

# THE REAPER'S GARDEN

*Death and Power in the World  
of Atlantic Slavery*



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overseer was killed and decapitated by the rebels, who set fire to several sections of cane field, as they called their fellows to arms by "singing their war song." Given the turnover in Jamaican population, he must have expected the revolts to have been long since forgotten by the enslaved. But apparently the latest rebels on Taylor's plantation had been inspired by lessons from the Jamaican past. Taylor caught a glimpse, reflected in his letter, of an oppositional political history, taught and learned on Jamaican plantations, a radical pedagogy of the enslaved. In surreptitious conversations and certainly in sacred rituals, the dead figured in the goals, strategies, and outcomes of slaves' political activity. The spirits of generations past indicated what might have been possible in the 1760s, and what might still be, in Jamaica.<sup>45</sup>

By the time Taylor discovered this subversive school of historical thought, the imperial context was quite different than it had been in the 1760s. Whereas patriotic Britons were able to feel themselves favored by God in the outcome of the Seven Years' War, many felt cursed by events of the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s, and this perception would contribute to the emergence of a different approach toward dead slaves, which presented them less as symbols of irrepressible liberty than as evidence of national sin. Although slave rebels could be seen as embodying British virtue in the midst of national triumph and conquest, the intervening decades had brought the American, French, and Haitian revolutions; rare was the Briton who could celebrate violent resistance in such dangerous times. In fact, martyred rebels never made so great an impression on the British imagination as would the more passive victims of slavery, the heaps of men, women, and children who died unheralded. Whereas black martyrdom illustrated the transoceanic availability of the dead to serve political purposes, martyrdom was not so influential as deaths that could be summoned without raising the specter of retributive violence, those which allowed the projection of sentimental concern and the possibility for imperial renewal, without admitting the justice of slave revolution. The black casualties of Atlantic slavery would affect political history less as icons of sacred authority than as the focus of arguments about national morality. Heroic rebels would influence imperial politics less than would the black victims of ordinary murders, which, happening to occur at a more opportune time than Tacky's Revolt, had extraordinary consequences.



## *The Soul of the British Empire*

IF THE TIME WAS NOT yet right in the 1760s for martyred slave rebels to win posthumous battles in the imperial capital, by the 1780s, changing conceptions of the proper relation between the living and the dead had helped advance the antislavery movement in Great Britain considerably. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, as rising evangelicalism, popular sentimentality, and the fashionable genre of graveyard literature focused British public attention on the relation between death and moral values, the high mortality rate in Britain's Caribbean slave colonies became a central focus of a massive movement for colonial reform.

Between the 1780s and the end of slavery, as partisans debated the causes of high mortality, they made the dead central players in the politics of antislavery. The antislavery movement, particularly in its evangelical Christian incarnation, drew strength from a new rhetoric about slave mortality; what had earlier been described principally in economic terms became a moral problem of vital importance to the "soul" of the British nation. Nevertheless, arguments about deaths among the enslaved showed an interpenetration of feeling and reason, of sentiment and calculation, that blended new styles of thought and speech with very old—indeed, one could say, unenlightened—impulses. Discussions of the sin of slavery were intertwined with consideration of judgment and the afterlife. Fear of damnation thus helped spur legislation to abolish the slave trade, register all slaves on colonial plantations, and finally end slavery in British colonies.

### Goods Thrown Overboard

Late in the summer of 1780, five Liverpool merchants, including William and John Gregson, the former and future mayors of the city, outfitted the *William* to trade for slaves in West Africa. When the ship reached the Gold Coast early the next year, its captain, Richard Hanley, found another ship for sale, a recently captured Dutch prize, the *Zorgus*, or *Zong*. He bought the vessel for his employers, dispatched the fortunate news, and transferred the *William's* surgeon, Luke Collingwood, to the *Zong* as captain. Collingwood and a crew of seventeen immediately commenced purchasing slaves to sell in Jamaica. As battles with the Dutch erupted along the coast, Collingwood cruised the trading forts, managing to acquire 440 captives. He also took aboard the outgoing governor of Anomabo, Robert Stubbs, who had been suspended for instigating a dispute with local chiefs.<sup>1</sup>

On 6 September 1781, the *Zong* left West Africa. The length of the Atlantic voyage stretched unexpectedly to eleven weeks; mortal sickness gained on the crew and cargo. By the time the ship was in sight of Jamaica on 27 November, seven members of the crew and more than sixty enslaved Africans had died. The epidemic promised to kill more before long. Sickness aboard the slaver would surely cause wary port authorities to quarantine the *Zong* in the harbor, thus alerting potential buyers to defects in the cargo.

Collingwood steered the ship away from the island (he would later claim that he had mistaken it for Hispaniola), pushed back into the encircling sea, and called a meeting of his officers. He told them that the ship's fresh water supply was low, that the sickest slaves below would surely die, and that when they did they would lose all value, cost the owners dearly, and diminish the expected remittance to their employees; but "if they were thrown alive into the sea, it would be the loss of the underwriters." His briefing held special appeal for the officers, who were promised the "privilege" of a certain number of slaves upon sale of the whole lot. The value of the officers' share would be determined by averaging the sale price of the entire cargo. Every sick and dying African who brought a low price at auction would reduce the officers' commission.<sup>2</sup>

Collingwood showed a clear familiarity with the maritime insurance policies then applicable to the slave trade. Indeed John Weskett's *Complete Digest of the Theory, Laws, and Practice of Insurance*, published earlier that

year, provided a calculated justification for the actions Collingwood was about to take: "Whatever the master of a ship in distress, with the advice of his officers and sailors, deliberately resolves to do, for the preservation of the whole, in cutting away masts or cable, or in throwing goods overboard to lighten his vessel, which is what is meant by jettison or jetson, is, in all places, permitted to be brought into a general, or gross average: in which all concerned in ship, freight, and cargo, are to bear an equal or proportionable part of what was so sacrificed for the common good, and it must be made good by the insurers in such proportions as they have underwrote."<sup>3</sup> Backed by sound financial rationalization, Collingwood ordered the slaughter of the sickest and weakest Africans for "the preservation of the whole," averring also that it might be crueler still to let them linger without water until they died of their illnesses.<sup>4</sup> It would be better, he might have said, to end their worldly suffering and resurrect them as part of a "gross average." The chief mate, James Kelsal, initially opposed the plan, or so he later testified in court, but he did not resist the order.

On 29 November, crewmen came into the dark and suffocating hold, selected fifty-four ailing men, women, boys, and girls, and took them above into sunlight and fresh air. Then they bound their hands and cast them overboard. The next day they came for forty-three more. Certainly, not all of these people were terminally ill, for one African man had the strength to grab hold of a rope that hung overboard, drag himself up to a porthole, and clamber back into the ship, where crew members found him hours later. Momentarily shielded from Collingwood's surveillance, the sailors sympathized with the man and returned him to the hold. Maybe they suspected that they and their own sick mates might have been similarly dispatched, if only they had been worth something dead.

The next day it rained, and the crew collected enough fresh drinking water to add a three-week supply to the ship's store. Then, on Collingwood's orders, they came below to take 36 more Africans. The crew managed to bind and jettison 26 of them before the last to leapt unfettered into the sea and escaped to drown themselves. In just three days, Collingwood and his crew had caused the deaths of 132 Africans.

The captain and crew conducted this business as they watched the terrified Africans thrashing about helplessly, choking and sputtering as the sea swallowed them whole. Remaining in his cabin below, Robert Stubbs, former governor of one of the busiest slave-trading posts in the

Atlantic world, saw and heard the drowning slaves from his portal. He was only a passenger, he said later, and had nothing to do with the transaction; perhaps he also thought it beneath him to sully his hands with the business. Housed beneath Governor Stubbs's quarters, the Africans could hear only the screaming and splashing, as they waited in the darkness for their turn. Whether from disease, dehydration, or sheer fright, thirty more of them died in the hold before the ship made landfall. On 9 December the *Zong* came within sight of Jamaica again. The slaver made harbor by 22 December, docking in time for Collingwood, Stubbs, and the crew to celebrate Christmas on land.

On 28 December the merchant firm Coppells & Aguilar offered two hundred survivors of the massacre for sale, advertising them as "choice young Coromantee, Fantee, and Ashantee Negroes" (Figure 5.1).<sup>5</sup> What became of them? How did they narrate the experience to others in Jamaica? At present, historians do not know who bought the Africans or where they may have gone, much less with whom they commiserated, who retold their stories to others, or how they resolved to live with the certain knowledge that whites were willing to murder them, methodically and systematically, without apparent purpose. We do know, however, that many Britons told and retold the story, in the vocabulary of evangelical moral sentiment, because they were certain that Collingwood, his crew, and the courts of Great Britain had grossly distorted the meaning of death.

### "Death More Dreadful Made"

The moral outrage exemplified by the reaction of evangelical Christians to the *Zong* massacre animated emerging abolitionist sentiments. The event provided a graphic example of the primacy of economic calculation over human life in the system of slavery. In the context of eighteenth-century conceptions of death and the dead, the articulation of this moralistic trope motivated a passionate politics. Antislavery campaigners superimposed the image of slavery that crystallized in the *Zong* case on the major parliamentary inquiries into the material and spiritual well-being of the enslaved in the British Caribbean. Making the high mortality rate in the Caribbean a focus of committee hearings in 1791 and of the slave registration legislation of 1815, Parliament regarded slave mortality, the accumulation of dead black bodies, as an important dimension

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28th December, 1781.

**FOR SALE at Black River,**  
on Wednesday the 9th day of Ja  
nuary next, on board the Ship  
**ZORCUE, Luke Collingwood**  
Commander, from the Gold Coast  
of Africa, 200 choice young  
**NEGROES, by**  
**Coppells & Aguilar.**

Figure 5.1. The survivors of the *Zong* massacre, advertised for sale by the merchant firm Coppells & Aguilar. *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* (Kingston), 28 December 1781.

of debates over the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and colonial slavery. At the moral center of antislavery concern was a figure—indignation at the triumph of greed over human life—that found expression in rhetoric about the deaths of slaves. This was more than propaganda; moralistic evocations of the enslaved dead grew out of deep convictions. They also relied on conventions of discourse that stemmed from profound transformations in the eighteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic world.<sup>6</sup>

As Britons struggled to come to terms with revolutionary changes in their demographic, economic, political, and religious experience, concern for the fate of Africans and their descendants, at a remove from the immediate upheaval at home, impelled abolitionists to articulate idealized notions of the British moral order at home and abroad. The dead became a symbol, a rhetorical device that abolitionists could bring to bear on political life. Detailed narratives of pain and death, and later the humanitarian use of demographic statistics, gathered power at the intersection of British idealism, sentimentalism, and evangelicalism.

In eighteenth-century Britain a dramatic increase in life expectancy accompanied the onset of the industrial revolution. The ravages of the plague, which had reduced the population of England from about 5.25 million to less than 4.9 million between 1657 and 1686, yielded to steady population growth by the middle of the eighteenth century. Once inoculation and vaccination had brought smallpox under control, Britons saw the first signs of a population boom. However, steady progress in life expectancy did not lead directly to the spread of more secular or “rational” ways of viewing death. In fact, at midcentury the perception was that Great Britain had experienced a dramatic *decline* in population.<sup>7</sup>

Many writers in Britain shared the view that the population of the “civilized” world had fallen, morally as well as numerically, since ancient times. Many also believed that the spread of commerce was to blame for the decrease. In a well-received essay, the Reverend John Brown argued that excessive commerce “brings Superfluity and vast Wealth; begets Avarice, gross Luxury, or effeminate refinement among the higher Ranks, together with general Loss of Principle.” In his explanation, “Vanity and Effeminacy” reduced the desire to marry among the elite, and “Intemperance and Disease” rendered the “lower Ranks” partially impotent. “This Debility is always attended with a Shortness of Life, both in the Parents and the Offspring; and therefore a still further Diminution of Numbers

follows on the whole.” Two bills introduced in Parliament in 1753 and 1758 sought to determine the extent of the supposed decline, by establishing a national register of births, marriages, and deaths. Both bills failed when they ran up against popular fears that “numbering the people,” King David’s great sin (Sam. 24:1–25), would incur divine wrath. Most viewed death and demography not through the lens of medical science but through the apocalyptic visions of Christianity. Indeed, men and women of feeling—especially authors and dissenting evangelicals—eschewed disenchanting rationalism in favor of emotionally charged public interactions with the dead.<sup>8</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, orthodox Protestantism held that death severed all meaningful communion between the living and the deceased. Unlike Catholics, in whose view the prayers of loved ones and the intercession of the Church could improve the state of passing souls, Protestants knew that their fate was fixed at death. As the historian Philip Almond has put it: “On the last day, the judgement would be made by God. And when this life was done with, and this world passed away, there would remain only a state of total blessedness and a state of interminable misery in the stark symmetry of contrasts between heaven and hell.” The only proper approach to death, then, was lonely and anxious preparation for eternity. Popular guides to the *ars moriendi* (art of dying), such as William Sherlock’s *Practical Discourse concerning Death*, first published in 1689 and appearing in thirty-two editions by 1759, urged, “This ought to be the Work and Business of our whole Lives, to prepare for Death, which comes but once, but that once is for eternity.” Such convictions isolated individuals from eternal communities—communities in which the living and the dead interacted across the boundary between the physical and metaphysical worlds—and distanced the dead from the routine concerns of the living.<sup>9</sup>

