very minor role in that inhuman commerce. Around 3.5 million Africans are estimated to have been shipped across the Atlantic in British vessels before the slave trade was finally abolished in 1807. The table below indicates the minute level of direct Scottish participation in this traffic.

11 C. D. Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists, 1833–1861* (Baton Rouge, 1981); Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756–1838* (Edinburgh, 2006).

12 Michael Lynch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford, 2001).

13 M. Duffil, 'The Africa Trades from the Ports of Scotland, 1706–66', *Slavery and Abolition* 25, no. 3 (2004): pp. 102–122; David Hancock, 'Scots in the Slave Trade' in *Nation and Province in the First British Empire*, ed. Ned C. Landsman (London, 2001), pp. 61–2; Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820* (Manchester, 2005); Eric Graham, 'Scots in the Liverpool Slave Trade', *History Scotland* March 2007; Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, chapter 1; T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire 1600–1815* (London, 2003), pp. 221–49.

Known Slave Voyages direct from Scottish Ports 1707–66

Port	Number of Voyages	Period
Port Glasgow	7	c. 1717–30
Greenock	14	Mainly 1760s
Montrose	4	1760s
Leith	2	1706; 1764
Total slaves embarked: c. 4,500		

Sources: M. Duffill, 'The Africa Trade from the Ports of Scotland 1706–66', *Slavery and Abolition* 25, no. 3 (2004): pp. 102–122; D. Eltis *et al.*, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999).

But this low rate of participation was not caused by any ethnic or moral opposition to the trade. As one historian of the abolitionist movement in Scotland has noted: 'At least until the 1760s there was almost total white acceptance of the use of black men and women as slaves'.¹⁴ Rather the explanation seems to be that London and the English outports were already so well established in the Africa trade by the end of the seventeenth century that the Scots had to find their primary Atlantic commercial niches during subsequent decades in tobacco and sugar importation. As Jacob M. Price has argued, a form of port specialisation developed along the west coast of Britain in the eighteenth century, with Bristol and Liverpool emerging as the premier slaving centres, and Glasgow more and more active in the tobacco trade.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Scots did have a notable role in the slaving activities of English ports. In Liverpool at least five Scots managed slaving firms. Of the 128 slaving captains sailing from the port during the later eighteenth century who mentioned their origins, twenty-five were from Scotland, as were no less than 136 ships' surgeons. Many were in the employ of the two dominant Scots trading houses in Liverpool, Samuel McDougal of Wigton (later a pre-eminent opponent of abolition) and the Tod brothers from Moffat.¹⁶ Scots were equally prominent in Bristol. One of the most powerful merchant dynasties in the north of Scotland, the Baillies of Dochfour, near Inverness, was partially founded on slave trafficking

¹⁴ C. D. Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery* (London, 1975), p. 155.

¹⁵ Jacob M. Price, 'The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707–1775', reprinted in *Studies in Scottish Business History*, ed. Peter L. Payne (London, 1967), pp. 299–318.

¹⁶ Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque, with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (London, 1897), p. 674; Eric Graham, 'Scots in the Liverpool Slave Trade', *History Scotland*, March 2007.

from Bristol.¹⁷ Robert Gordon from Moray was among the owners who managed ten or more slave-trading vessels in the city and between 1745 and 1769 profited from eighteen different voyages to east Africa.¹⁸

As David Hancock points out, however, it was in London that the Scots really made their mark. Around one in ten of the African traders in the capital were Scots in the early 1750s, a number he reckons increased in later decades.¹⁹ They were similarly heavily involved in the governance of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa as elected members of the Company's committee of management. Scots were factors and surgeons in the Company's ports where slaves were collected and also acted as private traders searching the coastal waters of Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast for human cargoes. One of the most notable enterprises was founded in 1748 when a consortium of five Scots, led by Richard Oswald, Augustus Boyd and Alexander Grant, took possession of a slave 'castle' on the Sierra Leone river at Bance Island which was linked to a dozen 'outfactories' or slave-gathering points in the interior. The enterprise was staffed mainly by kinsmen and associates of the principals. Between 1748 and 1784 the firm and its satellite companies shipped nearly 13,000 blacks across the Atlantic, many of them to Scots plantation owners in the Caribbean.²⁰

Hence Victorian assumptions about Scotland's peripheral role in slave trafficking were largely unfounded. The evidence of recent research demonstrates full and enthusiastic Scottish engagement at every level of the trade. Yet, while the business may have made some Scots merchants rich, its scale was unlikely to have had a profound impact on the overall economy of Scotland itself. To evaluate the connection between slavery and Scottish development, it is therefore necessary to extend the range of the enquiry from the trade itself to the plantation systems in the West Indies and the Chesapeake colonies, whose very existence depended on slave labour. The sugar, tobacco and cotton produced by these slave-based economies were absolutely central components in Scottish overseas commerce for most of the eighteenth century, dominating the country's international trade to a much greater extent than the equivalent sectors south of the Border.

The trade in tobacco became the most remarkable example of Scottish commercial enterprise in the imperial economy during the course of the eighteenth century. In one year, 1758, Scottish tobacco imports from the colonies of Virginia and Maryland exceeded those of London and the English outputs of

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp. 88–92.

¹⁸ David Richardson, ed., *Bristol, Africa and the Eighteenth Century Slave Trade to America* (Bristol, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁹ Hancock, 'Scots in the Slave Trade', p. 63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–83.

