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Marketing Social Justice: Lessons from our Abolitionist Predecessors

Abstract

This essay explores the nineteenth-century transatlantic free produce movement as a social justice experiment with important lessons for today's activists. Both American and British abolitionists embraced a boycott of slave goods as a method to place economic pressure on slaveholders and also to cleanse their bodies and souls of the sinfulness of slavery. While free produce failed to affect the financial success of slaveholders, it presented the movement with an opportunity to market abolition to a wider audience. Free produce advocates found methods to humanise enslaved women, men, and children by highlighting the violence, ruthlessness, and injustice of the system. They connected the products of slavery to the enslaved and offered alternative "free produce" to abolitionists. Free produce offered supporters a path toward more collective action against the system of slavery. Modern-day abolitionists are applying these lessons in the fight against slavery today—inspiring consumers to choose "free" or "clean" products as a method for maintaining personal integrity—and encouraging supporters to become actively engaged in the collective antislavery movement.

Keywords: *Abolition, Boycott, Slavery, Free Produce*

Selling virtue is trendy. Have you seen the tagline by the fair trade, organic clothing company Indigenous? "Fashion worth wearing, worth buying, and *worth talking about*."[1] Indigenous is not unique. Its ethical reason-for-being and its self-conscious embrace of principled corporate practices are of increasing appeal to entrepreneurs and progressive business owners. Their marketing approach—selling ethics—is also standard. The *moral economy* is no longer a remnant of 1960s lifestyle—a tiny section of the market that appeals to college professors, activists, and aging hippies. It has become a legitimate player in the massive, diverse, and complex global marketplace. Elizabeth Cline, in an article in the *Nation* titled "The Clothes Make the Movement," proposes that consumers,

1 Indigenous, at: http://www.indigenous.com/clinic/ (accessed on 5 April 2016).

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concerned about the labour conditions involved in the production of their merchandise, are choosing to purchase goods that have a clean supply chain—preferably domestically produced.

> Some brands are now carving out a profitable ethical niche, as a growing number of consumers seek out mass-market retailers that are doing a better job of managing their supply chains and making that difference visible to shoppers. […] Domestically made garments are increasingly popular and easier to find. Buying local gives shoppers a sense that they are building the economy and bringing jobs home, and designers like it because it gives them control over their product.[2]

There are also countless websites, non-profits, non-government organisations, and small businesses that specifically focus on connecting the marketplace to social justice issues. These groups blend morality and economics to insist that we all become virtuous consumers. Slavery Footprint is a website that mimics the principle of the "carbon footprint" to help consumers answer the question: How many slaves work for you?[3] Ecouterre offers fashion-conscious men and women trendy clothing with clean supply chains. As their website states: "Ecouterre seeks to change people's minds about what 'fashion' design entails beyond fleeting fads and mindless consumerism. Like any good product design, clothing production can be accomplished in a better, smarter, and more socially and environmentally sustainable way."[4] Shopping for a Change claims: "Together we are improving lives around the world."[5] All of these examples suggest that the rise of a *new moral economy* is as much about pressuring corporations and businesses into considering their relationship to human rights as it is about *raising awareness* among consumers. As Elizabeth Cline suggests: "Ethical purchasing offers people a chance to build healthier economies and workplaces, but it also gives shoppers the chance to tell a more complex and emotionally rewarding story about their clothing […] The appeal is about connection and engagement […] as much as it is about morality."[6]

This emphasis on "connection and engagement" is not original. More than one hundred and fifty years ago abolitionists in both the United States and Great Britain also attempted to engage the moral economy in their effort to end slavery through a global boycott of slave-made goods. Advocates of what was called the "free produce" movement demanded that abolitionists eschew cotton and sugar as a way to force slaveholders out of business and cleanse their souls of the sinfulness of slavery. Free Produce supporters also

2 Elizabeth Cline: The Clothes Make the Movement, in: The Nation, 5–12 August 2013.
3 Slavery Footprint, at: http://www.slaveryfootprint.org (accessed on 5 April 2016).
4 Ecouterre: Mission, at: http://www.ecouterre.com/mission (accessed on 5 April 2016).
5 Shopping for a Change: About Us: https://shoppingforachange.org/pages/how-it-works (accessed on 12 March 2017).
6 Elizabeth Cline: The Clothes Make the Movement, p. 22.

realised the enormous marketing potential of their movement. Like modern-day social justice activists, they understood that selling the idea of free produce could help increase antislavery sentiment across the North. However, in assessing the success of free produce, historians have focused on the movement's direct impact on the economy of slavery. Did free produce challenge "king cotton"? Did it put any slaveholders out of business? Did it create a global alternative to slave-produced sugar? We know that the answer to all these questions is a resounding "no." But we are investigating the wrong questions. We should be asking: "How did free produce affect antislavery sentiment?" Admittedly, this is a much more difficult question to consider. Nonetheless, the success of free produce lay in its ability to undermine slavery through *raising awareness*—and this was effectuated through a brilliant combination of pricking *individual conscience* and *catalysing collective action*. Moreover, this foundation constructed by free produce advocates offers twenty-first-century activists important guidelines for strategic employment of antislavery in the global marketplace.