By midcentury, the increasing currency of Enlightenment philosophy tended to reduce the emphasis on eternal damnation and suffering, at least among the literate upper echelons of British society. The image of God commonly took on a more benevolent, detached, and rational aspect. For many, the idea of “natural death” replaced notions of death as a “transcendental trauma.” As the historian Roy Porter has explained, “Death ceased to be the ultimate enemy, requiring heroic acts of will, faith, purgation, and penitence. Instead dying came to be widely treated as an easy transition to a more blessed state, a natural metamorphosis to be accepted, even

welcomed." It was not so for everyone. For members of the rapidly growing evangelical sects, only a grateful fixation on the death of Jesus Christ could afford the assurance of ultimate salvation.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in the 1730s and 1740s, the Protestant revival washed up on nearly every shore of the Anglo-Atlantic world. Distressed by what they saw as spiritual torpor, the decline of clerical authority, and the spread of rationalism, George Whitefield, Charles and John Wesley, and many other Protestant ministers resolved to rouse people's faith with passionate homilies about the death of Christ and his gift of salvation. Ministers abandoned the previous century's difficult and uncertain preparations for death and advocated instantaneous deliverance through faith and repentance. Though the evangelicals scorned Enlightenment skepticism, they did adapt to new currents of thought and expression that stressed the validity of personal experience and induction; the *experience* of faith in Christ's sacrificial death came to determine individual confidence in salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Yet despite the assurance offered to believers in the martyred Christ, evangelicals generally subscribed to a providential worldview according to which hell's terrible punishments would be visited on entire nations. Not only was the individual sinner at risk of eternal damnation, but whole societies risked awful retribution if they refused to renounce their sins and amend their ways. Eighteenth-century evangelicals conceived the world as a divinely sustained moral order. In this view, Providence was also "their inescapable summons to mould the world to a righteousness which would avert deserved national disaster, relieve the mundane sufferings of men, and pave the way for the salvation of their eternal souls." Thus, the terrors of the afterlife were brought to bear upon the social and political world. By making the death of Jesus the crux of both personal and national redemption, evangelicalism put death at the center of its vision of moral renewal and moral order. Evangelical religion supplied a nearly irresistible motivation for purposeful moral action, and new conventions for expressing moral sentiments and for representing relationships linking the dying, the dead, and the living helped shape the moral impulse at the heart of abolitionism.<sup>12</sup>

As the evangelical movements attracted ever-larger followings, their themes converged with those of popular writing about death. In 1732 a London printer produced an inexpensive new edition of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, containing an account of the sufferings and death of the Protestants

in the reign of Queen Mary, originally published in 1563. Its graphic depictions of the executions of the Protestant faithful confirmed the dignity of suffering and dying for religious principles. Published in cheap installments throughout the century, the *Book of Martyrs* was among the most widely read and most affecting texts of its time. As the historian Linda Colley has observed, "Foxe's martyrs could stand for Everyman. They included women as well as men, the poor and insignificant as well as the eminent and prosperous, and all ages from the venerable old to the most vulnerably young." They helped create a sense of nationhood founded on persecution, death, and Christian righteousness.<sup>13</sup>

Graveyard poetry, which emerged from the classical elegy in the early eighteenth century, paralleled the popularity of martyrology. Graveyard poets gained an audience throughout the century by inviting readers to reflect on the meaning of death as they joined self-conscious narrators on descriptive tours of church vaults and night walks through burial grounds. Appearing first in the 1740s and '50s, Robert Blair's work *The Grave*, Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*, and Edward Young's *Complaint or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* were among the most widely published writings of the latter half of the eighteenth century. Young's poetic address to a "worldly infidel" went through twelve editions in the 1750s alone. "What is this World?" Blair asked his readers. "What? but a spacious Burial-field unwall'd . . . Sin has laid waste, Not here and there a Country, but a World." The narrator of Young's *Complaint*, pining by the grave of his stepdaughter, pleads for the strength to quit a living death of sin, to break the "Thread of Moral Death that ties me to the World." Similar sentiments governed Elizabeth Rowe's *Friendship in Death*, originally published in 1728, and then followed by seven more editions up through the 1750s. In a series of imaginary letters from the dead to the living she cautions readers to be mindful of the afterlife and turn away from sin, so that they could look forward to experiencing the ineffable pleasures promised to the faithful. Emotionally affecting in tone, the work also signaled the ascendancy of moral sentimentalism as a discourse of advocacy. "Nothing teacheth like death," wrote William Dodd in his popular reflections on the subject, which were reprinted frequently between 1763 and 1822 (Figure 5.2).<sup>14</sup>

The convergence of elegy and evangelicalism often reflected personal connections between poets and preachers. Robert Blair had a personal

relationship with the dissenting minister Philip Doddridge, whose *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745) had a formative influence on evangelical thinking. James Hervey, himself an evangelical preacher, taught pious lessons in the hugely popular *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746), written in the tradition of graveyard poetry. Hervey and the Wesley brothers appreciated Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* because it dovetailed with fervent Christianity in highlighting the depravity of man and affirming the reality of the supernatural, while stressing the authority and authenticity of personal feeling. Upon Hervey's death in 1758, William Romaine, an associate of George Whitefield and, like him, an evangelist to the poor, composed and published a sermon in Hervey's honor, *The Knowledge of Salvation Is Precious in the Hour of Death*. It went through twelve editions before the end of 1759.<sup>15</sup>

The popularity of such writing served to keep death at the center of moral sentiments, given more secular expression by Edmund Burke and Adam Smith. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke argued that pain, danger, sickness, and death give rise to the strongest human passions. Such passions were also at the heart of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In the suffering and death of another, a person could discover empathy, the prerequisite for all moral concern. "We sympathize even with the dead," wrote Smith, especially with the victims of malign intent. Empathy could "animate anew the deformed and mangled carcass of the slain," inspiring, in Smith's account, the "horrors which are supposed to haunt the bed of the murderer, the ghosts which, superstition imagines, rise from the grave to demand vengeance upon those who brought them to an untimely end." Of course, where Smith and Burke offered reasoned worldly accounts of the relation between pain, death, and sentiment, the torments of hell and the possibility of eternal salvation weighed more heavily on the moral imagination of evangelicals and other Christians. Indeed, religiously inspired mortuary writing had set the stage for a much broader concern with the moral sentiments that connected the living with the dead.<sup>16</sup>

In early eighteenth-century Europe stories about death and pain among ordinary people proliferated, narratives that linked the concerns of readers to the experiences of others. Realistic novels, autopsies, and various social inquiries all made the dead and the dying available for representation and interpretation beyond the traditional realms of religion and family. Perhaps

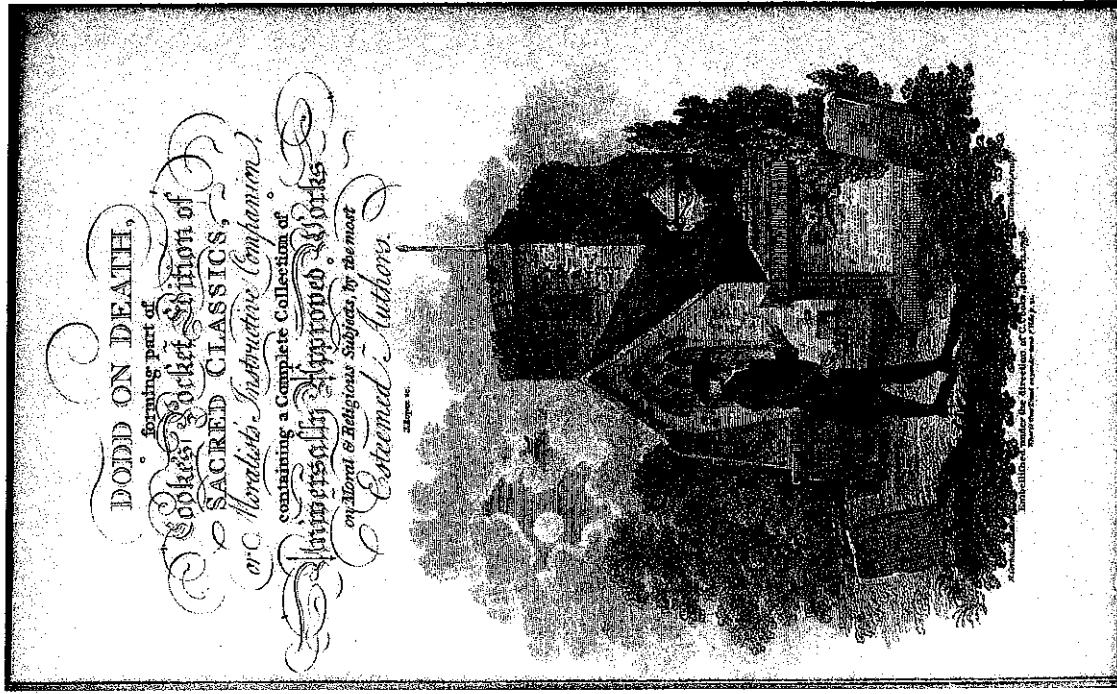


Figure 5.2. Graveyard ethics. Frontispiece, *Dodd on Death*, in William Dodd, *Reflections on Death* (London, 1796), engraving by W. Hawkins. This image shows a minister walking through a graveyard, drawing lessons on mortality from his meditations there. "What is that I read on yonder tomb?" reads the caption below the illustration. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard College Library (2003J-EC109).

more important, such accounts introduced complex causal explanations for death. Gothic and Romantic narratives, revolving as they did around evocative images of pain and death, helped build a morally charged aesthetic around morality that directed sentiment toward the mortal trials of others. These novel literary forms worked with emerging religious discourse to encourage new spiritually charged narratives of cause and consequence. Increasingly, and with greater effectiveness, the moral weight of the suffering or lifeless body could be used as leverage in a partisan dispute.<sup>17</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, British views about the radical changes wrought by the rise of industrial capitalism and the expansion of empire were couched in this idiom. The booming commerce in the Atlantic region enhanced the public profile and political prestige of the merchants and planters involved in West Indian trade, even as Britons began to experience dislocations and disorienting new work environments. From what they could learn about colonial slavery, most people understood large plantations to be the analogue, perhaps even the archetype, of the novel forms of production sprouting up around them. As Robin Blackburn has put it: "The novelty of the slave plantation, the commercial megapolis, the proto-industrial village, the capitalist factory posed fundamental questions about the relations between production and reproduction, and about the compatibility of new productive forces with a stable configuration of family and state."<sup>18</sup>

Just as many feared that the new economic organization would disrupt traditional life, they also worried that the same commercial values that fueled the Atlantic slave trade and fed the plantations would upset more sacred relationships. Did the absolute power that masters held over their slaves confirm that property rights included the license to dispose of a slave's life? Under such circumstances, could death itself remain sacred? Did the new materialism have its own designs on the meaning of death? Mortuary writing emphasized that earthly wealth was no guarantee of eternal salvation; in fact, it could prove to be quite the opposite. "Leisure is our Curse," wrote Young in *Night Thoughts*, the bitter fruit of "Art, brainless Art! our furious Charioteer [who] Drives headlong towards the precipice of Death/Death, most our Dread/Death thus more dreadful made."<sup>19</sup>

An appreciation for elegy and the literature of suffering similarly distinguished men and women "of feeling" in Jamaica, though they could not

share the British public's anxiety over slavery. When Thomas Harrison, the attorney general and advocate-general of Jamaica, heard *Night Thoughts* read aloud by the Reverend William Jones in 1779, he reacted with fashionable sentiments but hard-nosed practicality. In tears, he protested, "Were I to indulge in reading much of such books, I should be extremely fond of them, but it would absolutely incapacitate me for attending to my Business." Bryan Edwards, the planter, politician, and historian, was also a graveyard poet. His 1764 "Elegy on the Death of a Friend" featured a "poor Libyan slave" pining "with accents wild" over his master's grave. And Edwards was not above feeling sympathy for the enslaved. He acknowledged the injustice of slavery in several poems, including "Ode, on Seeing a Negro Funeral," published in 1773. "Why triumph o'er the dead?" he asked the reveling mourners. Because death had carried an African home: "Tis now the hero lives, they cry,/ Released from slavry's chain:/ Far o'er the billowy surge he flies/ And joyful views his native skies/ And long-lost bow'ts again." Yet Edwards's encomiums for dead slaves did not signal antipathy toward slavery. Like Thomas Harrison, Edwards had business to attend to; he owned more than fifteen hundred slaves in Jamaica.<sup>20</sup>

Englishmen at home generally reacted to the immorality of slavery with a greater sense of urgency. In the conspicuous materialism of West Indian planters, moralists discerned something that epitomized their greatest anxieties. Evangelicals in particular saw in colonial slavery an example of the existential struggle between the "dark bondage of sin and the light of Christian liberty that was carried on in each individual soul." As the working public of Britain saw in slavery a dystopian vision of their own future, many evangelicals saw in slaveholders the height of individual conceit and disdain for the promise of salvation. In *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1774), John Wesley cautioned slaveholders that if they did not change their course, they risked losing the only thing that truly mattered. Adopting the language of moral sentiment and alluding to the image of the crucified savior, he asked, "Do you ever feel another's pain? Have you no Sympathy? . . . When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or the bleeding side and tortured limbs of your fellow creatures, was you a stone, or a brute?" He accused slave traders and West Indian planters of murder. "Thy hand, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands are at present stained with blood," he charged. "Surely it is enough: accumulate no more guilt." And "Regard not money!" Wesley warned. "All that a man



hath will he give for his life! Whatever you lose, lose not your soul: nothing can countervail that loss." It was common for evangelicals of all denominations to see themselves as God's special prosecutors. So when the evangelical Gustavus Vassa, formerly the slave and sailor Olandah Equiano, approached fellow evangelical Granville Sharp in 1783 with news of 132 Africans killed for their insurance value, a mighty rhetorical weapon came into Sharp's hands, one he knew he had been chosen by God to wield.<sup>21</sup>

