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The Gentlemen Slavers: Status, Structure and Social Movements for the Conduct of Dirty Business

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Abstract

We consider the influences on entering into "dirty business" by which we mean economic activity that violates cultural values. We consider individual disposition to violate norms as a function of status, social contagion in a network, where status determines influence, and the role of a social movement to ignite attention to the norms and their violation. We analyze who entered the Liverpool slave trade. We find that high status Gentlemen were more likely to do so, and that they were highly influential on the behavior of their network partners. The abolition movement affected an increase in the magnitude of social influence, and shifted the balance of influence in favor of non-slavers.

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Alternative worlds lie in the chasm between what is allowed and what is admired. In this paper we ask “who engages in dirty business?” By dirty business, we mean economic activities that are not effectively prohibited by legal authority, but are nevertheless counter to operative social values. Cultures and economies may turn on whether capable and influential people take up activities such as selling life insurance, performing abortions, or marketing complex financial products to people who don’t understand them. We examine what is arguably the most enduring instance of dirty business for Western society, the transatlantic slave trade. Specifically, we examine who, among investors in shipping ventures in eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Liverpool, participated in slaving voyages.

Engagements in dirty business represent a breakdown in the chain between cultural values and individual behavior, so it makes sense to structure our inquiry around the links in that chain. At the top are the cultural values themselves, at the bottom is the individual, and in between is the network that connects individuals and transmits culture. Most sociologists will think of the actor’s local network when confronting the question of why some engage in dirty business. The idea that some actors are embedded in networks with norms that diverge from broader cultural values was our first instinct too, and it turns out to be true in the Liverpool slave trade. Reference to divergent local networks, however, is not a fully satisfying explanation for dirty business, nor for the slave trade. It remains to be explained why dirty business takes root at the local level in the first place, and how these local networks interact with the broader society. We aim to make a theoretical contribution by examining those questions.

We explain who takes up dirty business with reference to the differential application of the social sanctions associated with counter-normative behavior. We consider the role of status for normative compliance. In The Human Group, Homans (1950) argued that norms have lesser grip on those with high status, because their positions in the hierarchy are sticky, and robust even in the face of normative violations. Zuckerman and Phillips (2001) usefully extend that position, and integrate much related evidence, to argue for middle-status conformity, that normative freedom applies to those at the top and bottom of the status hierarchy (neither have much to lose) while those in the middle are most likely to obey norms. The normative freedom of those at the top of the status hierarchy is particularly relevant for the seeding of dirty-business practices in a local network, because they are more contagious in terms of influence on network partners. We therefore see a process where high-status individuals adopt dirty-business practices because they are less subject to the social sanctions attached to those practices, and infect their network partners with those practices. These are the Gentlemen slavers of our title.

If the status-contagion argument explains where and how dirty business takes root, the question of where it stops remains. Sometimes, of course, it doesn't, and norms as to what economic activities are acceptable change. But in other instances, the broader society strikes back, with a social movement that aims to raise the cost of dirty business. That is what happened in the British slave trade, and it presents an opportunity to examine just how the macro-effort at social change affected individual behavior. Again, the action occurs at the relational level, as individuals on both sides of the norm fight to influence their peers. The effort of the social movement does affect this process as we see evidence that the social pressure brought to bear by both the pro- and anti-slave trade camps increases during the peak abolition years. The contentious public discourse that surrounds the British slave trade in those years provides the material for more potent social influence processes.

Overall, our approach is to refine understanding of the role of networks in the exercise of culture by considering both micro and macro moderators. On the micro side, we consider the role of individual attributes of status for network theories that have tended to focus on the links that structure influence in networks at the cost of attending to the status of the nodes. In other words, we "bring the individual back in" to structural accounts of social influence. Of course, status is endemic in network analyses, but it is typically status derived from the network itself

(e.g., centrality), and thus itself a structural product. Status as an individual attribute would appear to have particular relevance for explaining change in social systems, whereas status as an endogenous product of the network would tend to reinforce extant system characteristics (e.g., the Matthew Effect). Our research design allows us to examine both forms of status, and we document the relevance of status as an individual attribute even after controlling for centrality-based status (which itself operates in our context as network theorists would expect).

The macro moderator on network influence is the social movement. In effect, our study represents an integration of the structural and cultural modes of diffusion identified by Strang and Soule (1998). The operation of the network of Liverpool traders changes when the abolition movement heats up. Both slavers and non-slavers become more influential on their network partners. We attribute this to the effect of the abolition movement to “change the conversation” about slaving that takes place in networks, both by encouraging the creation and circulation of more and better arguments both for and against, but also by increasing the intensity of the contention by raising the moral stakes. This represents evidence of a new form of outcome measure for a social movement literature that has tended to identify impact as changes in state policy, or more recently, changes in organizations. Our analysis indicates that beyond these influences on formal institutions social movements also impact the culture by affecting contention at the relational level, when one contact tries to convince another what behavior is right.