American Quaker John Woolman gave voice to free produce in the 1770s—declaring abstention to be an issue of individual conscience and purity—but it was a British women's campaign to abstain from sugar two decades later that provided the movement with significant traction. Historians estimate that several hundred thousand people participated in this domestic effort to eliminate British dependence on slave-produced sugar. Historian Clare Midgley asserts that "abstention was from the first seen as a way of moralising consumption, a *mark of virtue for abolitionists* who perceived themselves leaders of a moral crusade against the sin of slavery" [italics added].[7] Choosing to avoid sugar because it was stained with the blood of slaves provided abstainers with a sense of personal virtue. It cleansed the soul. Quaker Elias Hicks followed this lead in the United States and preached against both slavery and the consumption of slave-made goods. Elias Hicks' uncompromising essay *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and Their Descendants,* published in 1811, argued that the purchase of slave goods not only enriched slaveholders but also made consumers complicit in the sin of slavery. No one, he argued, could "plead the necessity" of indulging in the "luxuries raised by the labour of slaves."[8] Within a few decades of Elias Hicks' publication, Friends across the northern United States were actively supporting the free produce movement. This framework for action—beginning with individual purity and moving toward collective action—would remain in place throughout the movement's history.

British and American women became early free produce leaders because the movement was linked to both virtue and domesticity, two traits increasingly associated with femininity. American Quaker Alice Jackson Lewis offered a "forcible and impressive

7 Clare Midgley: Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism, and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture, in: Slavery and Abolition 17:3 (1997), p. 142.

8 Thomas E. Drake: Quakers and Slavery in America, Gloucester, 1965, pp. 115–116.

address"[9] in support of the movement at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends in the spring of 1806, while British Quaker Elizabeth Heyrick published several pamphlets discouraging women from using West Indian slave-produced sugar.[10] Indeed, Heyrick's persuasive publications helped to initiate a successful boycott of West Indian sugar among British women. African American women also joined the free produce effort, organising the Philadelphia Colored Female Free Produce Society.[11] One of the most influential free produce supporters in the United States was poet and writer Elizabeth Chandler.[12] Born in Philadelphia, Elizabeth Chandler moved to the frontier of Michigan in 1830 and devoted herself to abolition. She consistently employed domestic ideals to construct the free produce movement as a natural moral calling for women.

Free produce also attracted women because it was linked to the household. "Bringing moral pressure to bear on the public, in an area so closely concerning the household, was thought particularly suited to the growing network of ladies' antislavery societies,"[13] according to historians Louis and Rosamund Billington. Advocates pointed to women's ability to make purchasing choices within the home as the perfect avenue for helping to end slavery and, just as important, protecting the virtue of their families. Indeed, in abstaining from slave-produced goods women not only expressed their opposition to

9 Ruth Ketring Nuermberger: The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery, Durham 1942, p. 6.

10 Elizabeth Heyrick: Immediate Not Gradual Emancipation; or an Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest, and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery, London 1824; Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences of British Women, Leicester 1828; and Apology for Ladies' Anti-Slavery Associations, London 1828. See also Betty Fladeland: Men & Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation, Urbana 1972, pp. 178–183; Julie Holcomb: Cement of the Whole Antislavery Building: Women, Consumption, and Abolitionism in the Transatlantic World, unpublished paper; and Clare Midgley: Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870, London 1992, pp. 75–76.

11 Colored Females' Free Produce Society, in: Genius of Universal Emancipation, May 1831; and Colored Female Free Produce Society, in: Genius of Universal Emancipation, August 1831. See also Ruth Ketring Nuermberger: The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery, pp. 16–17, p. 19.

12 For more on the Green Plain group see: To the Editor, in: Genius of Universal Emancipation, January 1834. For more on Elizabeth Chandler, see Carlisle G. Davidson: A Profile of Hicksite Quakerism in Michigan: 1830–1860, in: Quaker History 59:2 (1970), pp. 106–112; and Merton L. Dillon: Elizabeth Chandler and the Spread of Antislavery Sentiment to Michigan, in: Michigan History 39 (1955), pp. 481–494; Benjamin Lundy: Poetical Works of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler with a Memoir of her Life and Character, Philadelphia 1836; and Marcia J. Heringa Mason (eds.): Remember the Distance that Divides Us: The Family Letters of Philadelphia Quaker Abolitionist and Michigan Pioneer Elizabeth Margaret Chandler: 1830–1842, East Lansing 2004.