Bristol, Liverpool and Whitehaven combined. Three years later the highest- ever volume of tobacco leaf was landed in Scotland, a staggering 47 million pounds, which amounted to a third of all the nation's imports and, when then sold on to European and Irish markets, no less than two-thirds of its exports. On the eve of the American Revolution in 1773–4 the Scots were reckoned to control over half the trade in the key areas of new colonial tobacco production. Little wonder then one planter, William Lee, could proclaim: 'I think it self-evident that Glasgow has almost monopolised Virginia and its inhabitants'.²¹

Lee's reference to Glasgow was telling. Although in earlier years other Scottish towns, such as Ayr, Dumfries, Bo'ness, Leith, Dundee and Aberdeen, were actively importing tobacco, the Glasgow merchants, through their two outports of Greenock and Port Glasgow, increasingly established a virtual stranglehold on the trade. As early as the 1710s the Clyde's share of Scottish imports was already around 90 per cent and by the 1760s had climbed further to 98 per cent. Glasgow was Scotland as far as the tobacco trade was concerned. It was not simply that the city's merchants were adept at crushing competition within the country; they were also formidable rivals within the broader imperial system. Over the middle decades of the century they carved out an ever larger share of the British trade. As late as 1738 the Scots controlled only 10 per cent of official UK tobacco imports, but this figure then rose to 20 per cent in 1744, stood at 30 per cent by 1758 and topped 40 per cent in 1765. Voices were raised in alarm in London, Bristol and elsewhere that if this trend continued for much longer, the Glaswegians would surely possess one of the nation's most lucrative Atlantic trades in its entirety.²²

In an important sense, however, this dynamic business was much more than the simple acquisition of tobacco leaf from colonial planters, based on slave labour, followed by sale to burgeoning consumer markets of France, Scandinavia, Holland and the German states. The tobacco trade was Scotland's first global enterprise. Because of it, Glasgow became a player on the world commercial stage by the 1770s. To establish and refine their competitive position in the international market-place, the city's merchants had to ensure they were able to service the needs of the colonial planter class for domestic articles, plantation equipment, household plenishings, clothing, luxuries and a host of other items. American consumers became increasingly sophisticated purchasers as their material standards rose in the wake of expanding markets in Europe for colonial sugar, tobacco, timber, cotton, rice and indigo. Some sense of the new

21 Quoted in A. Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 2002), p. 138.

22 T. M. Devine, 'The Golden Age of Tobacco', in *Glasgow*, Volume I, *Beginnings to 1830*, eds. T. M. Devine and G. Jackson (Manchester, 1995), p. 140.

consumerism comes from the New York press. In the 1720s merchants there described only fifteen different manufactured goods in newspaper articles. By the 1770s they were selling over 9,000 different imported items, many of which had highly specific descriptions. Expanding custom in the tobacco colonies, therefore, increasingly meant that Scottish factors and storekeepers had to offer the widest possible range of goods to satisfy the new demands. That in turn meant that their Glasgow principals had to create secure lines of supply for the vast array of consumer goods needed across the Atlantic. A global business emerged. Wine came from Madeira and the Canary Islands; sugar and rum from the Caribbean; linen from Ireland; luxuries from Holland; and so on. The sources of supply ran from the Mediterranean to Russia and across the Atlantic to the West Indies and Canada: 'the shipping routes stretched out from Glasgow like the ribs of a fan'.²³ And, at home, tobacco merchants set up many of their own centres of production by investing massively in tanneries, bottleworks, linen, sugar-refining, breweries, ironworks and other enterprises in Glasgow itself and in the counties around.²⁴

The impact was also deeply felt on the other side of the Atlantic. If the needs of the colonial planter class for consumer goods and agricultural equipment were great, their requirements for credit were even more pressing. Especially in the newer areas of tobacco cultivation, such as the backcountry of Virginia, where the poorer planters were concentrated, credit was the lifeblood of the local economy. With capital provided by British merchants, planters could purchase slave labour and the tools necessary to expand cultivation and clear virgin land. In addition, the credit advanced meant that the colonists could work through the months between harvests without denying themselves clothing, food and other items. Credit made it possible to cope with the inevitable differences in timing inherent in the tobacco economy – before the return for one year's crop had been harvested, the planter had to live and plant the next crop. In a sense, then, by extending liberal credit the Scottish houses provided the development capital for many parts of the Chesapeake. The resulting level of debt owed to the Scots rose steeply from an estimated £500,000 in the early 1760s to £1.3 million when the Revolution broke out in 1775.²⁵

²³ I. C. C. Graham, *Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America 1707–1783* (Ithaca, 1956), p. 127.

²⁴ Devine, 'The Golden Age of Tobacco', in *Glasgow*, eds. Devine and Jackson, pp. 139–183.

²⁵ Glasgow City Archives, Speirs Papers, TD 131/10–12, Diary of Alexander Speirs, 2 March 1778.

Credit on this scale provided evidence of yet another close Scottish link with the slave economies. It was not simply the merchant houses who gained, but also those whom they relied upon as sources of capital for transatlantic investment. As a late eighteenth century historian of Glasgow observed, 'the strength of the monied interest of the west of Scotland was embanked in it'.²⁶ The account books of the big companies reveal their remarkable capacity to attract interest-bearing loans on personal bonds from a very wide circle far beyond the active managers and partners of the firms. The funds which helped to lubricate the Chesapeake trade were drawn from landowners, trustees, tradesmen, physicians, military officers, spinsters, widows and university professors among others. That also meant the profits of the tobacco business were widely distributed through these financial networks well beyond the ranks of the merchant community.²⁷

The Scottish connection with the Caribbean sugar colonies has, until recently, attracted less scholarly attention than the American trades. For that reason, it will be given more extended consideration here than the tobacco business on which there is already a substantial bibliography. As well as trading with them, Scots were heavily involved in plantation ownership (which was less common in the American colonies) and were also widely engaged in the management of the islands as government officials, military men, merchants, attorneys, surgeons, physicians, shopkeepers and overseers. It was also striking that, although the commercial relationship went back to the later seventeenth century, the connection strengthened considerably from the 1760s. This was especially so after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, precisely at the same time as the transformation of the Scottish domestic economy gathered pace. In total there were an estimated 4,500 Scots in the Caribbean at the Union of 1707. These numbers remained relatively stable until the 1760s and then rose steeply to c. 17,000 new emigrants between 1750 and 1800.²⁸ Especially after the collapse of the tobacco trade in 1775, followed only by a muted recovery after 1783, the Scottish commercial relationship with the Caribbean achieved a massively new significance. The export share of British goods from Scottish ports to the islands accelerated dramatically. It rose from 21 per cent of official value in 1781, to 42 per cent by 1801 and then to 65 per cent in 1813. The tonnage of Scottish shipping bound for the Caribbean by that date was no less than 50 per cent

²⁶ Andrew Brown, *History of Glasgow*, II (Glasgow, 1795), p. 143.

²⁷ T. M. Devine, 'Sources of Capital for the Glasgow Tobacco Trade, c. 1740–80', *Business History*, no. 16 (1974).