An Analytic Narrative Approach

We explore the determinants of participation in the dirty business of the Liverpool slave trade among 7534 investors in overseas ventures in Liverpool between 1730 and abolition in 1807. Thirty percent of these invested in a slave voyage at some point in their careers. In most of what follows the specific empirical question is: What is the likelihood that the next voyage invested in will be a slave voyage, for investors who have not yet participated in slaving. This might be thought of as the “transition to slaving.”

Our presentation will be in the form of an analytic narrative (Bates et al., 1998; Alexandrova, 2009). An analytic narrative is an approach to research that draws simultaneously on analytical tools and on the narrative form that is commonly employed in history. We have placed the detailed description of our quantitative data, methods and results in the Appendix to

this paper. Here in the body, we'll iterate between theory, history, and the statistical results, as we consider individual, network, and cultural influences on the transition to the slave trade. Compared to the more typical sociological approach that presents theory, (sometimes) a case history, and statistics serially, our iterative approach is intended to be self-disciplining. By bringing these pieces closer together, it is easier to ensure that the analysis serves theory, while at the same time doing justice to seemingly peripheral details of history that do not fit the basic theory, rather than dismissing them as “outliers.” Related, the use of historical narrative forces us to confront the interdependencies between the causal forces at work in Liverpool slaving while an approach that privileged a statistical analysis might foster an illusion of independence of effects (Gaddis, 2002).

Liverpool and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Figure 0 shows the number of transatlantic slaving voyages throughout history from the most common ports of departure. Of the 28,443 voyages with known ports of departure, more originated in Liverpool than in any other place (4,974, or 17.5% of the total). In the years where Liverpool was most active in the slave trade, from about 1750 to the abolition of the British trade in 1807, it clearly dominates all other ports. Between 1791 and 1806, its “market share” measured in terms of percentage of the world’s slaving voyages never falls below 30%, and goes as high as 63% in 1798. Liverpool was well deserving of its sobriquets ‘slave trading capital of the world’ and ‘the metropolis of slavery.’

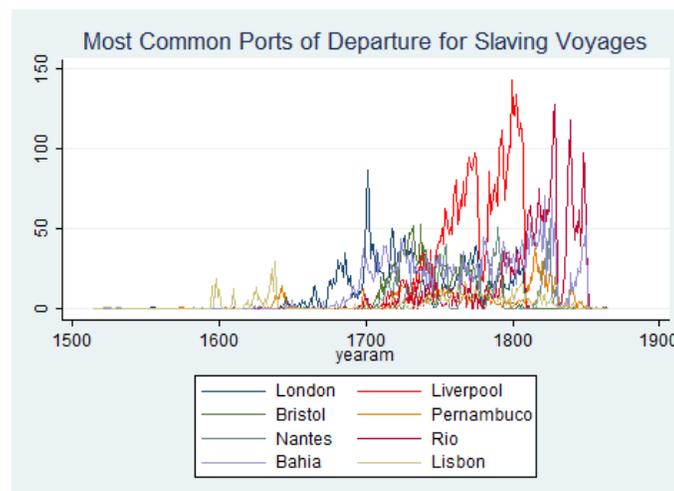


Figure 0, Slave Voyages from Leading Ports

London was initially the leading British slaving port owing to a monopoly granted to the Royal Africa Company that lasted until 1712. Thereafter, Bristol and London vied for leadership in the global industry, until Liverpool took over first place in 1744 and held that position until abolition. Liverpool's dominance of the trade was a function of three factors. First, it was a first-mover in building wet docks, building the first in Great Britain in 1715, and adding more throughout the eighteenth century. Power (1997) attributes this initiative to a town council dominated by the interests of overseas traders, noting that Liverpool experienced a "commercial *coup d'etat* (p. 311)" around the turn of the eighteenth century. Besides facilitating overseas trade, the docks also made Liverpool a shipbuilding center. Vessels used in the British slave trade were built in more than 100 places, but they were much more likely to originate from Liverpool than anywhere else. 42% of Liverpool slaving voyages were on locally built ships, while the comparable proportion of local supply for Bristol and London was 17% and 10%.

The second Liverpool advantage was its location. Liverpool ships could sail north around Ireland, avoiding privateers during the many 18th-century wars, while ships from Bristol and London were more vulnerable. Liverpool slave traders also benefitted from proximity to the Isle of Man, a tax haven until 1765, allowing Liverpool traders to avoid duties on foreign goods used to barter for slaves in West Africa. Related, Liverpool benefitted from the burgeoning textile industries in, and improved transportation linkages to, nearby Manchester. Textiles were the most common commodity in barter for slaves, typically making up about half of traded value. Other goods exported to Africa such as hardware and gunpowder were also made around Liverpool.