13 Louis Billington/Rosamund Billington: A Burning Zeal for Righteousness: Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement: 1820–1860, in: Jane Rendall (eds.): Equal or Different: Women's Politics: 1800–1914, Oxford 1987, p. 87.

slavery, they instilled lessons of moral purity in their families. A free-produce shirt was an opportunity for conversation about the horrors of slavery; an unsweetened cup of tea might lead to a discussion about the cruel break-up of slave families. As the moral guardians of the domestic arena, women's advocacy of free produce resulted in the opportunity for consciousness-raising among daughters, sons, husbands, sisters, brothers, and parents.

Such consciousness-raising often took the form of asking free American women to *identify* with their slave sisters—"to place themselves in imagination in bondage"—and thus to experience the suffering of slave women.[14] Abolitionists pointed to the breakup of the family as a particularly heartbreaking aspect of slavery for women. Because "the system of American slavery is constantly separating wives from their husbands, daughters from their mothers, sisters from their brothers," according to a free produce group in 1843, "it is the duty of every female after remembering those in bonds as bound with them to be earnestly engaged in pleading their cause."[15] The group further asserted that the most appropriate and effective method for defending the honour of slave women was to refuse to purchase the goods that resulted from their labour.[16] To ignore slave women's pain and buy slave cotton or sugar was, they argued, to become complicit in the horror of slavery and the violation of womanhood. "We should let the memory of the sufferings endured by the victims of oppression be so interwoven with the lines of our lives," explained the Ohio Free Produce Association, "that we shall be disposed to embrace every suitable opportunity to speak and act for their good."[17] At a meeting of the Western Free Produce Association in 1846, members asserted: "It is our duty as antislavery men and women to abstain from the use of Slave labour produce as carefully as though our husbands, our wives, or our children were the victims of Slavery."[18]

After encouraging free women to identify with bondswomen, abolitionists then highlighted the physical agony endured in producing the goods consumed by careless northern Americans. "It is a solemn thought to reflect that we should be living at ease, clothing ourselves with fine apparel, and faring sumptuously every day," mourned the Ohio Free Produce Association, "when a considerable portion of those things which we are apparently so pleasantly and unconcernedly enjoying are the fruits of the uncompensated toil of the poor slave, existing in a state of physical suffering and privation not easily to

14 Address, Henry Female Anti-Slavery Society Records, 6 June 1841, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, IN.

15 Henry Female Anti-Slavery Society Records, 23 July 1843, Indiana State Library.

16 Ibid.

17 Annual Report, in: Non-Slaveholder, November 1853. This was the only Annual Report of the Ohio Free Produce Association written exclusively by women. See 11 June 1853, Ohio Free Produce Association Minutes, Indiana State Library.

18 Free Labor Convention, in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 7 November 1846.

be conceived."[19] In his memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* Solomon Northup describes slavery as a system that "fattens and feasts on human blood."[20] Free produce proponents also illuminated slave suffering by giving wounded life to the products of slavery.[21] The Union County women lamented that even one of their sister abolitionists "should so far consent to strike hands with the oppressor, as lightly to purchase the goods in whose texture are seen the visible traces of oppression, cruelty and blood."[22] This powerful image—evoking a handshake between a woman abolitionist and a slave-owner as she took her red-stained purchase—certainly produced just the feelings of horror and empathy that free produce advocates desired.

The physical aspects of slavery emphasised by abolitionists also included taste, touch, and even physical environment. Henry Highland Garnet, an African American abolitionist and former slave, travelled to Britain in the 1850s at the behest of Anna Richardson and the Newcastle Free Produce Association to lecture in support of their cause. Henry Highland Garnet focused especially on food consumption. He depicted food as a global weapon in the antislavery arsenal. A fluid product, food was bought, sold, and traded as a means of creating wealth, building power, and influencing politics. Nonetheless, Garnet often pointed out how ordinary housekeepers had control over food consumption, price, and distribution. "In making their purchases, [such women] may choose the free in preference to the slave—may prefer, for instance, the sugars and coffees of the British West Indies to those of Cuba or the Brazils, the rice of Patras or Java to that of Carolina, the cocoa of Trinidad or Grenada to that of Brazil."[23] Food, therefore, empowered women and allowed them to act on their moral impulses. Garnet worked diligently to promote the movement among women and succeeded in catalysing or sustaining dozens of female free produce groups across Britain.