Granville Sharp was, by the 1780s, the most prominent antislavery campaigner in Great Britain. Sharp had taken up the advocacy of enslaved blacks in 1765, after he met Jonathan Strong, who had come to Sharp's brother William seeking medical aid for deep lash wounds inflicted by his West Indian master. In 1770, having already worked for several years to prevent masters from forcibly removing their slaves from England, Sharp began to advocate for James Somerset, a recaptured runaway slave whose master intended to send him to Jamaica. Immersing himself in English property and slavery law, Sharp prepared the winning brief for Somerset's defense of his right to remain in England. In 1772 Chief Justice Lord Mansfield ruled that while nothing prevented slaveholders from owning human property, no positive law sanctioned the removal of slaves from England. Though Mansfield stopped considerably short of ruling slavery on English soil to be illegal, his decision was widely misinterpreted as doing just that. Granville Sharp thus gained the reputation as the man who had reaffirmed that England was by definition a "free" country.<sup>22</sup>

Sharp's political energy derived from his belief in Providence and his concern with the moral governance of the world. In 1776 he argued that slavery violated the moral law of universal benevolence, on which righteous government ought to be based. "Upon the gospel Dispensation, all mankind are to be esteemed our brethren," Sharp wrote in *Just Limitation of Slavery*. "Especially are we bound, as Christians, to commiserate and assist to the utmost of our power all persons in *distress*, or *captivity*." Not only did Sharp undermine the religious endorsement of slavery, but he argued that anti-slavery agitation was an imperative of evangelical Christianity. In keeping with prevailing evangelical themes, Sharp raised the specter of divine judgment, suggesting that slaveholders might even be eternally condemned by their own slaves. "Let Slaveholders be mindful of the approaching consummation of all earthly things," he warned, "when, pethaps, they will see thou-

sands of those men, who were formerly esteemed mere *chattels* and *private property*, coming in the clouds, with their heavenly Master, to judge tyrants and oppressors, and to call them to account for their want of brotherly love!" He extended a similar warning to the nation and the empire in *The Law of Retribution, a Serious Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, Founded on Unquestionable Examples of God's Temporal Vengeance against Tyrants, Slave-holders and Oppressors*. Perhaps Sharp was drawing directly on the rhetorical strategies of Philip Doddridge, whose influential *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745) acknowledged that people must imagine the execution of divine law, and "feel something of the Terror of it," before they could be convinced to turn to the Gospel for deliverance. That would explain why Sharp ended his *Just Limitation of Slavery* in the voice of God: "Depart from me ye Curs'd into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels (Matt. XXV. 40,41)."<sup>23</sup>

Throughout *Just Limitation of Slavery*, Sharp singled out as most accursed the "TYRANNY in America" where "the abominable plantation laws will permit a capricious or passionate master, with impunity, to deprive his wretched slave even of his life."<sup>24</sup> Such outrage at the convergence of property rights and the right to kill foreshadowed his response to the *Zong* massacre.

### Portents of Doom

The *Zong* case came before the English courts under the name *Gregson v. Gilbert*, as a dispute over an insurance claim. Upon learning of their loss, the Gregsons and their partners promptly filed a claim with their insurer, Thomas Gilbert, for 132 slaves, each valued at thirty pounds sterling. Gilbert refused to pay. The ensuing lawsuit was first heard at Guildhall, London, on 6 March 1783. Gilbert argued that the defendants were not liable for the incompetence of Collingwood's planning and navigation. The Gregsons asserted that the *Zong* had been put in distress "by the perils of the seas, and contrary currents and other misfortunes," and that the captain's actions were sensible. For his part, the first mate and chief witness James Kelsal (Collingwood having died by time of the hearing) confirmed that it was the captain's right and responsibility to make such judgments. However, at least one observer in the courtroom was frustrated by the boundaries of the legal arguments. In an anonymous letter to the *Morning*

*Chronicle and London Advertiser*, one that surely caught Gustavus Vassa's attention, a spectator testified, "I waited with some impatience, expecting that the Jury, by their foreman, would have applied to the Court for information how to bring the perpetrator of such a horrid deed to justice." Instead, the jury found in favor of the ship's owners, and the court ordered the insurers to pay for the slaughtered property.<sup>25</sup>

Still refusing to pay, Gilbert appealed to the Court of King's Bench for a new trial. The appeal was heard on 22-23 May 1783, before a panel of three judges presided over by Chief Justice Lord Mansfield, who had adjudicated the *Somerset* case more than a decade earlier. Granville Sharp was in the courtroom. He may have come hoping to hear that no positive law sanctioned the willful murder of slaves; instead, he listened as the judges recognized Solicitor General John Lee's arguments in favor of the owners. Lee insisted: "It has been decided, whether wisely or unwisely is not now the question, that a portion of our fellow-creatures may become the subject of property. This, therefore, was a throwing overboard of goods, and of part to save the residue." Mansfield agreed in principle: "Though it shocks one very much, the case of slaves was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard." Nonetheless, Mansfield ultimately did order a new trial to reconsider the necessity of the jettison and the contractual liability of the underwriters. The ten Africans who jumped into sea of their own volition were excluded from consideration; by asserting their agency, Mansfield ruled, these had voided their insurance value. The result of that new trial, if it ever was held, remains unknown. In any event, the case moved abruptly from the Court of King's Bench to the court of Christian opinion, where Granville Sharp proved to be an expert litigator.<sup>26</sup>

Through a tireless letter-writing campaign, Sharp highlighted the moral stakes involved in the case, by emphasizing the incommensurability of the Christian and the commercial views of death. Outraged that, rather than require that a criminal judgment be rendered, the authorities had ordered a new trial "concerning the value of those murdered Negroes!" Sharp first wrote to the Lords of the Admiralty, requesting that they initiate a murder trial. "The most obvious natural right of human nature is at stake," Sharp wrote, "the right even to life itself." He continued, "A right to live ought by no means to have been suppressed in favour of a mere pecuniary claim in the most doubtful species of property." As the cultural theorist Ian Baucom has recognized, the "horror and outrage" inspired by the massacre

was compounded by the recognition that it was in itself "a financial transaction." Advocates for the owners had convinced the court, and thereby established in legal precedent, that "in drowning the slaves Collingwood was not so much murdering them as securing the existence of their monetary value." In doing so, the British nation itself became implicated in the intentional killing of human beings for financial gain.<sup>27</sup>

In Sharp's view, this could only bring a terrible judgment upon the entire country. "For the sake of national justice, that the blood of the murdered may not rest on the whole kingdom," he urged the Lords of the Admiralty to take action: "The only pleas of necessity that can legally be admitted, or are worthy of being mentioned in this case, are—1st, A necessity incumbent upon the whole kingdom to vindicate our national justice, by the most exemplary punishment of the murderers mentioned in these vouchers;—2nd, The necessity of putting an entire stop to the Slave Trade, lest any similar deeds of barbarity, occasioned by it, should speedily involve the whole nation in some such tremendous calamity as may unquestionably mark the avenging hand of God, who has promised to destroy the 'destroyers of the earth.'"<sup>28</sup> Sharp supplied them with a 138-page handwritten packet of material, including his letter urging that they conduct a murder investigation, a brief account of the massacre, and his own transcript of the trial at the Court of King's Bench. He also provided them with a copy of a letter he would send the first Lord of the Treasury and a copy of a petition sent from the insurers to William Pitt, the chancellor of the Exchequer. Without waiting for government action, Sharp consulted with the legal scholar Dr. Thomas Bever and at his own expense enlisted attorneys to prepare a criminal prosecution. Nevertheless, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty never initiated a murder trial. In fact, there is no evidence that they even opened Sharp's letter.<sup>29</sup>

In another letter, to the Duke of Portland, first Lord of the Treasury, Sharp enclosed the same materials he sent to the Admiralty. This time he invoked the threat of personal damnation, quoting an earlier letter he had sent to Lord North. "I only wish, by the horrible example related in the enclosed papers, to warn your Grace, that there is an absolute necessity to abolish the Slave Trade and the West-India slavery; and that to be in power, and to neglect, as life (and I may add, the tenure of office) is very uncertain, even a day, in endeavoring to put a stop to such monstrous injustice and abandoned wickedness, must necessarily endanger a man's eternal welfare,

be he ever so great in temporal dignity or office.' This was my warning to Lord North eleven years ago."<sup>30</sup>

Sharp sent a full account of the massacre to the newspapers, and he continued writing to influential men to repeat his description of "that horrible transaction," which, if not for its appearance in a business dispute, "might have been known only amongst the impious slave-dealers, and have never been brought to light." The reaction extended well beyond evangelical circles. Responding to Sharp's entreaties, the bishop of Peterborough admitted, "Were religion and humanity attended to, there can be no doubt that the horrid traffic would entirely cease; but they have too small a voice to be heard among the clamours of avarice and ambition." Dr. Porteus, bishop of Chester, but soon to be bishop of London, acclaimed Sharp's efforts: "Your observations are so just, and so full to the purpose, that I can add nothing to them but my entire approbation. . . . I hope the attention of the public will be excited by your efforts." But public agitation would not have to depend on Sharp's efforts alone. Most important, he inspired other writers, who from his description of the *Zong* massacre crafted an indelible image of the enslaved dead both as the victims of English greed and as portents of national doom.<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of the *Zong* incident, antislavery activists fashioned parables (planters accused abolitionists of spinning pure fictions) that featured greed, slavery, and death as fixed points on a triangle. The stereotype reflected the widely held view that the only ethical approach to death and to the dead was to envision the moral progress of the individual soul. Evangelical abolitionists charged that in the commercial arrangements that defined slavery and the slave trade, money replaced the soul as the ultimate desideratum in death. Moreover, the murder of heathens was a compound crime, extinguishing not just the living body but also the eternal soul before it could know Christ and be assured of salvation. For antislavery writers, prepared by sentimental and evangelical discourse on death, the *Zong* massacre became the archetypal impression of slavery, one that had everything to do with their opinions about appropriate relations with the dead. Most important, as historian David Brion Davis remarked, their accounts "fixed an unforgettable image in the mind of the reading public," one that outlined an enduring moral critique.<sup>32</sup>

Abolitionist writers began retelling the story of the massacre almost immediately, and they very quickly turned the *Zong* into a metonym for

colonial slavery. In his *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in British Sugar Colonies* (1784), James Ramsay, an Anglican vicar and former slaveholder in the West Indies, affected shock and near disbelief at the case, calling Collingwood a "sick monster." In the minds of other writers, there was nothing anomalous about the *Zong* murders. Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, a radical antislavery activist from the Gold Coast and author of *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787), cited the *Zong* massacre as only one example of the "vast carnage and murders committed by the British instigators of slavery." He took care to highlight the economic rationale behind the killing of slaves, "a very shocking, peculiar, and almost unheard of conception: They either consider them as their own property, that they may do with as they please, in life or death; or the taking away the life of a black man is of no more account than taking away the life of a beast." In 1788, John Newton, the evangelical rector of Saint Mary Woolnoth and a former slave trader, recounted the *Zong* case as one of the principal "specimens of the spirit produced by the African trade." But it was Thomas Clarkson who did more than anyone to secure the association of slavery with death, and the untimely death of slaves with greed.<sup>33</sup>

In his celebrated *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, published in 1786, then revised and expanded in 1788, Clarkson presented killing for profit as a common custom of slavers. Prefacing his essay with praise for the "pious endeavors" of Granville Sharp, Clarkson proceeded to "lay open the feelings of the reader" with tales of atrocity and avarice meant to illustrate the very antithesis of the Christian approach to life and death. He identified Collingwood's decision to "jettison" the Africans, those "victims, which avarice had determined to sacrifice to her shrine," as a "diabolical resolution." And though Clarkson called the massacre "unparalleled in the memory of man, or in the history of former times," he also made it representative of colonial slavery in general.<sup>34</sup>

He supplemented his account of the *Zong* massacre, "an authentic specimen of the treatment which the unfortunate Africans undergo," with other stories, including one about the killing of a sick child. Buyers offered such a low price for the weak and emaciated boy that the officers feared his sale would bring down the average sale price of the cargo and cost each of them about six shillings. They ordered the surgeon to throw the boy overboard. When the surgeon refused, they "came to the horrid resolution

of starving him to death.<sup>35</sup> They confined him, withholding food, water, and human contact, but for that of the chief mate, "who was continually going backwards to see if he was yet dead." After eight days, the boy died, "to the joy of the impious" slavers, according to Clarkson.<sup>35</sup>

Having made his moral point with such illustrations, Clarkson reinforced it with numbers. He found slave traders "guilty of the charge of having been accessory to the destruction of no less than twenty-five thousand of their fellow-creatures," positing calculated callousness as the cause of the high number. "It is conjectured," he asserted, "that if three in four survive what is called the *seasoning*, the bargain is highly favourable." Clarkson did not limit his discussion of the murderous nature of the slave trade to the deaths of Africans. Having personally interviewed thousands of sailors in London, Bristol, and Liverpool and examined muster lists for slave ships, he went on to observe in his *Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave Trade* (1788) that mortality rates for white sailors in the Africa trade were even higher than those for the enslaved. The slave trade was not a "nursery for [British] seamen," as elite opinion maintained, but "a Grave" destroying "more in one year, than all the other trades of Great Britain when put together destroy in two."<sup>36</sup>

Uniting the economic reasoning behind the *Zong* murders with general statistics in this way enabled Clarkson to argue convincingly that colonial slavery "cannot be carried on without the continual murder of so many innocent persons!" As for slavery's beneficiaries, he admonished them, "Exult in riches, at which even avarice ought to shudder, and which humanity must detest!" Reading Clarkson, Britons could hardly avoid interpreting his image of murderous slaveholders in the light of more general anxieties about ill-gotten gains in a rapidly changing social order. In another society, or at another time, Clarkson's indictments might have taken the form of an accusation of witchcraft; in late eighteenth-century England the means of expression for condemning the nefarious accumulation of riches derived from moral sentiment, evangelicalism, and the rhetoric of death.<sup>37</sup>