²⁸ Trevor Burnard, 'European Migration to Jamaica, 1655–1780', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53, no. 4 (1996), pp. 769–96; A. L. Karras, *Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish Migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake 1740–1800* (Ithaca, 1992), pp. 43–5; Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, pp. 23–4.

greater than that to the European continent combined – and this was the key period of radical economic transformation in Scotland itself.²⁹

In the eighteenth century, Britain's West Indian colonies were universally regarded as crucial to the empire. Even Adam Smith, as already seen, one of the most eminent contemporary critics of the colonial system, waxed eloquent about their immense value: the profits of a sugar plantation in the Caribbean, he noted, 'were generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America'.³⁰ Edmund and William Burke also asserted in 1757 that nowhere in the world could great fortunes be made so quickly as in the West Indies. Their importance to the British state and economy were widely and fulsomely acknowledged. In 1700 the British islands accounted for about 40 per cent of all transatlantic sugar consignments. By 1815 the figure had reached 60 per cent. At the end of the eighteenth century the Caribbean colonies employed, directly or indirectly, half the nation's long-distance shipping, their fixed and moveable wealth was reckoned at more than £30 million sterling, duties on West Indian produce accounted for an eighth of Exchequer revenues and the credit structures linked to the plantation economy were crucial elements in UK financial markets.³¹

The expansion of the British West Indian colonies was forged in the violent crucible of the titanic conflicts with France over transatlantic hegemony. By the 1760s, the Leeward Islands (Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat) and Jamaica had all been conquered or annexed. Further large-scale territorial gains took place after both the Seven Years War (ending in 1763) and the Napoleonic Wars (ending in 1815). As a result of the first, Britain added Grenada, Dominica, St. Vincent and Tobago (the Ceded Islands). By the second, the empire absorbed Trinidad, Demerara and St. Lucia. Developments of these new colonies depended on a number of factors. The British Laws of Trade and Navigation gave the islands a virtual monopoly of the protected home market for the products of tropical agriculture where commodities such as sugar by the 1750s were selling at prices some 50 per cent higher than in continental Europe. The West Indies at that time also exported rum, molasses and, especially after c. 1760, fed the factories of the early Industrial Revolution with cargoes of raw cotton. But sugar was king. It is reckoned that sugar consumption in England and Wales alone increased about twenty-fold in the period from 1663 to 1775. Between 1771 and

²⁹ National Archives, Customs 14 and 17/12. Copies in National Archives of Scotland, RH 2/4/22 and 40.

³⁰ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776; London, 1937), p. 366.

³¹ J. R. Ward, 'The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition', in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Marshall, p. 427.

1775 colonial imports topped 1.8 million hundredweights. Consumption per head in Britain rose spectacularly from about four pounds in 1700, to ten pounds by 1748 and then to twenty pounds in 1800.³²

The Caribbean response to the burgeoning sugar markets in Europe was built on two key foundations: the evolution of the plantation system and the intensive use of black slave labour. Some islands soon became little more than vast sugar plantations. It was said, for instance of Antigua in 1751, that the land was 'improved to the utmost, there being hardly one Acre of Ground, even to the Top of the Mountains, fit for Sugar Canes and other necessary Produce, but what is taken and cultivated'.³³ These were also 'slave societies', in the sense of human communities which depended above all else on unfree, forced labour for their very existence. Without the slave, the sugar economies of the Caribbean would have been impossible. By 1750 black Africans comprised about 85 per cent of the population of the British West Indies. It was scarcely surprising that the contemporary commentator, Malachy Postlethwayt, writing in 1745 in *The African Trade, the Great Pillar and Support of the British Plantation Trade in America*, could report that the nation's transatlantic commercial empire ultimately rested on an African foundation. Slaves outnumbered whites by six to one in 1748 and by twelve to one in 1815. Most whites were transients, hoping to make a quick fortune and return home as quickly as possible with their profits. Despite the fabled riches of the Caribbean however, few actually managed to achieve their dreams. But one consequence was that British West Indian whites failed to develop 'integrated, locally rooted societies, comparable with the North American colonies'.³⁴ Even Scottish migrants failed to leave the classic ethnic stamp of their schools and churches on the Caribbean islands where they settled.

This was not the only point of distinction between the two colonial systems. Another was the dramatic difference in the treatment of blacks. Not for nothing was the Caribbean known as the graveyard of the slaves. By the standards of unfree labour in the North American plantation colonies, human suffering in the West Indies was especially horrendous. About 1830, crude death rates in the USA and Jamaica were 20 and 26 per thousand respectively. The differences in birth rates were even more dramatic – 50 and 23 per thousand respectively. It was reckoned in the 1750s that a quarter of all slaves died within three years of arrival. But averages often concealed much higher figures. On the Codrington plantations in Barbados between 1741 and 1746, 43 per cent of all African negroes died

32 Ibid.

33 Quoted in R. B. Sheridan, 'The Formation of Caribbean Plantation Society, 1689–1748', in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Marshall, p. 402.

34 Ward, 'British West Indies', p. 433.

within three years of arrival. Partly this was based on an inhumane calculation. Planters generally believed until the later eighteenth century that buying 'salt-water' blacks, straight off the slave ships, was 'cheaper' than encouraging family life and reproduction of the existing stock. Thus, it was common practice for plantations to buy slaves at crop time and set them to work with little or no time spent on 'seasoning' (acclimatisation). By definition, also, slavery was an oppressive regime where work was always managed by the threat of severe punishment. Coercion reached especially rigorous and exacting levels in the Caribbean because the grossly skewed ratios of whites and blacks generated rancorous fear and paranoia among British planters about the potential menace of slave rebellions.