This emphasis on food consumption linked nicely with Garnet's interest in issues related to the body. For him, the body was a site of antislavery activism. Food was a necessity of life—enslaved people better than anyone understood the centrality of food to existence. Slave-owners used food to punish, torture, tempt, reward, and influence. Enslaved people produced food even as they often experienced its absence. Food and the

19 Ohio Free Produce Association Minutes, 8 September 1852, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

20 As quoted in Carol Faulkner: The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery: 1820–1860, in: Journal of the Early Republic 27:3 (2007), pp. 377–405, p. 396.

21 Glickman discusses the tactic of free produce advocates using metonymy to link slave products with the suffering of slaves. See Lawrence Glickman: Buy for the Sake of the Slave: Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism, in: American Quarterly 56:4 (2004), pp. 889–912, p. 899.

22 The Union Co., in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 15 October 1846.

23 Home Intelligence: American Slavery: The Free-Labour Movement, in: Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1 October 1850.

free produce movement thus provided Garnet with a tool for advocating his multiple understandings of antislavery. Free produce was intimately linked to individual bodies. Rice and sugar provided sustenance and physical pleasure while cotton offered warmth and comfort. The movement drew attention to individual bodies in a way many reformers found deeply moving and personal.

Garnet often highlighted his "pure" African blood as a way to give life to free produce. His African heritage and his blackness offered a visible example of slavery. Here was a body that had been deprived of food, had dripped sweat over fields of cotton, and bled under the whip. The fact that he had lost a leg early in life made his physical presence more compelling. Garnet brought chains and whips to his lectures and displayed them to his audiences. Slaves, he averred, "are treated like beasts of burden […] they are constantly under the whip—even the women being flogged unmercifully." Garnet displayed a nine-foot long whip "which had been wet with the blood of the oppressed slave" and manacles for the "legs and necks."[24] He connected these global instruments of slavery to the food that people consumed.

> The sugar with which we sweetened our tea, and the rice which we ate, were actually spread with the sweat of the slaves, sprinkled with their tears, and fanned by their sights, whilst the brutal driver goaded them to desperation, until an early grave relieved them from their misery. Could we consent to give power to the arm that whirled the lash, and help to drive the iron into the soul of the poor bondsman?[25]

Standing before his audience, Garnet embodied the potential of free produce. If only British women would create a demand for free-labour goods, argued Garnet, the war would be won. "Let the ladies take it into their hands […] and all the great firms who supplied the country"[26] would follow their lead.

Free produce also offered a physical environment conducive to individual virtue. One's choices in food and clothing allowed one to *act morally* and thereby clear one's conscience of any connection to slavery. This included the physical world one inhabited. Thus, abolitionists sought to create spaces that invoked freedom, such as Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia. This building was fitted with furniture made by "free hands" and its outfitting became the very fabric of its politics and morality.[27] It should be no surprise,

24 Anti-Slavery Meeting at Sunderland, in: Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1 November 1850.
25 Free-Labour Movement, in: Anti-Slavery Reporter, January 1851.
26 Ibid.
27 Beverly C. Tomek: Pennsylvania Hall: A "Legal Lynching" in the Shadow of the Liberty Bell, Oxford 2013. Thanks to Randall C. Miller for his insightful analysis on this issue.

therefore, that opponents of freedom for slaves burned the building to the ground within a few days of its completion. Its existence symbolised the presence of abolition within the city.

Free produce advocates understood that arousing individual conscience was a critical first step in producing a full-fledged abolitionist. Once an individual felt *connected* to antislavery sentiment the next step was to become *engaged* in the movement. In other words, if a woman began making choices about her consumption based on a boycott of slave-made goods, she was more likely to be interested in joining an antislavery group. Increasingly knowledgeable about and horrified by the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of slavery, free produce supporters became motivated to participate in *collective action* in support of antislavery. For many, this meant engaging in an organised intervention in the moral economy. As Lawrence Glickman asserts, "Free Produce activists treated the market as a contested terrain, and an important arena of moral influence subject to their agency, rather than as an evil to be suffered, and, if possible, avoided."[28] A collective intrusion into the global marketplace could lead to widespread raised awareness about the sin of slavery. "If used properly," asserts Glickman, markets "could provide a powerful engine for moral change."[29] As individual acts became collective, they compelled and impelled people to act.