Echoing Granville Sharp's rhetoric, Thomas Clarkson wondered how the "sin" of the slave trade might be judged in heaven. "If the blood of one man, unjustly shed, cries with so loud a voice for the divine vengeance, how shall the cries and groans of an *hundred thousand men, annually murdered*, ascend the celestial mansions, and bring down that punishment

which such enormities deserve!" He suspected he already knew the answer. The success of the North American rebels and the resulting rift in the British Empire seemed to prove God's displeasure, even as it provoked widespread anxiety over the proper course of imperial governance. During the 1780s a ruinous series of hurricanes had thrashed the West Indies, compounding the economic distress caused by war. Storms and earthquakes, "the violent and supernatural agitations of all the elements," could be seen only as the "awful visitations of God for this inhuman violation of his laws." After all, as Ortrabah Cugoano had asked a year earlier, "What wickedness was there ever risen up so monstrous, and more likely to bring a heavy rod of destruction upon a nation, than the deeds committed by the West Indian slavery and the African slave trade?" Africans were victims of "improvident avarice," Equiano wrote in his 1789 description of the deadly holds of slave ships, and this could spell only a disaster of biblical proportions for Great Britain.<sup>38</sup>

Abolitionists worked with feverish intensity to avert the impending apocalypse. In April 1787 Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson joined a dedicated group of Quakers to help initiate a broad-based nationwide movement with evangelical rhetoric as its motor. Between 1787 and 1794 Clarkson worked tirelessly to distribute damning information about the trade, lobbying members of Parliament and traveling all over England to help set up local abolition committees. James Phillips, a successful bookseller and member of the London committee, published reams of pamphlets and book-length studies, including Clarkson's essays and abstracts of parliamentary debates on slavery and the slave trade.<sup>39</sup>

Novels, plays, and poetry concerning slavery also attracted a wide audience in the late 1780s and early 1790s. The emergence of the antislavery movement coincided with an explosion in printed material, and suddenly Africa and colonial slavery were hot topics. Personal connections between influential authors and West Indian colonists, along with the improved circulation of news from around the empire, contributed to a growing awareness of the conditions endured by colonial subjects, enslaved and free alike.<sup>40</sup>

As sentimental fiction sharpened the sensibilities of British readers, stories of suffering in slavery became test cases for moral feeling. Hannah More, an evangelical and one of the most prolific "sentimentalist" writers of the period, also wrote *The Black Slave Trade* (1788). Abolition commit-

tees scored important propaganda victories by publishing and distributing William Cowper's *Negroes' Complaint*, a melancholy poem written from the point of view of an enslaved African. Cowper, an evangelical poet, had earlier expounded on the role Providence played in punishing national sins. Inviting readers to empathize with his own trials as a slave, Olaudah Equiano published his antislavery autobiography in 1789, taking every opportunity to remind his readers that he had often prayed for death to emancipate him. The reading public already understood African suicide as a political condemnation of slavery—even an act of martyrdom—a reaction that Equiano acknowledged by referring to his own reading of Foxe's *Martyrology*. Situating his yearning for death within the contemporary genre of spiritual autobiography, Equiano reminded his audience that the truest desire of a Christian ought to be spiritual freedom from temporal bondage, but also that earthly masters who failed to respect that wish were undoubtedly sinful.<sup>41</sup>

The literature also dramatized the stakes in popular struggles that convulsed industrializing England. The broad dissemination of colonial morality tales about greed and indifference to human suffering spurred nationwide petition campaigns against the slave trade in 1788 and 1792. As Robin Blackburn has observed, "abolitionism as a movement derived strength from its association with the critique of the operation of pure market forces . . . West Indian planters were attacked for working their slaves to death and making profits from an inhuman, immoral and illegitimate system." The populace in English industrial towns used antislavery rhetoric to assert that "where they conflicted, humanitarian and familiar values should prevail over business and property interests, and that capitalism and industrialism should be obliged to adjust to a self-reproducing human order." It should come as no surprise, then, that the first petition drives were incubated in burgeoning and fractious industrial towns. Manchester, which occupied the center of the spreading commercial and industrial networks but still had no parliamentary representative or municipal corporation, took the lead in circulating public petitions against the slave trade. Other industrial towns, including Birmingham, Sheffield, and Leeds, followed suit. By June 1788 over a hundred antislavery petitions had arrived at the House of Commons. Drawing their tenor of righteous indignation from evangelicalism, they generally subjected the slave trade to moral judgment, referring to it as "repugnant,"

"reproachful," and "inconsistent with the Profession of the Christian religion."<sup>42</sup>

The movement benefited from the involvement of a network of well-connected Anglican evangelicals centered around Clapham in South London. The Clapham Sect, or the Saints, as they were sometimes called, took up the abolitionist cause as part of an "international spiritual agenda" that aimed to bring spiritual renewal to the world by cleansing it of individual and national sins. It was in consultation with these influential evangelicals that, in July 1787, the London Committee had made the decision to concentrate its efforts on abolishing the slave trade through parliamentary legislation, thereby deferring an attack on slavery itself, which would be widely construed as an attack on property rights. Granville Sharp opposed the concession, declaring, "My own opposition is not merely against the slave trade, but also the toleration of slavery itself." But the leading role in the antislavery campaign had by then shifted to the most influential member of the Clapham Sect, William Wilberforce.<sup>43</sup>

William Wilberforce, a young, wealthy, and charismatic M.P., had converted to evangelicalism in 1785 during a protracted "spiritual crisis" provoked by his reading of Phillip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. As he considered the implications of his awakening, he consulted closely with John Newton, who had ascended in the esteem of pious Christians from the hated occupation of slave trader to the status of revered spiritual tutor. Newton surely influenced Wilberforce's revulsion for the slave trade, and over the next two years Wilberforce also began to consult James Ramsay and Thomas Clarkson. Early in 1787, in the course of conversations with his friends, Foreign Secretary W. W. Grenville and William Pitt, the reformist prime minister, Wilberforce resolved to introduce a bill in the House of Commons to abolish the slave trade. He considered it his "sacred charge."<sup>44</sup>

At Pitt's suggestion Wilberforce agreed that there should first be hearings to gather more "factual" information about the trade. On 11 February 1788 Pitt appointed a committee of the Privy Council to consider the state of the slave trade. As the council gathered testimony, Wilberforce and Clarkson worked to ensure the presence of compelling witnesses for abolition, to counter the influence of West India lobbyists and Liverpool merchants. After compiling 850 pages of evidence, the Privy Council published its report in April 1789. Wilberforce brought a motion for abolition to the

floor on 12 May that year, but as a result of heavy pressure from proslavery interests, the House of Commons delayed consideration until after it could hold its own hearings and gather its own evidence. By mid-1790, the House of Commons had gathered another 1,300 pages of testimony and reportage, yet because proslavery witnesses had dominated the process, Wilberforce had to call for still more examinations, to begin early in 1791. Finally, on 20 April 1791 at half past three in the morning, and after a two-day debate, the House of Commons voted on Wilberforce's measure. The poll resulted in defeat for the abolitionists, 163 votes against the bill and 88 in support.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Enlightened Self-Interest*

In Jamaica, Simon Taylor read the news of metropolitan abolitionism with alarm. In 1788 he began to complain bitterly to his business partner, the former M.P. Chaloner Arcedeckne, about the "people of England," who were so "willing to represent us as Devils incarnate." The antislavery activists were "mad Enthusiasts," Taylor wrote, "miscreants," "fanatics," and "villains." He wondered what had become of sound English judgment. "All of this madness respecting of the African trade is of the most serious nature & is an axe to the root of their most valuable Commerce," he warned. "Such a Phrenzy I believe never struck any people but madmen before and none of Don Quixot's exploits are to be compared to it."<sup>46</sup> After all, the reasonable arguments were on the side of the slaveholders, for their defense of slavery did not rest on visions of the afterlife, spiritual progress, or the rhetoric of moral sentiment. Taylor could take comfort in the fact that abolitionist images of slavery had as yet failed to overcome the influential discourse of proslavery advocates, witnesses, and writers. Testimony and opinions favorable to West Indian interests dominated the Privy Council report and had already begun to explain the deaths of enslaved Africans as an unfortunate consequence of individual management failures and as a result of African maladies. Apologists offered seemingly rational, rather than religious, explanations for the lethal nature of Atlantic slavery.

As early as 1774, writers who owed their fortunes to slavery were shaping the explanations that slavery's apologists would continue to use until emancipation sixty years later. Edward Long, the slaveholding planter

and celebrated author of the three-volume *History of Jamaica*, responded to Granville Sharp's earliest indictments of slave mortality by asserting that homicidal avarice ran patently counter to slaveholders' self-interest: "The more mercenary a planter's disposition is, the stronger must the obligation grow upon him to treat his labourers well, since his own profit, which he is supposed alone to consult, must necessarily prompt him to it." His fellow Jamaican planter William Beckford followed Long's logic in his *Remarks upon the Situation of the Negroes* in 1788, extending this reasoning to encompass the motivations of the transatlantic slave traders: "Suppose a cargo should consist (as many do) of six hundred slaves, and one half of them should perish from neglect, or from want of the common necessities of life; and the remainder be reduced by inanition to skin and bones; what advantage can this large cargo boast, thus conditioned, over one of half that number, out of which the loss has been small and the passengers healthy?" Hector McNeill employed a similar approach in his *Observations on the Treatment of the Negroes in the Island of Jamaica* (1788). He argued that a fortuitous rise in the price of slaves had inspired greater interest in their longevity. "Times and circumstances have altered wonderfully," he wrote. "The value, or more properly speaking, the original price of the Negro, has, in the course of thirty years, risen upwards on one third . . . The proprietor is therefore led to view the Negro Property as an object of great concern, and consequently is disposed to preserve it by every prudent method." This connection between the fortunes of planters and the well-being of slaves also underlay the argument that enslaved blacks were better off than English laborers, who, being without invested owners, "must pay or starve." The argument still made sense to many, but by 1788 many others believed that the potential consequences of such thinking had already been demonstrated by Captain Collingwood of the *Zong*. The simple equation of the contentment of slaves with the contentment of their masters had grown increasingly less convincing to broad sections of the British public.<sup>47</sup>

Slaveholders had to admit to the high mortality suffered by the enslaved. Not only was it obvious to most observers; more important, it served masters' argument that the slave trade should continue. In 1788, speaking of one parish in Jamaica, Edward Long told Parliament, "There are some Sugar Estates which have sustained their population by annual births, and are not under the necessity of buying Recruits. But I never

heard of more than Eight such Estates; and they are, in proportion to the rest in that Parish, only as 1 to 70." Similarly, in 1788 William Beckford acknowledged, "No man, who is acquainted with the West Indies, can suppose it possible that the average upon estates in the islands, can preserve a given number of negroes, without the aid of foreign purchase. Some plantations bury more than others; and it is natural to suppose, that where the labour is disproportionate, *there* will be the greatest mortality." Planters granted that slaves sold to pay debts or those who labored hard on insolvent properties suffered enormously, but Long thought this situation could be solved simply by attaching them to the land. The *reasons* for high mortality, however, were generally attributed to aberrant features of colonial slavery and causes beyond the control of planters.<sup>48</sup>

Long ascribed mortality in the slave trade to accidents and errors. "The objection, that many die in transportation to the colonies," he maintained, "does not bear against the trade itself, but against some defect or impropriety in the mode of conducting it." A reduction in death rates awaited only "efficacious remedies." Blaming abuses on lower-class overseers, Long excused plantation owners altogether. In cases of willful cruelty, only the strict application of the law was wanting; for example, "a white person, found guilty of wantonly murdering a Negroe, should be adjudged a felon, and suffer *death*." In any case, he attributed most mortality in the islands to exotic African diseases or the difficulty of adjusting to changes in climate.<sup>49</sup>

Long also initiated the oft-repeated accusation that blacks were largely responsible for their own demise. He blamed infant mortality on enslaved women, who he said spread venereal diseases, practiced abortion widely, and maintained poor child-rearing habits. Suicide he blamed on Africans' inordinate fear about European intentions. Oddly enough, he identified African judicial practices as the reason for this panic. "Their edicts are mostly vindictive," he surmised, without the benefit of any knowledge or expertise on the subject, "and death or slavery the almost only modes of punishment." Claiming falsely that 99 percent of enslaved Africans were criminals in their own countries, Long maintained that it was natural that they would "entertain horrid notions" about sale to the Europeans "and often struggle for relief before they quit the coast." Given these conditions, Africans were better off enslaved in the colonies, where a mere few might

"perish by casualties," than at home, where "all should die by the hand of the executioner."<sup>50</sup>

Following Long, Beckford argued that the anticipation of death among Africans subjected at home to "a worse slavery than they will experience in our colonies" offered the best evidence that blacks were better off in Jamaica. Beckford added that suicide was a cultural problem, an ethnically specific practice. "The Eboe negroes," he explained, "are particularly addicted to suicide." In this he only represented the widespread prejudices of Anglo-Atlantic planters. James Pinnock, a Jamaica barrister and slaveholder, recorded privately in his diary in 1781 that, "Hope, the Sail Maker, a very good Negroe generally but an Eboe, hung himself on a quarrel with Friends." But Beckford extended to an absurd extreme the claim that Africans were largely accountable for their own high mortality rate. Putting forward a view shared by many planters, he argued without evident irony that Africans killed themselves by attending the funerals of their friends and relations. "It is notorious," he insisted, "that more slaves are ruined in principle and health; at those dances which are allowed at the burials of their dead, than by any other intercourse or occupation whatever." Chaloner Arcedeckne heard much the same when he queried a plantation doctor with twenty-five years' experience in Jamaica. "With regard to the mortality of slaves," Dr. William Wright explained, "it is not in general owing to severity or oppression," but "to their going to distant Parts to Negroe Plays in the night where they dance immodestly drink to excess, sleep on the cold ground or commit many acts of sensuality and intemperance." Such explanations for deaths in bondage, similar to what might today be recognized as a "culture of poverty" argument, were to form the core of the defense of the slave trade and slavery right up until emancipation in the 1830s.<sup>51</sup>