Essentially, however, the high levels of slave mortality were caused fundamentally by the unrelenting nature of the plantation regime. The slave gangs on the sugar estates toiled from dawn to dusk in land preparation, harvesting the canes and boiling sugar. In the Caribbean about 90 per cent of the slaves worked in these tasks. One scholar estimates that it was 'probably one of the highest labour participation rates anywhere in the world'.³⁵ The arduous toil helps to explain why about half British West Indies slave women never bore a child in the mid-eighteenth century. On the American mainland there was not the same intensity of work on a single crop. Tobacco cultivation, tending farms, cutting timber and domestic service were just some of the varied range of tasks undertaken. Recent work on slave skeletal remains in Barbados burial grounds by nutritionists and anthropologists has added a new dimension to an understanding of slave mortality in the Caribbean. These results point unambiguously to malnutrition as a vital factor in reducing the immunity of the black population to the epidemic diseases which infested the low-lying plantations and their malignant environments.³⁶

Nor should the human factor be neglected in this account. The Caribbean was notorious for planter absenteeism. In 1832, 540 (84 per cent) of a total of 646 sugar estates were owned by absentees or minors. Proprietors were normally keen to escape back home (because of the low life expectancy in the tropics) as soon as they had managed to make enough for independent, leisured living in Britain.

35 Philip D. Morgan, 'The Black Experience in the British Empire, 1680–1810', in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Marshall, p. 470.

36 See, *inter alia*, Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982); Elsa V. Coreia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1965); Jerome S. Handler and Frederick W. Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, MA., 1978); R. B. Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1985), *passim*; Morgan, 'The Black Experience', pp. 467–73.

By 1800 it was their attorneys, managers and overseers who actually ran most plantations in the West Indies and, in these positions, Scots were often pre-eminent. This class was committed to maximising production, not simply to satisfy the expectations of their masters, but because they also were determined to get rich quickly and so return to spend their last years in more congenial surroundings than in the West Indian islands. The pervasive culture of avarice engendered a regime of unrelenting and pitiless rigour on the slave plantations. Untold numbers of blacks were quite literally worked to death. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that modern scholarship has identified the islands of the British West Indies as the location of the most deadly and destructive systems of chattel slavery in the New World. Only in the later decades of the eighteenth century, when the policy on most estates altered in favour of breeding new generations of black labour, rather than simply purchasing 'salt-water' slaves off the ships from West Africa, did a distinct trend develop towards amelioration. After 1807, when the slave trade to British territories was outlawed, that process became unstoppable.³⁷

By the 1770s Jamaica had become the dominant island in the British Caribbean economy, its wealth estimated at over £28 millions compared to £50 millions for the rest of the West Indian empire combined. Jamaica alone accounted for 40 per cent of the slave population of the British West Indies in the same decade. It was described in the mid-eighteenth century as a 'Constant Mine, whence Britain draws prodigious riches'.³⁸ Jamaica, by the later eighteenth century, had replaced Barbados as the economic powerhouse of the British Caribbean. Its white Jamaicans were the richest citizens in the Americas 'with individual wealth and income exceeding by a significant margin those of whites in mainland British America'.³⁹ And it was slavery which made the planters and merchants rich. In B.W. Higman's words:

Their worth in turn derived from most particularly the ownership of human beings, the enslaved who worked in the field and factory ... the riches of the planters were founded on an extremely unequal distribution of wealth in which most people did not even have legal possession of their own bodies but rather were counted as part of the tradeable capital stock.⁴⁰

³⁷ B. W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750–1850* (Kingston, 2005).

³⁸ Charles Leslie, *A new and exact History of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, c. 1740), p. 353.

³⁹ T. G. Burnard, "Prodigious Riches": the Wealth of Jamaica before the American Revolution', *Economic History Review*, LIV (2001): p. 508.

⁴⁰ Higman, *Plantation Jamaica*, p. 5.

In this famous fount of profit, the Scots were very active as plantation owners, attorneys, overseers and physicians. Edward Long, the planter-historian of the colony famously claimed: 'Jamaica, indeed is greatly indebted to North Britain, as very nearly one strand of the inhabitants are either natives of that country or descendants from those who were. Many have come from the same quarter every year, less in quest of fame than of fortunes'.⁴¹

The evidence of wills and testaments confirms Long's assertion. Between 1771–5 Scots accounted for nearly 45 per cent of all inventories at death valued at more than £1000 sterling. Further, roughly two-fifths of personal property inventories belonged to Scots in the same period.⁴² The Scottish connection went back as far as the ill-fated Darien expedition of the 1690s and before. Some of the survivors of the disaster settled in Jamaica, and one of the most prominent was Colonel John Campbell from Inverary, who had been captain of troops at Darien. By his death in 1740 he had become a member of both the Jamaica Assembly and Council and the influential patron of large numbers of young kinsmen and associates on the island from Argyll and Jura. Edward Long noted in 1774: 'I have head a computation made of no fewer than one hundred of the name Campbel (*sic*) actually resident in it (Jamaica) all claiming alliance with the Argyle family'.⁴³ The Scots were also over-represented among the ranks of the professional classes, physicians, surgeons and attorneys, who actually managed the sugar estates on behalf of absentee owners. In 1750 over 60 per cent of doctors in Antigua were Scots or Scottish-trained, and there is no reason to believe the pattern in other British islands was very much different. Some of these physicians also diversified into merchanting, slave-trading and plantation ownership.⁴⁴ The common view was that attorneys and overseers in Jamaica were usually men from Scotland. Lady Nugent, soon after her arrival on the island in 1801, took the view that 'almost all the agents, attornies, merchants and shopkeepers, are of that country [Scotland] and really do deserve to thrive in this, they are so industrious'.⁴⁵ Modern historians have made similar comments in confirmation.⁴⁶

A strong Scottish presence was noted in other islands. When St. Kitts was ceded to Britain in 1713, half the land divisions of 100 acres and above went to

41 Edward Long, *A History of Jamaica*, II (London, 1774), pp. 286–92.

42 R. B. Sheridan, 'The Role of the Scots in the Economy and Society of the West Indies', in *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Volume 292, eds. V. Rubin and A. Tuden (New York, 1977).

43 Long, *History of Jamaica*, II, p. 286.

44 T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600–1815* (London, 2003), pp. 233–4.

45 Quoted in Higman, *Plantation Jamaica*, pp. 77–9.

46 R. B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: an Economic History of the British West Indies* (Barbados, 1974), p. 387.