For those free produce advocates who moved beyond the individual choice of abstention—whose *connection* turned to *engagement*—the *business of free produce* offered countless opportunities to become active participants in the effort to enlarge the moral economy. "Free Produce was based on a new set of ideas about consumption," Glickman avers. "It was also a business. From harvesting raw materials, to producing, distributing, and marketing goods, free produce entrepreneurs sought to develop alternatives to an economy that, even in the Northern United States, was thoroughly intertwined with the system of slave labour."[30] Every stage of this complicated intervention in the economy presented an opportunity for *raising awareness* of the movement's reason-for-being: *opposition to slavery*. *Engagement* with free produce at any stage, therefore, inevitably involved increased promotion of abolition.

As Carol Faulkner points out in her work on Philadelphia women abolitionists, "Free produce enabled abolitionist women to engage in a wide array of business activities. Seeking to clothe their families in morally untainted fabric, Philadelphia women started one of the first free-produce societies."[31] They procured free cotton, contracted out the spinning, and manufactured it into a variety of products. Women also pressured local store-owners into

28 Lawrence Glickman: Buy for the Sake of the Slave: Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism, p. 893.

29 Ibid., p. 898.

30 Ibid., p. 890.

31 Carol Faulkner: The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery: 1820–1860, pp. 384–385.

giving preference to free produce goods. The Birmingham and West-Bromwich Ladies' Negro's Friend Society asked British grocers in the spring of 1849: "The Free-Man, or the slave; which shall supply your establishment?"[32] This business activity was empowering for women, because it allowed them to do something real and direct to protest a moral wrong and bring about a moral right. Moreover, as Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor shows in her work *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America*, women had long since interacted in commercial enterprises through entrepreneurial, service, and consumption activities.[33] Their free produce engagements reinforced what was already an expanding arena of female influence.

Free produce advocates devoted much time and effort to the challenge of finding reliable sources of untainted cotton for anxious and clamouring store-owners. For some advocates, this challenge became a life mission—but even this pragmatic activity offered countless opportunities for *raising antislavery awareness*. Anna Vaughan Kett's work on George Taylor, a Philadelphia-based Quaker who operated a busy free produce store, reveals that he constantly encountered frustrating problems with free cotton. In his letters to suppliers, according to Anna Vaughan Kett, "Taylor complained about poor quality, lack of choice, late shipments and the inability of manufacturers […] to fulfil his orders. All of these issues made stocking the store a frustrating business and they show that there was often not enough free-cotton fabric produced in England to satisfy demand."[34] As a result, he devoted his energy toward increasing supply, a practical way to ensure that his business succeeded and the movement grew. During each of his interactions with consumers, suppliers, and middlemen, Taylor and others highlighted the ever-pressing *moral* issue of slavery—making it the constant theme of his commercial interactions. When Josias Browne, "the leading Quaker free-cotton agent in Manchester,"[35] received complaints about the quality of his produce, "he wrote a pamphlet urging his customers to compromise on quality if necessary. He implored: 'A coarser dress honestly obtained, is better than a finer one wrung out of the blood and sinews of the Slave.'"[36]

In my own work on women abolitionists in the Old Northwest, I also found that the supply and distribution of free produce goods occupied much of the time and energy of its supporters. Free produce agents searched the South for non-slaveholding farmers who would provide them with cotton. The Philadelphia-based Female Society for the

32 Alice Taylor: Sewing Dissent: Domestic Practices, Global Economies, and 'Free Labour' Dress, unpublished paper.

33 Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor: The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America, Philadelphia 2009.

34 Anna Vaughan Kett: Cotton, Anti-Slavery, and Empire: Issues in the Atlantic Supply Chain for Free Labor Cotton in the 1850s, unpublished paper, presented at the British American Nineteenth Century History Annual Meeting, 2013.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

Encouragement of Free Labour proved unusually successful in this effort. They obtained several thousand pounds of free cotton from abolitionist Nathan Hunt, Jr., and had it manufactured into cloth. They broke even in supplying this "free" fabric to abolitionists even though consumers often complained of the rough quality of the cloth.[37] Small farmers in southern Illinois and southern Ohio grew cotton for home consumption and this provided a useful source of free-labour cotton.[38] Abolitionists also sought alternative sources of sweetener to replace slave-produced sugar. Even the most self-sacrificing abolitionists tended to disdain maple sugar and beet sugar, thus forcing agents to look to Puerto Rico, Mexico, Manila, and China for "free" sugar.[39] The difficulty in obtaining the product inevitably made it more expensive.