The Jamaican plantocracy responded to the abolitionist petitions in Great Britain primarily in the terms used by Edward Long. In two committee reports sent by Jamaica's House of Assembly to the House of Commons at the end of 1788, slaveholders argued that the decrease in the slave population was due largely to various "causes not imputable to us, and which the People in Great Britain do not seem to understand." The reports attributed most deaths to an imbalance in ratio between the sexes, which inhibited the birth rate, and to epidemic diseases from Africa. To explain

mortality in Jamaica, the planters offered tortured calculations that subtracted an inflated number of runaways, Maroons, and free blacks from the total numbers of Africans imported since 1655, to conclude that only 26,491 slaves had "decreased" in well over a century. Fifteen thousand of these, they proposed, had died between the years 1780 and 1787, when war, a series of violent hurricanes, and famine had wrought havoc on the island. Slaveholders thus sought exoneration by referring to the same catastrophic events that Granville Sharp had taken as evidence of God's judgment.<sup>52</sup>

To blunt the charge of murderous cruelty, the reports enumerated the recent adjustments to the legal administration of slavery, among them stricter punishments for the wanton murder of slaves and accountability on the part of overseers. Simon Taylor rushed to send a copy of one of the new laws to Chaloner Arcedeckne, "to show to the people we are not such inhumane beings as those wicked Enthusiasts represent us to be & that people cannot murder or destroy Negroes as they do Dogs at home." The assembly produced statistics on capital punishment showing that very few slaves had actually been executed. "In order more effectively to prevent the Destruction of Negroes by excessive Labour and unreasonable Punishments," a new law required the surgeon of every plantation, "to give an annual Account of the Decrease and Increase of the Slaves of such Plantation, with the Causes of such decrease, to the best of his Knowledge, Judgment, and Belief." Infant mortality would be arrested by the offer of financial incentives to overseers, "Twenty Shillings for every Slave born on such Plantation, Penn, or other Settlement." In short, and in sharp contrast to the spiritual discourse of the day, calls for slight modifications in civil administration and appeals to the self-interest of the propertied classes encompassed nearly the entire rhetorical explanation of the death of slaves by apologists for slavery. By distancing themselves and their business from the deaths they caused, slaveholders and their allies sought to remove as many of the dead as possible from the growing debate over slavery, and thus reduce the legions of dead slaves arrayed against them by abolitionists to a small band of spectral aberrations. Slaveholders hoped to kill symbolically those whom slavery had already killed physically.<sup>53</sup>

#### *An Abstract of the Evidence*

Carefully coordinated by Jamaica's principal lobbyist, Stephen Fuller, proslavery testimony carried the day when the M.P.'s voted on Wilberforce's

first abolition bill in 1791. Nevertheless, the moral figure of slavery as murder occasioned by greed took more definitive shape in the testimony of the witnesses for abolition. Despite the failure of the 1791 motion for abolition, the testimonial evidence gave abolitionists another opportunity to frame and publicize slavery as a moral problem that revolved largely around the deaths of the enslaved. Late in 1790 Wilberforce managed to have an abstract of the abolitionist testimony published and distributed to each M.P. In 1791 the abolitionist publisher James Phillips printed fifteen hundred copies of a second edition, and within two weeks abolition committees had distributed it widely.<sup>54</sup>

The questions asked by the House of Commons committee in 1790 and 1791 and the testimony given at the hearings revealed that slaves' deaths and their moral implications now occupied an important place in the consideration of slavery and the slave trade and showed also the persistence of the imperial moral crisis kindled by the captain of the *Zong*. Ostensibly set to collect information only about the slave trade, the hearings brought life in the sugar colonies under close scrutiny, allowing abolitionists to draw as damning a picture of the institution of slavery itself as they had already drawn of the trade. The slave trade was becoming synonymous with massacre, and slavery with unnatural and untimely death.

The parliamentary hearings of 1790-1791 did take into consideration the intricate details of trade and economy, but Wilberforce and his counsel William Smith spent considerable time inquiring into the human toll levied by the slave trade and colonial slavery. The hearing investigated the whole of the British Caribbean, but as Britain's most populous and profitable colony, Jamaica featured prominently in the testimony. The witnesses went a long way toward establishing that the cruelty of overseers and the hardened avarice of slaveowners caused the high mortality in the West Indies. Testimonial evidence confirmed the impression that many M.P.'s had formed from the proposed preamble to a clause of Jamaica's Consolidated Slave Law (1787), which sought to make plantation overseers more accountable. Reported in the *Cornwall Chronicle* and reprinted in the preface to *Abstract of the Evidence*, the language disclosed "the extreme cruelties and inhumanity of the managers, overseers, and book-keepers of estates" and asserted, "It frequently happens that slaves come to their death by hasty and severe blows, and other improper treatment." Wilberforce's and Smith's questions focused on the callous disregard for black life, for example: "Have you ever known persons who were known to have been



gulty of great severities to their Negroes, and who were commonly reputed to have murdered them?; Have any instances fallen within your notice, wherein, besides regular punishments, Negroes have been treated by the overseers with capricious cruelty?"<sup>55</sup>

Men who had experience in the sugar colonies answered with illustrative stories meant to excite sentiment over episodes of suffering and death. Dr. Jackson, who had practiced medicine in Savanna-la-Mar in the mid-1770s recalled an instance where a flogging had killed an enslaved man. Asked if there had been any attempt to punish the killer, Dr. Jackson admitted that he was aware of none. Yet there had been public concern. "People said that it was an unfortunate thing, and they were surprized that the man was not more cautious, as it was not the first thing of the kind that had happened to him; but what they chiefly dwelt upon was the loss that the proprietor sustained."<sup>56</sup> Several others reported similarly unpunished murders. Robert Cross, a former bookkeeper, overseer, and soldier in Jamaica, told of another overseer who, "by severity," had "destroyed forty out of sixty" of the slaves in his power in the course of just three years.<sup>57</sup> Henry Coor, who resided fifteen years on the island as a millwright, described punishments for the enslaved in evocative detail to show just how severe overseers generally were:

I have known many of these poor creatures, who have been whipt upon the ladder to the number of 100 to 150 lashes, and sometimes to the amount of two cool hundreds, as they are generally known by the overseers; I have known many of these poor creatures returned to the place of their confinement, and in the space of one, two, or three days, at the overseer's pleasure, have been brought out to the ladder again, and have received the same complement, or thereabouts, as before; and they generally make a point never to take these tortured creatures off the ladder till all their skin, from their hams to the small of the back, appears to be nothing but raw flesh and blood, and then they went over the whole parts with salt pickle, which, while the pain lasted, appeared to me, from the convulsions it threw them into, to be more cruel than the whipping.<sup>58</sup>

Coor also told specific stories that emphasized how injured to suffering and death whites in Jamaica had become. He told the parliamentary committee about Old Quasheba, who had been brought to the overseer as a runaway while Coor sat dining with him. After dinner, the overseer summarily hanged Quasheba with the aid of one his clerks. Coor heard her

choking and screaming for several hours. When the clerk came, "apparently in great spirits," to brag about the deed, Coor reproached him. But the clerk retorted, "Damn her for an old bitch, she was good for nothing, what signifies killing such an old woman as her." The plantation manager sent for Coor the following morning to find out what had happened, incensed that Coor could see his "master's Slaves murdered in that manner, and not let him know of it." Coor simply responded that it was not his business, "cruelties of that kind were so common in the plantations, that I had thought no more about it." The plantation manager was furious over the loss of property, but not angry enough to dismiss the overseer, who had produced very profitable crops in the past. Evangelical audiences who read the published testimony later could not fail to see that nowhere in the story had anyone spoken of concern for Old Quasheba's immortal soul.<sup>59</sup>

Coor did observe, however, that "cruel treatment" had driven many enslaved men and women to suicide. Substantiating the common awareness that Africans believed they would return home after they died, stories of suicide confirmed the misery of slavery and countered proslavery testimony suggesting that Africans might be happier under colonial slavery than at home. Their performance at funerals also provided evidence of their readiness to find escape in death. Several witnesses testified to the "the great joy which is discovered at their funerals by their fellow-slaves, and which joy is said to proceed from the idea that the deceased are returning home." By contrast, at least one witness reported that funerals in Africa were more sorrowful affairs. When Wilberforce and Smith put the question to several more witnesses—"Did you ever know Negroes to commit suicide, and under what circumstances?"—the responses corresponded to popular Romantic descriptions of suicides as heroic tragedies for which the fault lay with a corrupt and unfeeling world. As such, suicide functioned as the ultimate proof of oppression, much as the decisions of the ten Africans who leapt freely overboard from the *Zong* indicted the venality of Captain Collingwood and his officers.<sup>60</sup>

As had been the case with the *Zong* massacre, the parliamentary testimony on slavery set up an equation linking slavery, death, and money: the willful substitution of financial gain for the fate of the soul. Slaves were routinely worked to death. "Hard work," as well as severe punishment, "certainly occasions a constant decrease in the able Negroes," explained former

overseer William Fitzmaurice. "I am very sorry to say," he acknowledged, "that a great number of Negroes are hurried to their grave" by having to keep up an unbearable pace on work gangs. He spoke on good authority. During the last four years that Fitzmaurice lived in Jamaica, he bought ninety-five slaves and sold fifty-two of them. These "were all that were living, and those fifty-two I did not sell as seasoned Slaves; if I had attempted to keep them till the usual time of seasoning, I should have had a greater decrease, and on this very account I sold them." Seizing on such estimates of death and devaluation, Wilberforce and Smith asked, "Did you ever hear any calculation made concerning the time which an African Negro would be required to last in order to repay the price of his purchase?" Fitzmaurice admitted only that there had been an old saying in the parish of Saint Thomas-in-the-Vale, Jamaica, "that if a negro lived seven years he paid for himself." But slaves could not always be kept alive long enough to secure a return on the investment.<sup>61</sup>

Fitzmaurice told a story about one gentleman's plantations in Saint Thomas-in-the-Vale, where, "by over pushing, the most part of his Negroes were destroyed while he was in England, and when he returned he found his estates almost without Negroes, and judgements against him to the amount of a large sum of money to various people, and those Negroes that lived were taken upon writs of Venditioni; I purchased myself, at a public sale, fifty odd to cover a debt for a house in Kingston." In such a volatile market, few owners could be concerned about the family lives of the enslaved. Dr. Harrison, a former plantation doctor in Jamaica, told the committee that there was no "encouragement given to bring up families; the general opinion being, that it was better to purchase new Negroes, than to rear Negro children." Witness after witness came before the House of Commons committee to confirm Ortabah Cugoana's allegation that "the great severities and oppressions loaded upon the wretched survivors are such that they are continually wearing out, and a new annual supply wanted," to replace "the great multitude of human souls that are actually deprived of life by carrying on that iniquitous business." Against Cugoana's ideal image of all individuals' having an essential existence as souls precious in the sight of God, the testimony to the House of Commons in 1791 gave an impression just like that held by Captain Thomas Lloyd of the Royal Navy: to slaveholders, enslaved men and women "were very generally considered as black cattle, and very often treated like post horses."<sup>62</sup>

*An Abstract of the Evidence* concluded by invoking Hercules Ross, who resided in Jamaica from 1761 to 1782. In the early 1770s Ross attended a series of meetings in Kingston called by Thomas Hibbert, the most eminent Guinea factor, or slave dealer, in Jamaica, who wanted to debate the wisdom and morality of the African slave trade. At these meetings, Ross delivered the opinion that the trade was contrary to both "sound policy" and "the laws of God and nature," and that it ought to be abolished. He voiced this conviction no more than a few years after he had seen a particular group of slaves sold in Kingston's public square, survivors of an event eerily similar to the *Zong* massacre. Before they arrived at auction, these thirty-odd men and women had been packed, along with about four hundred others, into the hold of an unnamed English ship that had sailed from the coast of Africa. One night, it struck the reefs surrounding the Morant Keys, three small sandy islands clustered just southeast of Jamaica. The officers and crew took their boats ashore with provisions and arms. They left the Africans shackled aboard the slaver. Through the night, the captives wrenched free of their irons and fashioned life-rafts from pieces of the vessel. The next morning, from the shore half a league away, the officers and crew watched as the African women and children floated towards them upon the rafts, attended by the men who could swim. Fearing that the Africans would soon come after their food and water, the officers and crew resolved to kill them. "As the poor wretches approached the shore," Ross recalled, "they actually destroyed between three and four hundred of them." Only thirty-three or thirty-four survived for sale in Kingston. Perhaps the details of this massacre, a decade before the voyage of the *Zong*, convinced Hercules Ross that the slave trade was a source of "great destruction and great misery to the human race." Perhaps also, the others holding the academic debate in Kingston were aware of the event or were convinced by Ross, for they finally decided in the majority "that the trade to Africa for slaves, was neither consistent with sound policy, the laws of nature, and morality." In spite of that, the most profitable days of the slave trade to Jamaica were still to come.<sup>63</sup>

When *An Abstract of the Evidence* circulated among the public, it helped inspire half a million Britons to sign petitions calling for the abolition of the slave trade in 1792. In April of that year, the House of Commons responded to public pressure by voting to end the slave trade by 1796. But the abolition bill met vehement opposition when it reached the House of

Lords. Though they were not beholden to popular opinion, the lords avoided voting the measure down directly; instead they stalled it once again, by demanding that the evidence collected by the Commons be presented anew to them. One motion away from victory, frustrated abolitionists would wait another decade before Parliament sanctioned their cause again.<sup>64</sup>