Scots.⁴⁷ In the later eighteenth century most of the white population of Tobago were Scotsmen, while in Grenada, by 1772, fifty-four Scots (over half of British landowners) possessed 40 per cent of all land planted in sugar and coffee.⁴⁸ As more and more territory was won from the French, from the 1760s, it too offered fresh opportunity for Scottish investment in Antigua, Dominica, Vincent, Trinidad and Guyana. As Sir William Forbes, the distinguished Edinburgh banker, recorded in his *Memoirs*: 'extensive speculations were entered by some Scotsmen for the purchase and cultivation of lands in the newly acquired West India Islands'.⁴⁹ A distinctive profile began to emerge. Unlike the pattern in the Chesapeake, Scots in the Caribbean became major owners of plantations and the armies of slave labourers who worked them. Here the Scottish connection with slavery was direct, unambiguous and immediate.

In another sense, however, the Scottish links with the Caribbean had important parallels with those to the American colonies.⁵⁰ If the American trade had its rich 'tobacco lords', West Indian commerce could boast its 'sugar princes'. Both produced merchants and firms of immense wealth with the financial surpluses which might have allowed for large-scale investment in the Scottish domestic economy. Glasgow's sugar merchants were a small élite numbering around 80 individuals in the partnerships which dominated the trade. Among them was a minor group of only a couple of dozen families who ran much of the business. The giant firm was Alexander Houston and Company with assets in trade, land and industry in both Scotland and the West Indies, valued at £630,000 in 1801. When it showed signs of collapse in the 1790s the government itself was forced to step in, so disastrous would its failure have been for the Scottish economy as a whole. Immediately below the vast Houston organisation were firms such as John Campbell Sen. and Co. (with assets of £179,000 in 1814); Robert Dunmore and Co; Dennistoun, Buchanan and Co; Leitch and Smith; Robert Mackay and Co; and Stirling, Gordon and Co.

Several of the merchant dynasties who made up these partnerships also owned Caribbean plantations, but the primary role of the firms was essentially to act as the selling agents in the UK and Europe for sugar, rum and coffee, provide credit and advances for slave purchases and organise the Scottish export trade to the

47 R. B. Sheridan, 'The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, XVIII (1963), p. 158.

48 J. C. Vardin, *La Mise en Valeur de l'île de Tobago, 1673-1783* (Paris, 1969), p. 23; Hancock, 'Scots in the Slave Trade', p. 64.

49 Sir W. Forbes, *Memoirs of a Banking House* (London and Edinburgh, 1869), p. 39.

50 This paragraph summarises T. M. Devine, 'An Eighteenth Century Business Elite: Glasgow West India Merchants, c. 1750-1815', *Scottish Historical Review*. LVII, no. 163 (April, 1978).

West Indies. From their ranks were also drawn Glasgow's political élite after c. 1780: the provosts, councillors and officers of the Merchants' House and the Chamber of Commerce who governed the city down to the early nineteenth century. They established the Glasgow West India Association in 1807 which, by the 1820s, had become a vocal and robust opponent of the movement for slave emancipation.⁵¹ While anti-slavery petitions were being generated from all over Scotland, the Association and its loyal press ally, the *Glasgow Courier*, vigorously defended the interest of the slaveowners against 'the spread of evil, so much to be dreaded' which, in their view, if emancipation came, would be catastrophic for the fortunes of the city.⁵²

The evidence surveyed thus far, therefore, suggests that Scotland had a deep and growing association with the two principal slave-based economic systems in the eighteenth-century Atlantic Empire: Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina on the American mainland, and the sugar islands of the Caribbean to the south. But what impact did this relationship have on Scotland's domestic transformation in this period? In England, the debate on slavery and industrial capitalism, despite the innovative work of Inikori, Solow and others, remains unresolved. Indeed, one very recent contribution to the discussion has insisted that 'sugar cultivation and the slave trade did not form an especially large part of the British economy . . .'.⁵³ Such a conclusion is hardly surprising because the revisionists who search for a key link between slavery and capitalism in England face considerable evidential and conceptual difficulties in order to produce a convincing thesis.

On the eve of the Industrial Revolution England was already a rich, highly developed and sophisticated economy with substantial urban growth and a highly commercialised agriculture system, making it one of the most developed societies in Europe.⁵⁴ English industrialism probably had no need of the finance from external sectors like the colonial trades to move forward by that period. The system was quite capable of replenishing itself from re-ploughing of profits to provide for further growth and from the existing surplus wealth of the contemporary domestic economy. In addition, econometric studies suggest that the idea of a radical change in economic direction during this period in England, at least implied by the term 'revolution', is overdrawn. The route to economic modernity was long and evolutionary rather than an experience of short-term

51 Glasgow City Archives (GCA), West India Association Minutes, Miscellaneous Papers, 3290–3294.

52 Quoted in Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, p. 86.

53 Burnard, "Prodigious Riches", p. 506.

54 Joel Mokyr, 'Accounting for the Industrial Revolution', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, Volume I: *Industrialisation, 1700–1860*, eds. R. Floud and P. Johnson (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1–27.

dramatic transformation. In this perspective, once again, the resulting modest increments in capital supply could easily be achieved from within the existing domestic system. As the late Michael Postan once asserted, ‘there were enough rich people in the country [England] to finance an economic effort far in excess of the modest activities of the leaders of the Industrial Revolution’.⁵⁵

However, it may well be that Scotland could provide more fertile ground for the revisionists. It was a country which was in much greater need of external markets and supplies of capital during the industrialisation process than its much richer and more advanced neighbour to the south. North of the Border, and up until the early nineteenth century, when convergence between the two countries accelerated rapidly, the structures of the Scottish economy were distinctive and different. First, as indicated by contrasting wage rates and the persistence of subsistence relationships in much of agriculture, Scotland c. 1750 was a much poorer society.⁵⁶ Indeed, a few decades earlier in the 1690s, a series of harvest failures and trade crises had unambiguously demonstrated the fragility of the nation’s economy. It took at least a generation for Scotland to experience sustained recovery from these disasters.⁵⁷ Second, the current consensus among most Scottish historians is that from around the 1750s and the 1760s, a clear and decisive break with the past was taking place. The comparative evidence suggests before forced Soviet industrialisation by the state in the 1920s and 1930s, few societies, if any, in Europe could equal the speed and scale of the Scottish transformation.⁵⁸ In other words, the term ‘Industrial Revolution’ is still viewed as having profound and legitimate resonance in a Scottish context.

