West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783–1807

This book challenges conventional wisdom regarding the political and economic motivations behind the final decision to abolish the British slave trade in 1807. Recent historians believe that this first blow against slavery was the result of social changes inside Britain and pay little attention to the important developments that took place inside the West Indian slave economy. David Beck Ryden’s research illustrates that a faltering sugar economy after 1799 tipped the scales in favor of the abolitionist argument and helped secure the passage of abolition.

Ryden examines the economic arguments against slavery and the slave trade that were employed in the writings of Britain’s most important abolitionists. Using a wide range of economic and business data, this study deconstructs the assertions made by both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists regarding slave management, the imperial economy, and abolition.

David Beck Ryden (associate professor of history, University of Houston – Downtown) has degrees in economics and history from Connecticut College (B.A.), the University of Delaware’s College of Business and Economics (M.A.), and the University of Minnesota’s Department of History (Ph.D.). He is the author of several articles on British American slave societies for Slavery and Abolition, The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, and Social Science History. He is also editor of The Promoters of the Slave Trade, a collection of pro-slavery pamphlets produced by West Indian planters during the age of abolition. The Economic History Association selected Ryden’s dissertation as a finalist for the Alexander Gerschenkron Prize. He was a postdoctoral fellow and lecturer in the Department of American Studies and History at Brunel University in London.
West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783–1807

DAVID BECK RYDEN
...and our tobacco colonies send us home no such wealthy planters as we see frequently arrive from our sugar islands.

Adam Smith

Wealth of Nations (1776)
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B.1 Estimates of Jamaican Slave Population, 1722–1805 301
My interest in Eric Williams and the Williams’ Debate started many years ago, so there is a long list of mentors, colleagues, friends, and institutions that have made this book possible. My first foray into the topic began as a graduate student in Russell Menard and Stuart Schwartz's “Slavery in the Americas” proseminar at the University of Minnesota. Rus and Stuart not only offered suggestions while I was writing the paper required for the course but also dispatched me to Jamaica so I could incorporate materials from the Jamaica Archives into the essay. With John McCusker’s very helpful advice on the organizational scheme of the records, I made my way to Kingston and Spanish Town and was oriented to the two cities by Mr. Lester Woolery. For me, this was a very exciting introduction to archival research: within a semester I was “hooked” on one of the most important problems Williams presented to West Indian, British, and North American scholars.

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David Beck Ryden
November 15, 2008
### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BCSC</td>
<td>Boston College Special Collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>Clements Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNB</td>
<td>Dictionary of National Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUSC</td>
<td>Duke University Special Collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRO</td>
<td>East Sussex Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCSP</td>
<td>House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HL</td>
<td>Huntington Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>IJ</td>
<td>Institute of Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td>Jamaica Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives, United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLS</td>
<td>National Library of Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLW</td>
<td>National Library of Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>London Society of West India Planters and Merchants</td>
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<td>SRO</td>
<td>Sommerset Record Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWIM</td>
<td>Institute of Commonwealth Studies’ microfilm copies of the Society of West India Merchants Minute Books (original manuscripts at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWIPM</td>
<td>Institute of Commonwealth Studies’ microfilm copies of the Society of West India Planters and Merchants Minute Books (original manuscripts at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVAP</td>
<td>The Taylor and Vannec-Ardeckenke papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWB</td>
<td>University of Wales-Bangor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WVL</td>
<td>William Vassall Letterbook</td>
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