The abolitionists' disappointment in Parliament was not total. A few modest reform measures, of the kind acceptable to the more enlightened slaveholders, became law in the 1780s and 1790s. In 1788 Sir William Dolben, one of two M.P.'s for Oxford University, sponsored a regulation act to ameliorate the lethal conditions aboard slave ships. To alleviate shipboard overcrowding that generated "putrid disorders and all sorts of dangerous diseases," the act sought to limit the number of slaves that could be carried per ton and to provide piece-rate financial incentives to ship captains and surgeons for slaves landed alive. A decade later, in 1799, a similar act regulated the carrying capacity of slaves in relation to their physical dimensions. A 1790 statute responded to the *Zong* massacre by prohibiting the insurance of slaves, except for narrowly defined risks; a law passed in 1794 explicitly banned the recovery of losses incurred by throwing slaves overboard. But by 1793 antislavery rhetoric had lost some of its allure for many M.P.'s, who were now more touched by the tales of killing and chaos emanating from the French and Haitian revolutions. When the London Corresponding Society, formed in 1792 by such radical "British Jacobins" as Thomas Hardy, declared their support for abolition, many began to suspect that the *Abstract of the Evidence* might be as dangerously subversive as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, a strident defense of the French Revolution.<sup>65</sup>

### *Chains of Meaning*

The deluge of sentimental antislavery narratives in the 1780s had begun to lose some of its emotional force by the end of the century, as people recognized the limits of sentimental politics. As the literary historian Adam Lively has argued, "The enormous actual gulf between European and enslaved African was bridged in the imagination by projecting onto slavery conventional melodramatic scenarios. The anti-slavery aesthetic spoke more of the reader and of his (or very often her) existence than it

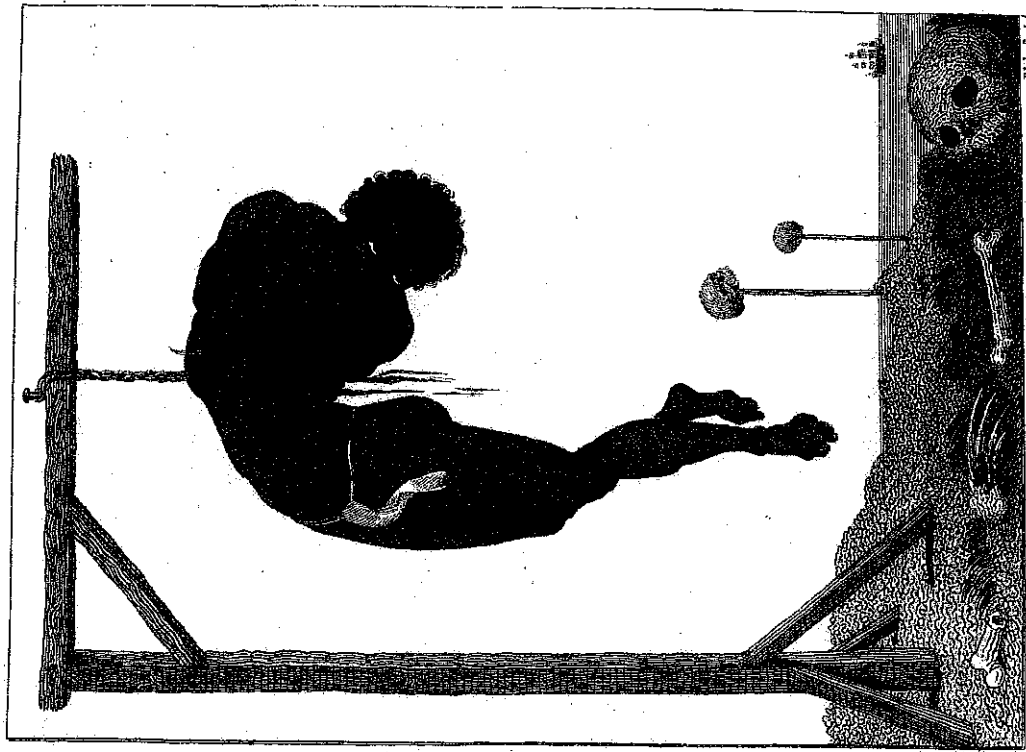
did of that of the slave, its ostensible subject." Even antislavery testimony, based on first-hand experience, offered its narratives in the sentimental terms that the English found convincing at the time. The literary enthusiasm for victims of suffering drew sharp criticism in the 1790s, and even the most sentimental writers began to feel they had been self-indulgent. According to the cultural critic Debbie Lee, Romantic writers continued to write powerful moral critiques of slavery, albeit more oblique ones. "Since the topic had been made so explicit for so long," Lee says, "such writers considered it most powerful when least obvious, most familiar when unfamiliar, and truly intimate when seemingly distant." Relying more heavily on allegory, Romantics evoked antislavery sentiments in "traces," symbolic substitutions that could still be read for their political meanings.<sup>66</sup>

There was a similar, though less subtle, development in the way people applied graphic arts and statistics to further antislavery aims. The circulation of abolitionist anecdotes abetted by the enormous growth in print media in the latter half of the eighteenth century gave pictures and numbers a new power to sum up and signify antislavery themes. Both visual images and demographic figures acquired the ability to stand for sentimental stories whose moral was already understood. Empathy and abstraction converged in the combination of representations of dead and dying slaves and recitations of unnatural decreases in population. The guiding spirit of Edward Young, the poet of *Night Thoughts*, who inspired readers to draw moral lessons from relations with the dead, and of John Foxe, whose *Martyrology* appeared in five new printings between 1784 and 1800, continued to inform the public, as it learned to interpret increasing quantities of numerical and pictorial information. "For over a century Young was the poet of Christian sensibility par excellence," the literary historian Stephen Cornford contends, "and his poem signaled the beginning of an era when the search for truth, certainty and knowledge tended to find answers in idealism rather than empiricism, in enthusiasm rather than pragmatism."<sup>67</sup> In fact, during the antislavery campaigns, idealism and empiricism were dramatically united. Demographic data combined with visual imagery allowed people to survey and grasp immense amounts of information about events that they could never experience, yet traces of moral sentiment remained attached to these abstractions. Chains of meaningful association bound the *Zong* massacre to future discussions of slavery,

and the ethical outrage that crystallized in its wake could be provoked in a flash by an image or by a recitation of numbers. Both could function as empirical proof of an ethical argument.

William Blake's antislavery engravings, for example, encoded the evangelical approach to death in macabre detail, along with the condemnation of colonial slavery. In 1791–92, as Britons considered the evidence of inhumanity in their West Indian colonies, Blake worked on his engravings for John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. When the book appeared in 1796, antislavery activists scoured it for anecdotes and imagery that could excite abolitionist feeling, though Stedman himself had fought a bitter campaign against the Maroons and was an apologist for colonial slavery. From original watercolors by Stedman, Blake fashioned scenes of torture and death that were powerfully evocative but also, through the viewing conventions of the period, taken as accurate representations of objective truth. One of the images, *A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*, brought traditional iconography of death, horror, and evangelicalism together to create an enduring emblem of antislavery sentiment (Figure 5.3). The image depicts a man suspended from a gallows by a hook run through his rib cage. Around his body, skulls adorn sticks and bones litter the ground. Evoking the traditional *memento mori*, Blake announces the universal approach of death, made specific in the black man's imminent fate. The man stares directly out of the page without expression; perhaps he is already dead. But the open eyes of the man, suspended alive like Christ, also signify spiritual redemption and everlasting life. He embodies Blake's radical Christian vision. Blake's efforts to represent those killed for revolting against their status as chattel probably influenced his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), which David Erdman has described as an "indictment of the 'mistaken Demon' whose code separates bodies from souls and reduces women and children, nations and lands, to possessions."<sup>68</sup>

After he finished his engravings for Stedman's *Narrative*, Blake took other opportunities to make moral images of death. He produced more than 537 watercolors and 43 engravings for the 1797 edition of *Night Thoughts*, and in 1805 he began drawing the images of death, judgment, and the afterlife that would appear in the 1808 edition of *The Grave* by Robert Blair. Soon after, he painted his impression of James Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs*. Blake's engravings of the tortured body of the



*A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows.*

Figure 5.3. *A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*, engraving by William Blake, in John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, vol. 1 (London, 1796). This image was based on a 1773 eyewitness description from Suriname. The victim hung there alive for three days, until he was finally bludgeoned to death by a sentry he had insulted. Blake gave the scene the iconic status of a crucifixion and arranged the *memento mori* death's-heads to draw attention to the ship off the coast, implicating overseas empires in the execution. From the collection of the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

black man thus exemplified his larger concern with death, redemption, and the moral government of the world.<sup>69</sup>

Other artists made the connection between death, slavery, money, and politics more explicit than did Blake. Though British satirists generally accepted the prevailing contempt for blacks, they sometimes mined the topic of colonial slavery in order to lampoon greed, political corruption, and the degeneracy of elite society. The 1791 House of Commons debate and the petition campaign that followed it provoked more direct reflections on slavery. The satirist James Gillray engraved *Barbarities in the West Indies* (Figure 5.4), based on an incident reported by Sir Philip Francis to the Commons that April. The caricature shows a sinister-looking overseer stirring a slave in a boiling vat of sugar cane juice. Nailed to the wall behind him are some small animals, a severed black arm, and a single pair of black ears. As J. R. Oldfield has pointed out, this image, like similar caricatures, expresses ambivalence about the merits of abolition. Gillray may well have been satirizing what proslavery advocates saw as the excesses of antislavery testimony. Nevertheless, such images gave vivid form to the connections linking death, greed, and slavery and lodged them in the visual imagination of the viewing public.<sup>70</sup>

The best-known abolitionist image of the period (perhaps excepting Josiah Wedgwood's kneeling slave) showed the plan and sections of a slave ship, modeled on the *Brookes* of Liverpool, which, like the *Zong*, carried Africans from the Gold Coast to Jamaica. In late 1788, when abolitionists in Plymouth published an image of the packed lower deck of a slaver, it quickly came to Thomas Clarkson's attention. He had a more detailed version published in the spring of 1789, which he distributed to members of both houses of Parliament in advance of Wilberforce's first motion for abolition. The icon also appeared more widely in myriad antislavery tracts and pamphlets, posted in the streets of Edinburgh or even framed and displayed in private homes, and in the first edition of the *Abstract of the Evidence*. The London committee arranged for the printing and distribution of eight thousand additional copies in 1788–89.<sup>71</sup>

The image of the plan and sections of a slave ship encapsulated moral censure of the commercial way of death, rendered emblematically rather than anecdotally (Figure 5.5). "Here, in diagrammatic form," explains Oldfield, "were human beings reduced to the level of inhuman objects, treated as so much merchandise and stowed on board ship in the most appalling

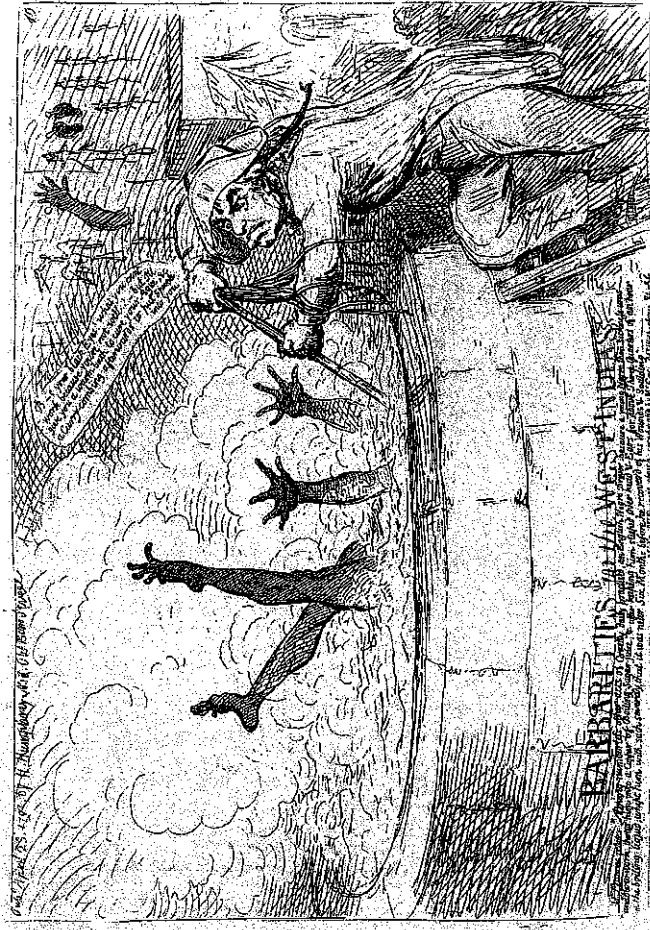


Figure 5.4. *Barbarities in the West Indies*, drawing by James Gillray, 23 April 1791, in *The Works of James Gillray* (London, 1849). A plantation overseer uses a whip handle to stir a black body into a vat of boiling sugar, as he exclaims, "B—t your black Eyes! What you can't work because you're not well!—but I'll give you a warm bath to cure your Ague, & a Curry-combing afterwards to put Spunk into you." Nailed to the wall in the background are several dead animals, a black person's severed arm, and a pair of human ears. The caption refers to the parliamentary debates of 1791: "Mr. Frances relates, 'Among numberless other acts of cruelty daily practiced, an English Negro Driver, because a young Negro thro sickness was unable to work, threw him into a Copper of Boiling Sugar Juice, & after keeping him steeped over head & Ears for above Three Quarters of an hour in the boiling liquid, whipt him with such severity that it was near Six Months before he recover'd of his Wounds & Scalding.'" Vide Mr. Frances speech corroborated by Mr. Fox, Mr. Wilberforce & c. &c." Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

conditions."<sup>72</sup> Perhaps more important, it was impossible to escape the impression that the *Brookes* was a tomb, a mass grave that yielded hand-some rents to its owners.