Third, the fundamental extent of these rapid changes needs to be stressed. Growth was not simply confined to a ‘leading sector’ of textile-based industrialisation in cotton and linen, where it may indeed have been at its most dynamic. The whole of Scottish society was being recast between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A key indicator of the dash towards modernity was the pace of urbanisation. In 1750 only one in eight Scots lived in towns (defined as urban communities of 4000 or more inhabitants), a very much

55 N. F. R. Crafts and C. K. Harley, ‘Output, Growth and the British Industrial Revolution: A Restatement of the Crafts-Harley View’, *Economic History Review*, 45 (1992): pp. 703–730; M. M. Postan, ‘Recent Trends in the Accumulation of Capital’, *Economic History Review*, Volume 6, no. 1 (October, 1935): pp. 1–12. For an opposing perspective see Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England*, pp. 405–72.

56 Compare the content of my chapter, ‘Scotland’ in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, eds. Floud and Johnson, pp. 388–416, with the rest of the volume.

57 Christopher A. Whatley, ‘The Issues facing Scotland in 1707’ in *The Union of 1707: New Dimensions*, eds. S. J. Brown and C. A. Whatley (Edinburgh, 2008), p. 13.

58 T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700–2007* (London, 2006), pp. 105–23.

lower proportion than that of England. By the 1820s it was more like one in three.⁵⁹ Further, the transformation was not confined to manufacturing industry and the urban areas. In the two decades after c. 1760 the Scottish countryside took on a recognisably modern form with enclosed fields, trim farms and separate individual holdings, a set of changes which had taken many generations to achieve south of the Border. North of the Highland line, Gaeldom moved from tribalism to capitalism over scarcely more than two generations.⁶⁰

Fourth, again unlike England, the Scottish domestic market was relatively small and grew only slowly in the eighteenth century. In the 1750s the population was around 1.25 million and had only risen to 1.6 million in 1801. The annual growth rate of 0.6 per cent was just over half that of England, primarily because of high net levels of emigration, and significantly behind the Irish increase of 2.1 per cent over the longer period 1791 to 1821. Not surprisingly, therefore, historians of Scotland place much more emphasis on external markets, partly in England, but more commonly across the Atlantic, as the strategic sources of demand for the vastly increasing flow of goods now turned out by the nation's mills, weaving shops and iron works.⁶¹ Throughout the nineteenth century, this overseas orientation became even more evident. Against this background, it can be argued that the slave-based economies of the Atlantic had a powerful impact on Scottish economic growth as a source of raw materials for the new industrialism, market expansion and capital transfers to manufacturing, mining and agriculture.

Before the 1830s, the Scottish Industrial Revolution was mainly limited to the textiles of cotton and linen. Metal manufacture was laggard and only came into its own from the 1830s and 1840s onwards. The establishment of the famous Carron Company in 1759 and a flurry of iron works opened before 1801 proved to be a false dawn. No new companies were floated between that date and 1824. While output did rise for a time, the rate of expansion was markedly slower than that in England.⁶² On the other hand, textiles were dominant, accounting for the

⁵⁹ T. M. Devine, 'Urbanisation' in *People and Society in Scotland*. Volume I, 1760–1830, eds. T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 27–52.

⁶⁰ T. M. Devine, *The Transformation of Rural Scotland. Social Change and the Agrarian Economy, 1660–1815* (Edinburgh, 1994 and 1999); T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War. The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 1994).

⁶¹ R. H. Campbell, 'The Making of the Industrial City', in *Glasgow*, eds. Devine and Jackson, pp. 184–213.

⁶² J. Butt, 'The Scottish Iron and Steel Industry before the Hot-Blast', *Journal of the West of Scotland Iron and Steel Industry*, 73 (1966); Christopher A. Whatley, *The Industrial Revolution in Scotland* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 31.

employment of 257,900 workers or 89 per cent of all recorded manufacturing jobs. The fastest rise was in mechanised cotton spinning, which in turn depended on expansion of raw material supplies from the plantation economies of the West Indies and the American South.⁶³

In fact, the connection was catalytic. During the American Revolutionary War, several Glasgow tobacco houses switched their interests to the sugar islands of the Caribbean. Merchant correspondence reveals that while the most lucrative opportunities lay in the importation of sugar, planters drove hard bargains and forced firms to take raw cotton as well. In consequence, cotton coming into the Clyde virtually halved in price between 1776 and 1780: 'this was one of the factors which appears to have persuaded numerous former linen and silk merchants and manufacturers to concentrate activities on cotton spinning and weaving'.⁶⁴ Until well into the 1790s, 'sea island' cotton from the Caribbean provided the leading sector of the Scottish Industrial Revolution with the vital raw material for its mills and workshops until being replaced after that period by the southern states of the USA, another slave-based economic system.⁶⁵

These economies were also key markets for Scottish textile producers and other manufacturers. David Eltis and Stan Engerman stress that 'All scholars recognise the [English] domestic market to have been much larger than the Caribbean'.⁶⁶ Perhaps so, but it was a different story for Scotland, especially when the populations of the American tobacco colonies are added to those of the West Indian islands. Between 1651 and 1851, the population of England rose from 5.2 million to 16.7 million.⁶⁷ Scottish population was 1.2 million in 1755 and by 1801 had only grown to 1.6 million. In 1851 the total stood at 2.8 million.⁶⁸ For such a relatively small country, the Atlantic markets came as a much bigger and decisive bonus than for England. In 1770, the population of the British American colonies was 2.7 million. The British Caribbean population was 760,000 in 1801, most of them slaves who represented a potentially enormous market for provisions

63 Norman Murray, *The Scottish Handloom Weavers, 1790–1850* (Edinburgh, 1978), p. 23.

64 National Library of Scotland, MS8793, Letter Book 'E' of Alexander Houston and Co., *passim*; T. M. Devine, 'A Glasgow Tobacco House during the American War of Independence', *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXIII, no. 3 (July, 1975); Whatley, *Industrial Revolution in Scotland*, p. 42.

65 Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 377–8.