In addition to access, quality, and price, free produce consumers were concerned with the authenticity of the product. Such concern offered a chance to elucidate on the moral imperative of antislavery. "The incentive to pass off slave goods for free labour goods was strong,"[40] points out Alice Taylor. "The mark-up on free items was between ten and 25 per cent and as with organic merchandise today, there were significant numbers of retailers who offered a mixture of goods, free and non-free."[41] It was a challenge for abolitionists to ensure the "free" provenance of free produce goods. Just as today's consumer activists highlight the "clean supply chain" of free trade goods, so too did free produce advocates. In London, Quaker Bessie Inglis set up "free-labour depots" to guarantee the quality and genuineness of their goods.[42] "Antislavery publications […] warned their readers to 'use judicious caution' in determining where and from whom to purchase goods. Tracts and pamphlets advised women to […] be especially judicious when shopping for cotton goods."[43] As one such pamphlet warned: "No ladies should be allowed to be imposed upon by the offer of goods merely stamped, 'Free Grown.' This is Not Sufficient. The draper should shew the stamped certificate of the manufacturer, or Free Cotton Agent, with whom he deals."[44]

37 Ruth Ketring Nuermberger: The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery, p. 61.
38 Ibid.
39 Margaret Hope Bacon: By Moral Force Alone: The Antislavery Women and Nonresistance, in: The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 279.
40 Alice Taylor: Sewing Dissent: Domestic Practices, Global Economies, and 'Free Labour' Dress, unpublished paper, p. 3.
41 Ibid.
42 Louis Billington/Rosamund Billington: A Burning Zeal for Righteousness: Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement: 1820–1860, pp. 87–88; Clare Midgley: Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870, pp. 138–139.
43 Ibid.
44 Alice Taylor: Sewing Dissent: Domestic Practices, Global Economies, and 'Free Labour' Dress, unpublished paper, p. 7.

A key element of the discourse surrounding free produce was the idea of *sacrifice*—and this was used to pull women into the movement. Elizabeth Chandler modelled this type of argument in a series of fictional letters published in the *Liberator*. She accused "Isabel" of being a "willing partaker" in "all the luxuries" produced by slavery. Yes, Elizabeth Chandler admitted, it was "inconvenient" to forgo "poundcakes and ice cream," but antislavery demanded "a few sacrifices of inclination." When Isabel finally resolved to eschew slave goods Elizabeth Chandler congratulated her: "Your simple meal will be sweetened with the reflection that it is at least unpolluted."[45]

In Indiana, the Newport Female Anti-Slavery Society expressed no toleration for the excuses of those who purchased slave-made goods:

> Those abolitionists especially, who profess the doctrine of abstinence from the products of slave labour, and at the same time purchase such articles, without an absolute necessity to do so, or give them the preference on account of their superior quality, or because they please the fancy better, or are cheaper than similar articles of free labour produce, do in fact cast a stumbling black in the way of others, and bring reproach upon the truth.[46]

Indiana Quaker Rebecca Beeson took the idea of sacrifice quite seriously. In the summer of 1843, as her health was declining, she used the time among her friends and family before her demise to "bear a faithful testimony against slavery."[47] In control even during her final minutes on earth, Beeson "requested to be buried in free labour clothes" as she did not want anything about her "that was stained with the blood of her brother."[48] A zealous advocate of free produce, she used her death to draw attention to the economic war against slavery.[49] The all-female Annual Report committee of the Ohio Free Produce Association pleaded, "let us lay aside considerations of individual comforts and pleasures, when they interfere with our duty to our less favoured brethren and sisters, of whatever colour or name."[50]

45 Benjamin Lundy: Poetical Works of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler with a Memoir of her Life and Character, pp. 53–57.

46 Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 9 November 1841.

47 Encouraging, in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 18 August 1843. There is one other reference to an abolitionist woman in Indiana requesting to be buried in free produce clothes. Rachel Williams made this appeal before she died in 1849. See Marion Miller, The Antislavery Movement in Indiana, Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 1938, ch. 3.

48 Encouraging, in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 18 August 1843.

49 Ibid.

50 Annual Report, in: Non-Slaveholder, November 1853. For the membership of the committee that wrote the Annual Report see 11 June 1853, Ohio Free Produce Association Minutes.

One manifestation of sacrifice for free produce advocates was home manufacture. The free labour Quakers of Marion County, Ohio, called on abolitionists "to manufacture their own clothing" and thus reject the "deplorable system of oppression."[51] Rural women in the antebellum period were quite adept at making their clothing and so this kind of sacrifice seemed natural and comfortable to women living in bucolic Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan.