If the story of the *Zong* symbolized the Atlantic slave trade as a moral dystopia, the plan of the *Brookes* refined the abstraction. "Designed," according to Thomas Clarkson, "to give the spectator an idea of the sufferings of the Africans in the Middle Passage," the image effected a subtle

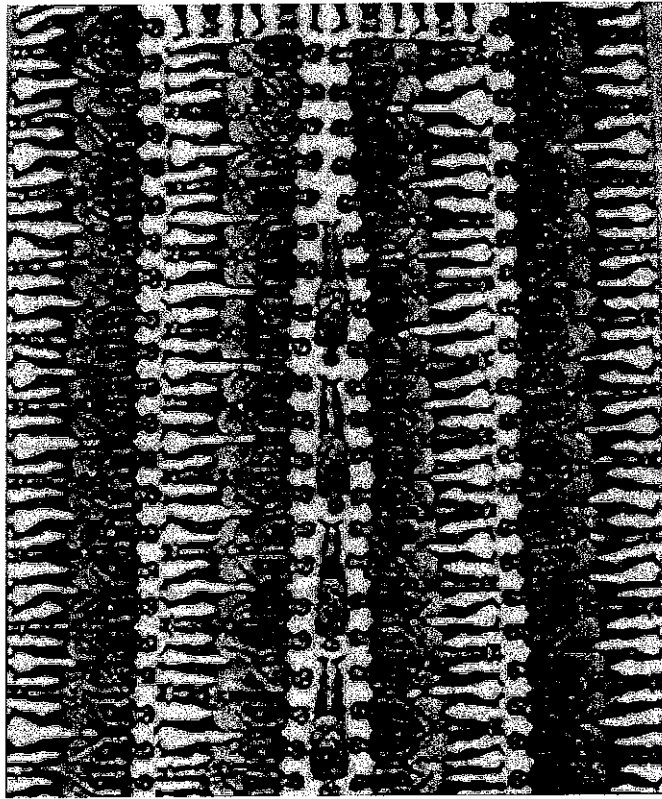


Figure 5.5. Detail from *Plan and Sections of a Slave Ship*, frontispiece to *An Abstract of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the Years 1790 and 1791* (London, 1791). Originally published in 1789 (printed by J. Phillips), the image, which has been reproduced frequently down to the present, represents the cargo hold of the *Brookes*, a Liverpool slaver which traded in Jamaica in the 1780s. One of the larger ships in the trade, the *Brookes* carried as many as 609 enslaved Africans in its hold. Courtesy of the Rare Books, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

shift in evocative technique, inspiring horror not through the details of suffering, but through its lack of detail. Although close inspection of the image would reveal gender distinctions, shackles, and bodily contortions, nothing indicated the anguished cries, or the blood and filth in the hold. For viewers trained by moral sentimentalism and gothic fiction to see authentically human experience in such details, the revelation that slavers could coolly reduce human bodies to such neat, lifeless patterns was in itself horrifying. Viewers who knew the stories of suffering and death contained in the *Abstract of the Evidence* had to notice the absence of such stories, the absence of humanity, from the plan of the slave ship. Indeed, the generic

nature of the image forced them to seek stories of suffering and death in the accompanying text. As an abstract rendering of the confluence of death and calculation, the image both summarized the traces of various sentimental and evangelical ethical narratives and foreshadowed the emergence of the demographic debate on the enslaved population of the West Indies. That debate only intensified after the abolitionists had finally brought a halt to the British transatlantic slave trade. In the rhetoric that attended that victory, the *Zong* again played a role. As Ian Baucom has recognized, the story of the *Zong* massacre assumed a truly generic form in the House of Commons abolition debate of 1806. During the debate “the story of the massacre was retold: though now not as the story of a particular historical event . . . but as one in a series of equivalent stories.”<sup>73</sup>

Of course, the general understanding of the slave trade as commerce in death was only one factor in the ultimate success of the abolition bill that year. Recent evidence indicates that West Indian planters, especially in Jamaica, faced a crisis of overproduction in the early years of the nineteenth century that severely eroded confidence in the sugar industry among imperial policymakers. As Robin Blackburn has wryly observed, it was only after the threat of Jacobinism and the French Revolution had faded, and once a majority of M.P.’s were “convinced that abolition did not contradict ‘sound policy,’” that “knowing it to be dear to the heart of the middle-class reformers, they allowed themselves to be shocked by the appalling brutalities of the Atlantic slave trade.” Nevertheless, by provoking anxiety over God’s judgment of the British Empire, the generic representation of the slave trade had inspired passionate and crucial political action and would continue to frame the terms of the succeeding episodes in the debate over colonial slavery.<sup>74</sup>

#### “An Arithmetical Proposition”

Following the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, the old theory that a decline in population could result from an immoral economic bargain formed the underpinning for the movement to bring about registration of slaves, an amelioration in their living conditions, and their eventual emancipation. Debates in Britain about the correlation between the magnitude of the population and its moral welfare, which had begun in the mid-eighteenth century with the earliest attempts to “number the

people," now focused on colonial slavery. The first nationwide census in 1801 had demonstrated that the British population was not, in fact, in decline, but the moralists were not satisfied; they transposed their argument to the slave colonies, where it appeared to be justified. In 1815, again backed by a mass campaign, parliamentary abolitionists pressed for a register of the enslaved populations in the West Indies. The proposed bill was meant to ensure, through carefully monitoring of patterns of birth and death in the colonies, that no new slaves were smuggled in from Africa. Though the intercolonial slave trade was still legal, strict enforcement of the ban on the African trade was intended to encourage planters to *breed* rather than *buy* their workforce. Merchants and planters in the colonies were hostile to the proposed legislation, rightly fearing that such a census might reveal embarrassing statistics. It was common knowledge that slaves failed to reproduce themselves naturally in the sugar colonies and that their numbers had decreased since the end of the transatlantic slave trade, but slaveholders hoped to hide the extent of the demographic debacle. Following the path hewn by Long and Beckford, they again blamed the decrease on factors beyond their control. The Jamaican assembly protested in 1815 that after the abolitionists had abused them "in detail," with anecdotes of cruelty and barbarity, "we are [now] attacked in the mass, and told, that although we have refuted the items, the general charge of cruelty and oppression must be just, because the slaves have not increased, but diminished, in number." The colonial assemblies' protests were enough to obstruct the imposition of a central register, administered from London, but there was enough pressure to persuade them to establish colonial registers under local control. The registration returns continued to document a profound demographic crisis. Confronted by the numerical "facts," advocates on both sides of the slavery issue again invoked the dead in spirited debates.<sup>75</sup>

Planters and merchants reprised the arguments laid out by Long: rogue underlings were beyond their control, and the bad habits of the enslaved were responsible for their poor life expectancy and low birth rate. Immorality, superstition, abortion, and even witchcraft served as convenient scapegoats for the demographic decline. The gothic novelist and slaveholder Matthew Gregory Lewis summarized planters' sentiments perfectly in his diary: "Say what one will to the negroes, and treat them as well as one can, obstinate devils, they will die!" Such sarcastic reasoning

could not undo the ordinary conflation in the popular mind of slavery, avarice, and death that had been established in the 1780s and 1790s. As long as this simple chain of associations remained intact, abolitionist arguments continued to be morally convincing, even when they no longer relied on sentimental discourse. As incriminating statistics were reported in from the West Indies, antislavery activists in Britain came to see them as an index of the basic inhumanity of slavery.<sup>76</sup>

The recorded statistics acted as seemingly "rational" analogues to detailed stories of physical suffering. Thomas Fowell Buxton spoke for many humanitarians when he told an 1832 parliamentary committee on the state of the West Indies that the decrease in the slave population was "the best of all tests of the condition of the Negro." Basing his argument on his understanding of Malthusian population theory, he asserted that barring "great convulsions . . . increase can only be prevented by intense misery." In this way Buxton folded a generic argument, about the immorality that caused demographic deterioration, into what seemed a scientific truism. He justified his argument in terms appropriate to an age in which the influence of sentimental rhetoric was yielding to bureaucratic rationality. He cited population decline, he said, "because it cannot be liable to the imputation of any excitement of feelings; it was a purely rational argument, it was addressed only to the understanding, it was an arithmetical proposition." The statement was sly. Such numbers certainly excited feeling, but sentiment now came cloaked in the authority of reason. The ethical corollary to John Weskett's gross averages, demographic statistics carried narratives of suffering with them. Despite the transition from moral sentimentalism to humanitarian empiricism, emotional weight attached to the dead remained a fundamental feature of British morality. For the devout, redemption for the British Empire could only come with the cleansing of the national soul through the restoration of proper attitudes toward death and the dead, and this required expiation for the sin of slavery. The moral climate that developed in response to the death of slaves was an important factor in Parliament's decision to mitigate slavery in 1823 and finally to emancipate the enslaved in the 1830s.<sup>77</sup>

Popular antislavery politics in the Age of Reason were less a rational pursuit than a national exorcism, a campaign to rid the British Empire of a great evil. Antislavery rhetoric and activism emerged as an important part of the British vision for the colonial moral order in the late eighteenth

and early nineteenth centuries. At its center was an evangelical understanding of death and redemption, couched in the rhetoric of moral sentiment.<sup>78</sup> Reacting to deep demographic changes and political-economic tensions in Britain, mortuary politics in antislavery discourse projected idealized resolutions of domestic crises onto the British West Indies. The image of West Indian slaveholders as depraved killers satisfied a widespread yearning, especially on the part of evangelicals, to find the evil at the root of contemporary social strains. Yet as long as systematic murder was seen largely as the result of moral failure, antislavery polemics were vulnerable to at least one of the counterarguments by merchants and planters: that the moral condition of black men and women was the source of their failure to propagate.

Evangelical antislavery activists relied on a religious understanding of population trends. As a result, they often believed that planters had only to attend to the moral instruction of enslaved blacks in order to see their numbers grow naturally. In 1806 Wilberforce assured skeptics that the slaveholder need only ensure "that the negroes are well fed, regard paid to their health, their habits, to their domestic comforts, and, above all, to their moral improvement; and he will soon find them rapidly to increase in numbers." In this respect, many evangelical abolitionists agreed with planters that the slaves' "morally degraded condition," their savagery, was partly to blame for rampant mortality among them. Abolitionists advocated the reformation of slaves' moral state as a means to achieve demographic increase. Much of their effort to "ameliorate" slaves' condition in the 1820s focused on winning freedom for evangelicals to proselytize in the colonies. Once protection had been guaranteed evangelist missionaries to the colonies, many respectable reformers were content to see slavery continue in a milder, because more pious, form. But though this solution may have soothed the conscience of evangelicals in Britain, overseas missionaries actually had to confront the somewhat different spiritual convictions and freedom struggles among the enslaved. The result of such encounters would propel antislavery rhetoric and action well beyond British reformers' more limited vision of moral reform.<sup>79</sup>



## Holy Ghosts and Eternal Salvation

TO REDEEM THE SOUL of the British Empire, it was necessary to save the souls of its heathen inhabitants. If Britons were to avert a divine calamity, they would have to bring imperial subjects, including the enslaved in America, to God. Fearing that the souls of so-called heathens would face hell, eternal oblivion, or "spiritual death," evangelical Protestants in the second half of the eighteenth century entered into a worldwide competition to save souls. The matter was urgent, for the terrors of hell weighed heavily on the minds of evangelists, and they knew that heathens were damned unless they could be converted, "plucked from the burnings, and rescued from heathenish and savage darkness." Not to desire their salvation was considered "inhuman," even "devilish."<sup>1</sup>

Late in the year 1824 the Baptist missionary William Knibb embarked for Jamaica aboard the merchant ship *Ocean*, to assume the mission of his deceased brother Thomas. Violent weather in the English Channel delayed his passage for two months and forced Knibb, barely twenty-one years old, to reflect upon his own mortality. Death was often on William Knibb's mind as he lay in his berth. He was well aware that Jamaica was among the most dangerous places to which an evangelist could go, "the grave of the Europeans," a colony where no insurance society would underwrite a policy on any man's life, on any terms. Thomas had died after just fifteen months on the island, before he reached the age of twenty-five. "But if such a short period is allotted to me," William wrote to his relatives at Kettering, "my prayer is that I may be able to do the



- 137/118, ff. 115–118; John Shipman, "Thoughts upon the Present State of Religion among the Negroes of Jamaica," 1820, WMMMS Archive Special Series, Biographical, West Indies, box 588, FBN 2, nos. 27–31, 12–13.
38. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 37.
39. Bryan Edwards, "Stanzas, Occasioned by the Death of Alico, an African Slave, Condemned for Rebellion in Jamaica, 1760," *Poems Written Chiefly in the West Indies* (Kingston, 1792), 38; James G. Basker, *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660–1810* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 131–132.
40. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 24 July 1760; *ibid.*, 9 June 1765.
41. *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 30 (April 1760): 179–181; *ibid.*, June 1760, 294; *ibid.*, July 1760, 307–308; *ibid.*, August 1760, 393; *ibid.*, 31 (July 1761), 321; *ibid.*, August 1761, 377.
42. Christopher L. Brown, "From Slaves to Subjects: Envisioning Empire without Slavery, 1772–1834," in Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, eds., *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 116–120; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 25–28; Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).
43. Thomas Day and John Bicknell, *The Dying Negro, A Poetical Epistle*, reprinted in Debbie Lee, ed., *Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period* (London, 1999), 413.
44. Edwards, "Stanzas Occasioned by the Death of Alico," 37–39; Basker, *Amazing Grace*, 131–132; James G. Basker, "The Next Insurrection: Johnson, Race, and Rebellion," *Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 11 (2000): 37–51.
45. Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 9 December 1765, in Betty Wood, ed., "The Letters of Simon Taylor," 29–30; Simon Taylor to Robert Taylor, 24 October 1807, ICS, Taylor Papers, I/1/44; Simon Taylor to George Hibbert, 31 October 1807, ICS, *ibid.*, I/1/43. For comparison's sake, see James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (Cambridge, U.K., 1997), esp. 256–276; and Richard Price, *First-Timers: The Historical Vision of an African American People* (Chicago, 2002 [1983]).
5. *The Soul of the British Empire*
1. David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, U.K., 1999); Jerome Bernard Weaves to Committee of the Com-