66 Eltis and Engerman, 'The Importance of Slavery', p. 125.

67 E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 208–9.

68 *Census 1971 Scotland: Preliminary Report*.

and cheap clothing. By 1810, the number of Africans in the sugar islands and the plantation areas of North America had expanded to just over 2 million.⁶⁹

Scottish exports to the American mainland colonies at official values averaged £97,962 in 1740–44, then tripled to £298,922 from 1770–14.⁷⁰ This was significant but much more crucial to the domestic economy, however, was the market for ‘slave cloth’ in the Caribbean. Demand there helps to explain why, as already seen, the West Indies took such an increasing share of exports from Scotland of home-produced goods in the later eighteenth century, rising from 21 per cent (at official values) in 1781 to 65 per cent in 1813.⁷¹ Here, the strategic factor was linen manufacture. Linen was by a long way Scotland’s largest manufacturing industry and biggest industrial employer in the eighteenth century. Between 1746 and the 1790s, the output of cloth more than doubled in volume and trebled in value. Even after the 1780s, when the dramatic expansion of cotton captured attention, linen production continued apace. Official output again rose threefold to reach nearly 27 million yards annually in 1813–17. Work in linen spinning, weaving and finishing was critical to the way of life of countless Scottish families. Contemporary estimates suggest that about 40,000 weavers worked for the market in the 1780s and just under 170,000 women found their ‘chief employment’ in the spinning of linen yarn. When some of the finishing trades are included, full and part-time linen employment in that decade may have occupied more than 230,000 men, women and children.⁷² Little wonder that John Naismith could remark in 1790 that ‘The linen manufacture has been the most universal source of wealth and happiness introduced into Scotland. To how many thousands has it afforded bread for these forty years past?’⁷³

In broader terms, the industry was divided into two types of specialisation. Most Scottish production concentrated on the cheaper and coarser lines which in turn were heavily geared to satisfying the needs of the export market. Fife, Angus and Perthshire were the dominant centres for these trades. Fine manufacture for lawns and cambrics tended to focus more on Glasgow and the western counties of Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire. The finer production was more oriented to the home market than in the regions of east-central Scotland. In that last area, the

69 Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 192–5.

70 Jacob M. Price, ‘New Time Series for Scotland’s and Britain’s Trade with the Thirteen Colonies and States, 1740–1791’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXII, no. 2 (April, 1975), pp. 301–325.

71 See above.

72 Alastair J. Durie, *The Scottish Linen Industry in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 158–60.

73 John Naismith, *Thoughts on Various Objects of Industry pursued in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1790), p. 93.

imperial factor was crucial in three ways. First, the industry enjoyed the protection of a high tariff wall against European competition. Second, the system of bounty payments set up by the state in 1743 to boost cloth exports to the colonies was vital. From 1745 bounties were also extended to low-priced cloth, which generated a dramatic increase in linen exports to the plantations across the Atlantic in the years that followed. Throughout the eighteenth century, 80 to 90 per cent of these exports were supported by the bounty, and when it was temporarily withdrawn in 1754 the output of some of the coarser linens halved, only to recover vigorously when the subsidy was restored two years later.⁷⁴ Third, the colonial markets were critical to growth. European consumption was marginal and Ireland of minor significance. Nine-tenths of all Scottish linen exported from Scotland went to North America and the West Indies. After the American War, the Caribbean became even more important. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the standards of living of countless working-class families in the eastern Lowlands of Scotland came to depend on the huge markets for cheap linen clothing among the slave populations of Jamaica and the Leeward Islands.⁷⁵ Moreover, out of this specialisation came the global industry of jute, centred on Dundee. Jute was to that city what shipbuilding was to Glasgow. In due course, Dundee rejoiced in the name 'Juteopolis'.

The final issue to be considered is that of capital transfers from merchanting and plantation ownership in the slave-based economies to Scotland. Previous work by this author has revealed very significant investment by tobacco and West Indian traders in Scottish industry, commercial infrastructure and land in the key decades of economic transformation between c. 1750 and c. 1800.⁷⁶ Manufacturing industry in Glasgow and the West of Scotland gained very significantly from colonial merchant capitalisation after c. 1730. Around eighty industrial units in iron-working, sugar houses, glassworks and soapworks gained, but the decisive capital transfers were in textiles where no less than 46 enterprises were involved. Above all, West India merchant capital was often vital for the big cotton-spinning firms which dominated the industry before 1815. Two houses, Leitch and Smith and Stirling, Gordon and Co., were key shareholders in James Finlay and Co. which by the early nineteenth century owned three major mill

⁷⁴ Durie, *Scottish Linen Industry*, pp. 151–2.

⁷⁵ Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, pp. 336–7.

⁷⁶ T. M. Devine, 'The Colonial Trades and Industrial Investment in Scotland, c. 1700–1815', in *The Organisation of Inter-oceanic Trade in European Expansion, 1450–1800*, eds. P. Emmer and F. Caastra (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 299–312.

complexes and was probably the single largest producer of cottons in Scotland.⁷⁷ Similarly, two of the partners in John Campbell Sen. And Co. and one of the members of Dennistoun, Buchanan and Co. contributed £70,000 of total capital of £150,000 in the New Lanark Company between 1810 and 1812.⁷⁸ The two last-mentioned West India firms were also connected through Alexander Campbell and Robert Dennistoun with Robert Humphrey and Co., cotton-spinners of Hutchesontown, Glasgow, in which West India interests held £20,000 of the £32,000 capital in 1816.⁷⁹ The Dennistoun family were involved in a variety of other firms, such as John Monteith and Co. and Reynolds, Monteith and Co., cotton-spinners of Renfrewshire (c. 1795) and, more importantly, in the formation of the company which developed the major Stanley Cotton Mills in Perthshire.⁸⁰ Monteith, Bogle and Co., the owners of the cotton complex at Blantyre in Lanarkshire, also drew on the resources of two West India houses: Alexander Garden of the Caribbean firm of Francis Garden and Co. became a member of Monteith, Bogle and Co. through his marriage with the daughter of its leading partner, Henry Monteith;⁸¹ and Adam Bogle, the other major partner, was not only a scion of a long-established merchant family in Glasgow, but was also a member of Robert Bogle jun. and Co., a leading West India house in the city.⁸² Furthermore, it was reckoned that Alexander Houston and Co. had about £20,000 invested in the cotton industry at the time of the firm's bankruptcy; and Robert Dunmore was the leading figure behind the establishment of the Ballindalloch Cotton Co. in Stirlingshire.⁸³

Other spin-offs from the tobacco and sugar trades were the foundation of Glasgow's first three banks and investment in both the Forth and Clyde and Monklands Canals. There was a huge outflow of funds from colonial commerce into the purchase of landed estates, with well over half of the Glasgow colonial merchant élite involved and a grand total of at least 140 properties acquired in the

77 James Finlay and Co., Glasgow, Balance Book of J. Finlay and Co. 1789–1800: the firm's capital rose from £30,000 in 1795 to £75,000 in 1810.