Free produce advocates also compared the austere lifestyle and virtuous sacrifice of abolitionists to what they imagined to be the luxury-loving plantation mistresses who wore silk gowns and ate sumptuous meals even as they whipped their slaves for the slightest infractions. In calling on women to shun basic comforts, abolitionists pointed to their superior femininity. "Fancy" goods signified selfish indulgence—the antithesis of "true womanhood"—and so abolitionists encouraged each other to take a simple approach to everything from dress to food. To those who grumbled about the high price and rough quality of free labour goods, the Indiana women responded by asking them to adopt a "more self sacrificing spirit."[52] They also reminded one another that no matter what sacrifice had to be made for free produce, their lives were superior to even the best-treated slaves. "Our fellow men and women might abstain [from slave-labour products] and still retain a thousand fold the pleasures and enjoyment of life, of which the slave is deprived."[53] No free produce shirt or cake, no matter how scratchy or tasteless, could compare to the threadbare clothes and meagre food that typically sustained southern slaves.

As individual converts to free produce came together to challenge the dominance of slave goods they developed "extensive commercial relationships […] between free produce associations, cotton growers, textile manufacturers, shopkeepers, consumers" and quality-control experts."[54] These relationships converged into a transatlantic network that relied on the complex geography of abolition to create a foundation for raising antislavery awareness on both sides of the ocean. Historians have long since understood that both slavery and antislavery were part of a complicated web of global networks. Abolitionists employed maps, travel accounts, international commercial records, and travel itself to situate and advertise their movement. Antislavery was geographically fluid: information, people, texts, commerce, goods, money, all flowed across the Atlantic and back again.

Free Produce organisations utilised this complex global network to raise awareness and promote abolition. Henry Highland Garnet became a part of this transatlantic flow during his 1850s travel to Britain. Every aspect of his trip became a marketing opportunity for free produce advocates, including his expedition across the ocean. According to Samuel

51 The Marion County Free Labor Convention, in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 5 November 1842.

52 At a Meeting, in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 10 December 1842.

53 Free Labor Anniversary, in: Free Labor Advocate & Anti-Slavery Chronicle, 25 August 1843.

54 Alice Taylor: Sewing Dissent: Domestic Practices, Global Economies, and 'Free Labour' Dress, unpublished paper, p. 2.

Ward, editor of the antislavery newspaper *Impartial Citizen*, Garnet had requested a "second cabin" on the steamer at a rate of $70 but "'lest there should be trouble;' was compelled to take a state room, at a cost of 120 dollars."[55] While racial discrimination on public transportation in the United States was common, Ward carefully distinguished this case due to its *British* connections. The steamer was *not*, as one might assume, a southern-owned vessel but, in fact, it was British and "under the command of Englishmen."[56] Ward's editorial offered a poignant reminder that slavery included a multifarious web of relationships that touched people, products, relationships, and policies despite their apparent distance from the institution itself. In highlighting British connections to slavery, Free Produce supporters hoped to motivate collective outrage and action.

Once Garnet arrived in England, he joined his friend and abolitionist colleague James Pennington. The two immediately proceeded to the Peace Convention in Frankfurt, Germany, as representatives "of the collared race," according to Ward.[57] They found ample opportunity to awaken the antislavery impulse in their audiences by highlighting free produce.[58] The Germans requested that Pennington and Garnet hold a meeting to discuss their experiences with slavery and their escape from the notorious institution. The two abolitionists took advantage of the heightened interest in their cause and held two meetings that attracted hundreds of curious and eager Germans. "It was a novel thing for a German assembly to listen to statements respecting slavery from persons who had themselves been slaves," explained Ward in his editorial on the meeting.[59] American fugitives who had travelled across the Atlantic embodied slavery for German audiences. Wasting no time in promoting free produce, Garnet schooled Germans in the basics of the economic boycott of slave goods. So compelling was his argument and his presence that two German women literally sprang out of their seats and publicly pledged to eschew all goods produced by slave labour.

Garnet and Pennington returned to England following their German adventure and both threw themselves into the powerful, sometimes chaotic whirlpool of abolitionism in Britain. Using the home of free produce enthusiasts Mary and Henry Richardson in Newcastle as his base, Garnet commenced a lecturing tour that was remarkable for its breadth and depth, even comparing him to other American abolitionists who travelled in Britain. His travels were emblematic of the geographically complexity and fluidity of antislavery—he was an American ex-slave who boasted of his African blood offering lectures to German, Irish, English, and Scottish audiences.

55 Henry Highland Garnet, in: Impartial Citizen, 12 October 1850
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Letter to Gerrit Smith, Esq., From H. H. Garnet, in: Impartial Citizen, 20 October 1850.
59 Henry Highland Garnet, in: Impartial Citizen, 12 October 1850.