- pany of Merchants Trading to Africa, 27 July 1781, PRO, T 70/33; Robert Stubbs to Committee of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, 30 January 1783, PRO, BT 6/6. The narrative of the voyage of the *Zong* is drawn from the following sources: Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, N.C., 2005), 10, 14–15, 129–130, 195–202; Robert Weisbord, "The Case of the Slave-Ship *Zong*, 1783," *History Today* 19, no. 8 (August 1969): 561–567; Granville Sharp, "An Account of the Murder of One Hundred and thirty-two Negro Slaves on Board the Ship *Zong*, or *Zung*, with some Remarks on the Arguments of an eminent Lawyer in Defence of that inhuman Transaction, enclosed in the Letter of the 2d July, 1783 to the Lords of the Admiralty," in Granville Sharp, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq., Composed from His Own Manuscripts and Other Authentic Documents in the Possession of His Family and of the African Institution by Prince Hoare* (London, 1828), appendix 8, xxvi–xxxiii; and Henry Roscoe, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of King's Bench, 1782–1785* (London, 1831), 232–235.
2. Sharp, "An Account of the Murder," xxvii.
3. John Weskett, *A Complete Digest of the Theory, Laws, and Practice of Insurance* (London, 1781), as cited in Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 107, 137–138.
4. Certainly, Collingwood was not the only captain in the trade to do what he did. A decade before the *Zong* massacre, the Moravian missionary C. G. A. Oldendorp remarked upon certain occasions when "the captain [was] faced with the painful necessity of sacrificing a part of his slaves in order to keep the rest of them alive on the scanty provisions that remain." Oldendorp, *A Caribbean Mission*, ed. Johann Jakob Bossard (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1987), 216.
5. Supplement to the *Royal Gazette*, 28 December 1781, 818.
6. For the most compelling recent explanation of the origins of the British antislavery movement, see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006). See also Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York, 2002); David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, 2006), 231–249; and Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston, 2005).
7. Ralph Houlbrooke, "The Age of Decency: 1660–1760," in Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings, eds., *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2000), 174.

8. Rev. John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London, 1757), quoted in D. V. Glass, *Numbering the People: The Eighteenth-Century Population Controversy and the Development of Census and Vital Statistics in Britain* (London, 1973), 26; Glass, *Numbering the People*, 17–21.
9. See Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge, U.K., 1994), 68–69, 110; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Religion, Ritual, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), 379–420; William Shertock, quoted in Houlbrooke, “The Age of Decency,” 178.
10. Julie Ruggs, “From Reason to Regulation: 1760–1850,” in Jupp and Gittings, *Death in England*, 204; Roy Porter, “Death and the Doctors,” in Ralph Houlbrooke, ed., *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement* (New York, 1989), 84–86.
11. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1988), 20–74; John Walsh, “‘Methodism’ and the Origins of English-Speaking Evangelicalism,” in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1900* (New York, 1994), 19–34.
12. See Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London, 1975), 157–183, 198.
13. John Foxe, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs: A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant Death of the Early Christian and the Protestant Martyrs*, ed. William Byron Forbush (Peabody, Mass., 2004); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 25–28; quotation, 27.
14. Robert N. Essick and Morton D. Paley, *Robert Blair’s The Grave, Illustrated by William Blake* (London, 1982), 3; Stephen Cornford, ed., *Edward Young: Night Thoughts* (Cambridge, U.K., 1989), 134; Houlbrooke, “The Age of Decency,” 179; William Dodd, *Reflections on Death* (London, 1796 (1763)), 6.
15. Essick and Paley, *Robert Blair’s The Grave*, 9–10; Cornford, *Edward Young: Night Thoughts*, 8; Houlbrooke, “The Age of Decency,” 179.
16. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (New York, 1998 [1757]), 91; Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, U.K., 2002 [1759]), 16, 82–83; Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 242–264; Cornford, *Edward Young: Night Thoughts*, 17.
17. Thomas W. Laqueur, “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), 177;

- Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge, U.K., 1996); Adam Lively, *Masks: Blackness, Race, and the Imagination* (Oxford, 2000), 83; Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia, 2002), 23–43; E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge, U.K., 1995); Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia, 1994), 23.
18. Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), 59–60.
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20. O. F. Christie, ed., *The Diary of the Revd William Jones, 1777–1821* (London, 1929), 51; Bryan Edwards, *Poems Written Chiefly in the West Indies* (Kingston, 1792), 46–47; James G. Basket, *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660–1810* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 131–136.
21. John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (London, 1774), 46–53; Sharp, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 352.
22. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 244; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (New York, 1999 [1975]), 470–500. On the Somerset case, see Steven Wise, *Thought the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).
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24. Sharp, “Just Limitation of Slavery”; quotation, 36 (emphasis in original); see also 33, 50.
25. Roscoe, *Reports of Cases Argued*, 232; Weisbord, “The Case of the Slave-Ship Zong,” 563.
26. John Lee, quoted in Roscoe, *Reports of Cases Argued*, 233 (emphasis in original); Lord Mansfield, quoted in Weisbord, “The Case of the Slave-Ship Zong,” 564; Roscoe, *Reports of Cases Argued*, 234; Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 169.
27. Sharp, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 362–363, xxxii–xxxiii; Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 8, 135.

28. Sharp, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 362, xxxiii.
29. Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 123-128; Weisbord, "The Case of the Slave-Ship *Zong*," 566; Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 3.
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31. *Ibid.*, 363; "Dr. Hinchcliff to Granville Sharp," 31 August 1783, and "Dr. Porteus to Granville Sharp" [n.d.], in Sharp, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 367-368.
32. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 406.
33. James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), 35; Folarin Shyllon, *James Ramsay: The Unknown Abolitionist* (Edinburgh, 1977); Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York, 1999), 85; John Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (London, 1788), reprinted in Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell, eds., *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton)*, 1750-1754, with Newton's *Thought upon the African Slave Trade* (London, 1962), 105; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography* (London, 1989).
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35. Clarkson, *An Essay on Slavery and Commerce*, 114, 103.
36. *Ibid.*, 103-104; Thomas Clarkson, quoted in Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore, Md., 1999), 102-103.
37. Clarkson, *An Essay on Slavery and Commerce*, 164-165, 112.
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39. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 249, 264-265.
40. Lively, *Masks*, 58-59; Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, 25-26.
41. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 159; Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 50, 56, 62, 203, xix-xx.
42. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 440-441, 139; Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 265-266; J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (London, 1998), 115.
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45. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 267; "Debate on Mr. Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade," *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. 29, 1791-92 (New York, 1966), cols. 250-359.
46. Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedekne, 7 April 1788, 1 May 1788, 29 May 1788, 30 August 1788, and 6 November 1788, Vaneck Papers, 3A/1788/3, 3A/1788/8, 3A/1788/10, 3A/1788/21, and 3A/1788/26, respectively, Cambridge University Library.
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49. Long, *History of Jamaica*, 2:398-399, 498.
50. *Ibid.*; also 435-436, 378, 396.
51. Beckford, *Remarks upon . . . the Negroes*, 79, 82; James Pinnock, Barrister of Jamaica, Brief Diary, 1758-1794, 22 October 1781, British Library, Add. MS 33316, 10; William Wright, M.D., to Chaloner Arcedekne, 1 March 1788, Vaneck Papers, 3G/3, i-ii.
52. "First Report of the Committee of the House of Assembly of the Island of Jamaica," 16 October 1788, in Sheila Lambert, ed., *HCSRP*, 69:266.
53. Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedekne, 7 April 1788, Vaneck Papers, 3A/1788/3; "Second Report of the Committee of the House of Assembly of the Island of Jamaica," 12 November 1788, in Lambert, *HCSRP*, 69:267-272; quotation, 268.
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55. *Abstract of the Evidence*, v; Lambert, *HCSRP*, 82:68 (emphasis in original), 71.

56. Testimony of Dr. Jackson, 14 February, 1791, *ibid.*, 56.
57. Testimony of Captain Robert Cross, 15–16 February 1791, *ibid.*, 68.
58. Testimony of Henry Coor, 16 February 1791, *ibid.*, 71.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*; *Abstract of the Evidence*, III; Rugg, "From Reason to Regulation," 212–213; Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, 30–31.
61. Testimony of William Fitzmaurice, 9 March 1791, in Lambert, *HCSP* 82:220; Testimony of William Fitzmaurice, 10 March 1791, *ibid.*, 226, 232, 233.
62. Testimony of William Fitzmaurice, 10 March 1791, *ibid.*, 225–226; Testimony of Dr. Harrison, 12 February 1791, *ibid.*, 46; Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, 76; "Testimony of Capt. Thomas Lloyd," 25 February 1791, in Lambert, *HCSP* 82:147.
63. Testimony of Hercules Ross, 17 March 1791, in Lambert, *HCSP* 82:259; *Abstract of the Evidence*, 44–45, 141.
64. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 146.
65. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 269; James W. LoGerfo, "Sir William Dolben and 'The Case of Humanity': The Passage of the Slave Trade Regulation Act of 1788," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 6, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 431–451; Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, "Slave Mortality on British Ships, 1791–1797," in Roger Anstey and P. E. H. Hair, eds., *Liv- erpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition: Essays to Illustrate Current Knowledge and Research* (Liverpool, 1976), 113–125; Weisbord, "The Case of the Slave-Ship Zong," 567; Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 277–278.
66. Lively, *Masks*, 61, 68–69; Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, 28, 40–41.
67. Cornford, *Edward Young: Night Thoughts*, 13.
68. Richard Price and Sally Price, eds., *Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society* (Baltimore, Md., 1992); Anne Rubenstein and Camilla Townsend, "Revolted Negroes and the Devilish Principle: William Blake and Conflicting Visions of Boni's Wars in Surinam, 1772–1796," in Jackie DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson, eds., *Blake, Politics, and History* (New York, 1998), 273–298; mento mori images were often used by artists to signify the universality and inevitability of death. See Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, c. 1500–1800* (London, 1991), 9–14; and David V. Erdman, *Blake, Prophet against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (Princeton, N.J., 1969 [1954]), 228.
69. Essick and Paley, *Robert Blair's The Grave*, II–12, 18.

70. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery, 172–179*. See also Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
71. For the history of the Brookes image, see Cheryl Finley, "Committed to Memory: The Slave Ship Icon in the Black Atlantic" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2002); Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, 51, 56, 99, 163–66.
72. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, 165.
73. Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament* (London, 1808), 2:III; Cheryl Finley, "Committed to Memory: The Slave Ship Icon in the Black-Atlantic Imagination," *Chicago Art Journal* 9 (1999): 12; Ian Baucom, "Specters of the Atlantic," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 64. See Wilberforce's reference to the Zong case as proof of a general practice of making Africans "walk the plank," British House of Commons, *Substance of the Debates on a Resolution for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (London, 1968 [1806]), 56–57.
74. David Beck Ryden, "Does Decline Make Sense? The West Indian Economy and the Abolition of the British Slave Trade," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 347–374; Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 315.
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77. Higman, "Slavery and the Development of Demographic Theory," 181, 184, 182. For the most thorough analysis of the influence of popular

politics on antislavery legislation, see Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1987) and Drescher, "Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade," *Past and Present*, no. 143 (May 1994): 136–166.

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79. British House of Commons, *Substance of the Debates*, 38; Thomas Cooper, *Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica* (London, 1824), 9–10; Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Kingston, 1998 [1982]), 102–108.

## 6. Holy Ghosts and Eternal Salvation

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2. Philip Wright, *Knibb "the Notorious" Slaves' Missionary, 1803–1845* (London, 1973), 11–12; Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829–1858*, 2nd ed. (London, 1970 [1863]), 22–23; copy of Mr. Knibb's Journal of His First Voyage to Jamaica, January–February 1824, William Knibb letters, BMS, WI/3.

3. Copy of Mr. Knibb's journal, 28 January 1824, BMS, WI/3.

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5. R. A. Minter, *Episcopacy without Episcopate: The Church of England in Jamaica before 1824* (Worcester, U.K., 1990), 289–291, 150–151.

6. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, 1990), 59.

7. William Knibb to Thomas Knibb, Bristol, 6 May 1823, William Knibb letters, BMS, WI/3. Knibb is here referring to Romans 6:3–4: "Do you

not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? There we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York, 1989), 162.

8. Gillian Lindt Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities* (New York, 1967), 13. On the Moravian mission in the Caribbean, see Richard S. Dunn, *Moravian Missionaries at Work in a Jamaican Slave Community, 1754–1835* (Minneapolis, 1994); and John F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005); Zinzendorf's *Hymns Composed for the Use of the Brethren*, quoted in Richard Price, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore, Md., 1990), 57, 59.

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10. Arnold Rattenbury, "Methodism and Taterdemalions," in Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo, eds., *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590–1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1981), 32; Coke, *History of the West Indies*, 1:27. One of the earliest devotional texts mentioned in John Wesley's Oxford diary was Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*. Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, Tenn., 1995), 128; For an analysis of deathbed scenes in colonial North America, see Erik R. Seeman, "Reading Indians' Deathbed Scenes: Ethnohistorical and Representational Approaches," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 17–47.

11. Rev. William Fish to Benson, Kingston, 26 April 1804; Fish to Benson, Kingston, 26 April 1804; Fish to Benson, 11 May 1804 (emphasis in original)—all in WMMS, West Indies General Correspondence, box III, FBN 1, nos. 2, 4.

12. "Letter of Mr. Young, Kingston, 19 April 1824," in *Missionary Notices, relating principally to the Foreign Missions*, no. 103, July 1824, vol. 4, 1823–1825 (London, 1825), 298.

13. Buchner, *The Moravians in Jamaica*, 14–15; 1822 minutes of the WMMS, WMMS synod minutes, 1822–1838, box 148, FBN 1, no. 1; Catherine