78 National Archives of Scotland (NAS), GD64/1/274, (Copy) Contract of Copartnership of New Lanark Co., 5 Oct. 1810.

79 GCA, Campbell of Hallyards Papers, Minute of the Meeting of the Trustees of Alexander Campbell, 16 Apr. 1819; Trustees of R. Dennistoun to Campbell's trustees, 15 Dec. 1823.

80 NAS, Particular Register of Sasines (Renfrew), 42/217.

81 *Glasgow Courier*, 31 Dec. 1812.

82 GCA, Bogle MSS, Genealogy of the Bogle family; Minute Books of West India Association of Glasgow, Individual and Firm Subscriptions.

83 NAS, GD237/134, Minute of a Meeting of the Creditors of the House of A. Houston and Co., 23 Sept. 1806; Signet Library, Court of Session Process 368/21, Petition of Robert Dunmore, 1–4.

burgh itself and the surrounding counties.⁸⁴ Even this impressive figure, however, does not do full justice to the capital repatriated from the Caribbean because it is confined to merchant portfolios and does not include possible investments of plantation owners in Scottish land. Initial investigations not only suggest that this was very significant but, unlike that of the merchant princes considered here, their purchase of estates was across much of the Scottish countryside and not contained in any way to the west-central region.⁸⁵

This essay has attempted to describe a strategic connection between the Atlantic slave-based economies and Scotland's Great Leap Forward in the second half of the eighteenth century. The relationship was arguably a potent one, especially in relation to raw material supply for the cotton manufacture, expanding and new markets and capital transfers to industry and agriculture. It has been argued that these external influences were especially vital to Scottish development given the country's traditional poverty and the relatively small size of its own internal market. However, although the impact of the plantation economies is deemed to be catalytic, it was by no means the only cause of the Scottish Industrial Revolution. The commitment of the landed élites to economic transformation, indigenous levels of skills and education, the rationalising of Enlightenment thought and natural endowment, *inter alia*, were all part of the mix. Also, the slave-based economies were of fundamental importance in the first textile-dominated phase of Scottish industrialisation but had little relevance to the second, after c. 1830, which was based on iron, steel and engineering, not least because by then the capital resources of the nation were much enhanced. In addition, recent research has shown that the Indian Empire was an important source of external funds; again, by no means did the Atlantic have a monopoly. Yet, it would seem that Asian resources, repatriated by Scots in the East India Company's service and by private merchants, tended on the whole to be invested in landownership (in terms of current knowledge) rather than in industry.⁸⁶ So the story is a complex one but even when all the necessary qualifications are made, the central argument remains that the Atlantic slave-based economies were indeed fundamental to Scotland's eighteenth-century transformation.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement. Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700–1900* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 54–92.

⁸⁵ Based on a preliminary survey by my research assistant, Alex Hendrickson, in 2008 of records of landed families with eighteenth-century Scottish West India interests held in both public and private archives.

⁸⁶ George McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State* (London, 2008), pp. 180–202.

⁸⁷ An important start in advancing the current knowledge was made in March 2010 at the Royal Society of Edinburgh Workshop on Scottish connections to the slave trade and slavery,

There is a final irony here. Scotland's growing prosperity increasingly rested after c.1760 on the profits and markets of the transatlantic slave-based plantation economies. Yet, precisely at the same time, some of the towering figures of the Scottish Enlightenment were building a formidable moral, economic and philosophical case against black slavery. As one scholar has put it: 'in the latter half of the eighteenth century the anti-slavery idea ran along filaments of an Atlantic intellectual web, at the centre of which sat the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment'.⁸⁸ Scottish empirical philosophy, notably in the writings of Francis Hutcheson, emphasised sympathy and fellow-feeling between human beings as the keystone of proper ethical behaviour. That idea of benevolence was in direct conflict with the slave system. Adam Smith also attacked it from the standpoint of economic pragmatism: 'the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end dearest of all'.⁸⁹ Equally, one of Smith's star pupils, John Millar, in his influential *Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks* (1771) argued that slavery was a cancer in the very heart of any civilised society likely to cause continuous rebellion from those subject to coercion and inducing luxury among those who owned them. In time, these contributions fed into the great arsenal of ideas which destroyed slavery in the British Empire and also help to explain why Scotland was so significant in the struggle for emancipation which ended in victory in 1833.⁹⁰

But in the short term, the intellectual assault on slavery remained insulated from the daily existence of countless Scots in the plantation economies and the Africa trade. The enormous vested interests involved won over abstract theory. The correspondence of Scots merchants and managers to their relatives at home reveals little concern with the morality of slavery in the later eighteenth century. This was apparently the case among those who had been exposed to the condemnations of the intellectuals. One of the most forthright opponents of black slavery was James Beattie who held the Chair of Moral Philosophy in Marischal College, Aberdeen. In his *Elements of Moral Science* (1790) he fulminated against this outrageous moral evil which he described as 'utterly repugnant to every principle of reason, religion, humanity and conscience'.⁹¹ But Beattie also admitted that some of his students found employment in

sponsored by both Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. It involved Scottish historians, archivists and key researchers from outside the country with expertise on the subject from non-Scottish perspectives.

88 Rice, *Black Slavery*, p. 167.

89 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I (London, 1804), p. 345.

90 Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery*, pp. 55–60.

91 Quoted in Rice, *Black Slavery*, p. 176.

the slave-based societies of the empire despite his 'pleading the case of the poor Africans' in his teaching. He recognised that 'many of my pupils have gone to the West Indies' and he could only maintain the pious hope that, while there, the principles he had enunciated would guide 'their conduct to their unfortunate brethren'.⁹²

⁹² Quoted in C. D. Rice, 'Abolitionists and abolitionism in Aberdeen: a test case for the nineteenth-century anti-slavery movement', *Northern Scotland*, I, no. 1 (December, 1972), p. 70.