The Price of Emancipation

When colonial slavery was abolished in 1833, the British government paid £20 million to slave-owners as compensation: the enslaved received nothing. Drawing on the records of the Commissioners of Slave Compensation, which represent a complete census of slave-ownership, this book provides for the first time a comprehensive analysis of the extent and importance of absentee slave-ownership and its impact on British society. Moving away from the historiographical tradition of isolated case studies, it reveals the extent of slave-ownership amongst metropolitan elites, and identifies concentrations of both rentier and mercantile slave-holders, tracing their influence in local and national politics, in business, and in institutions such as the church. In analysing this permeation of British society by slave-owners, and their success in securing compensation from the state, the book challenges conventional narratives of abolitionist Britain and provides a fresh perspective of British society and politics on the eve of the Victorian era.

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The Price of Emancipation

*Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery*

Nicholas Draper
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A note on language

Slave-owners in Britain in the early nineteenth century invested energy in elaborating different categories for themselves, including ‘proprietor’ and ‘planter’, and spoke of being ‘possessed of slaves’, in one of the numerous linguistic and representational strategies adopted to blur the reality of their position. At the same time, the process whereby the British state sanctioned, amassed, evaluated and paid out on claims for compensation from slave-owners in exchange for the freedom (initially partial) of enslaved men and women did not operate, at the metropolitan centre, on the basis of identification of, nor differentiation between, individual enslaved men and women. Instead, it worked in terms of the numbers and categories of ‘slaves’ treated as abstract commodities. Accordingly, this study reinstates the language of ‘slave-owner’ to describe those whose asserted title to treat human beings as property was recognised by the state, and uses the term ‘slaves’ in extracting, analysing and compiling data from the records of the state bodies charged with compensation payments to slave-owners. It uses ‘enslaved’ in all other contexts.
### Abbreviations

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<td>ASR</td>
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<td>Clergy of the Church of England Database</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNB</td>
<td>Dictionary of National Biography</td>
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