Garnet's lectures called for international collective action against slavery in the form of free produce. He emphasised the importance of emigrating British citizens in the success of the movement. In his lectures to Irish audiences, for example, he called on the steady stream of Irish immigrants to the United States to become outspoken supporters of free produce. As the British antislavery newspaper *The Slave* asserted, "There are, at the present time, *three million* of native born Irishmen in [the United States]; and the number is daily augmenting. Hence, very important it is that the spirit of freedom should be carried with them to the New World."[60] This was especially true, continued the editorial, because "'the Irish in America are the worse enemies to emancipation.'"[61] While Irish immigrants were perceived as anti-abolitionist, German immigrants received a more favourable depiction in the antislavery press. In one discussion of Garnet's trip to Frankfort a British paper explained,

> It should be mentioned, to the honour of the German people, that the emigrants who leave that country for the United States have kept themselves free from the vice by which so many of our own people have been contaminated. The German settlers in the United States have acted as if they believed that all men were of one family. They have not treated the coloured man as if he were a being of an inferior race. They have received him into their log-houses, as if he were a man and a brother. When fugitive slaves have been on their flight northward to the land of liberty, they have uniformly found the German kindness and true humanity in the German mind, which spurns from it the odious idea of trading in human flesh and blood, and getting wealth by those means which are resorted to by settlers from our own country.[62]

The free produce movement offered a transatlantic method for inspiring abolitionists toward collective action. By the time Garnet became a spokesperson for the free produce movement in the early 1850s, it was disdained by some leading American abolitionists, including and especially William Lloyd Garrison, who considered it a waste of precious antislavery resources and effective only in causing unnecessary guilt. In Britain, however, free produce experienced resurgence in the 1850s thanks to the tireless efforts of the Richardsons and Garnet. That energy flowed back across the Atlantic in the form of literature, lecturers like Garnet, commercial enterprises, goods, and even immigrants.

Free produce is unique as an abolitionist method because it is multi-layered—offering advocates various entry points for involvement—ranging from changes in individual behaviour to collective organising and large-scale economic interventions. Advocates often experienced an awakening that involved a moral inventory of sorts—an *internal*

60 Henry Highland Garnet: Labours in Ireland, in: The Slave, October 1851.
61 Ibid.
62 Anti-Slavery Meeting at Frankfort on the Maine, in: Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1 October 1850.

exploration of one's values and beliefs. For many, this awakening caused a significant change in *everyday behaviour*. Consumption and purchasing habits were explored and adjusted. Such adjustments presented opportunities to express one's personal opposition to the sin of slaveholding. It was a way to purify one's soul. Eliminate guilt. Feel good about one's self.

But free produce for many was not just an issue of individual conscience-wrestling and changed behaviour. It became an opportunity to engage in collective action—small or large—to raise awareness and further challenge slavery. Every intimate tea party with friends and neighbours was an opportunity to discuss sugar and promote the movement. Wearing free produce clothing could inspire a conversation about slave labour, "King Cotton", and the local free produce store. An author or poet might incorporate free produce into her writings. A lawyer might take on a fugitive slave case. An entrepreneur might look for an opportunity to buy and sell free cotton. A grocer might change his stock. And all of these advocates might join a free produce organisation—organising collectively to make free produce available to a wider audience and raise awareness at a broader level. This is where the strength and meaning of free produce lay, and where we as historians might focus our attention as we continue to gauge the movement's larger impact on the rise of 1850s antislavery sentiment and the coming of the Civil War.

Moreover, this emphasis provides modern-day abolitionists with tools for understanding the role and purpose of free produce today. A blended approach that incorporates the personal—such as consciousness raising, individual and family purchasing habits, or free-produce style displays—with the collective—such as creating or joining a free produce organisation, initiating organised political action designed to affect policy change, creating a free produce business, or participating in a commercial enterprise designed to promote clean supply chains—offers the greatest potential for raised awareness and further movement success. The styles of free produce are not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, interdependent and should be developed cooperatively and collaboratively.

The moral economy of the twenty-first century offers social justice scholars a path to combine lessons of the past with activism today. Countless organisations, businesses, and non-profits are eager to continue the work of our predecessors. For those of us in the classroom, this path is especially clear. As we teach about the history of slavery and antislavery, raising awareness and understanding about past injustices, we must remind our students that injustice continues. The classroom is an appropriate location for ethical education linked to historical scholarship. Most universities and colleges seek to develop in their student enlightened, principled global citizenry. The very roots of our education system harken back to a call for the public good. As historians, we can highlight the relationship between learning from the past and taking action toward a more just and egalitarian future.

While we must be cautious about *simplistic uses of history* for understanding contemporary problems, we nonetheless must participate in policy debates with smart, evidence-driven, and thoughtful comparisons. Free produce is just one example.

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