The third Liverpool advantage was human capital. We have already noted the dominance of merchants over Liverpool's politics. There was a similar commercial dominance over its culture. But this commercial focus, combined with the opportunities and risks of overseas trade, produced improvisers and innovators. In many ways, Liverpool simply did the slave trade better. They implemented effective organizational governance mechanisms and trade remittance mechanisms for their far-flung enterprise, more so than slave traders from London and Bristol (Silverman and Ingram, 2012; Morgan, 2007). They developed close relationships with the African traders that supplied them with slaves, allowing them to rely on trust to smooth exchange (Behrendt et al., 2010). They exploited market power in acquiring and selling slaves, and were

first-movers into new slave markets (Morgan, 2007). Liverpool also enjoyed a greater supply of capable ships' officers, which enabled them to operate in places such as the Bight of Biafra that did not have European resident agents, and therefore required that trade be conducted directly between ships' officers and African merchants (Behrendt, 2007).

Overseas traders in Liverpool could invest in the slave trade or the more common direct trade. Direct trade involved taking immigrants and manufactured goods to the Americas and returning with agricultural staples. Slave trade involved taking manufactured goods to the West Coast of Africa, trading them with African traders or less typically European factors for slaves (and perhaps ivory), sailing to the Americas, selling the slaves and, if time permitted, acquiring a cargo of agricultural staples for the return trip. Liverpool traders acquired slaves in many places in West Africa, but the Bight of Biafra, was their favored site. Similarly, they sold slaves all over the Americas, but Jamaica and Barbados were the most common destinations. As Table 1 indicates, the slave trade represented more risk, more potential reward, and greater financial outlay than the direct trade.

Table 1
Comparison of Direct Trade and Slave Trade, 1730-1807

	Voyages in our Data	Ships Sunk, Seized or Condemned	Average Number of Owners	Estimate of Voyage Expenses, not including ship	Estimate of Gross Profit of Successful Voyage
Direct Trade	14211	8.1%	3.19	£1,550-£2,000	£750-£1,000
Slave Trade	3034	18.8%	4.07	£3,850-£5,500	£3,000-£4,000

Estimates from our data (columns 1-3) and Silverman and Ingram, 2012 (columns 4-5)

Was the Slave Trade Really Counter to British Values?

One might ask whether slavery was in fact “dirty business” in Britain during this period, given the economic importance of the slave trade to the metropole and her Caribbean colonies, the fact that the trade was carried out legally by British traders for more than two centuries, and the lack of an active British abolition movement until late eighteenth century. The answer is “yes.” The

first chapter of Moral Capital, Chris Brown's history of the cultural antecedents of British abolitionism, is titled "Antislavery without Abolitionism." In it he argues that the slave trade represented a divergence between economic practice and normative values, and that there was a social cost to this: "Slave traders in Britain encountered public disapproval early in the eighteenth century, decades before the emergence of those cultural movements [abolition] often credited for engendering antislavery sentiment (2006: 37)." A key claim is that antislavery sentiment did not emerge simultaneously with the abolition movement, but was instead widespread throughout the period we study. As Davis explains, "climates of opinion do not give virgin birth to social movements (215)."

In Capitalism and Antislavery, Seymour Drescher documents the low cultural standing of the slave trade: the "tension between economic utility and social distaste was present early in the development of the British slave colonies. Such attitudes appeared far too soon to attribute the phenomenon to the enlightenment. The condemnation of the slave trade as un-Christian and inhuman was distilled even into mid-eighteenth century children's literature (1986:18)." He notes that slave vessels never landed in Britain, and that metropolitans exposed to slavery in the Caribbean expressed culture shock.

The view from history is of two solitudes, a muffled tension between a British culture that celebrated liberty operating adjacent to a colonial economic system that relied on slavery. As Emma Rothschild concludes in her cultural history of the Johnstones, an eighteenth century Scottish family that participated in the slave economy (one of them was son-in-law to a Liverpool slave trader) while sometimes championing the values of abolition, "[t]he forty years ...from the new settlements of 1763 to the abolition of the slave trade (in British ships) in 1806, were a time of humanitarian sentiment as in the abolitionist associations...and at the same time, of consolidation and expansion in the Atlantic slave economy (p. 162)." These separate moral worlds could coexist because slavery occurred far away from Britain. While its perpetrators were not lauded at home, neither was it necessary to constantly confront their offense to British values. Slavery violated those values, but distance from slave colonies made it possible to avoid the conversation, at least until the late eighteenth century. The Liverpool traders, however, represented an exception to this normative suspension. They were literally the brokers between the metropole and the slave economy, the only residents of Britain actively involved in slavery.

Slave traders were the bridge between those separate worlds, and therefore the focus of the energy produced by their normative tension: “Anti-slavery sentiment did circulate in the early eighteenth century...[but] critics tended to judge American slaveholders and Atlantic slave traders rather than British institutions and British policies (Brown, 2006: 36).” This brings us to our puzzle: why did the Liverpool slave traders engage in a dirty business despite exposure to the anti-slaving values of British culture?

Status and Entry to the Slave Trade

Given that the slave trade was legal, any sanctions incurred for violating cultural expectations would be social. Slave trading, like all dirty business, is in the realm of normative control. And although there was no active contention over the trade until late eighteenth century, Liverpool traders did suffer social sanctions: “The moral censure of ‘Liverpool Men’ by evangelicals and Dissenters shaped subsequent perceptions of the town’s eighteenth century merchants as brutal and boorish (Longmore, 2007: 227).” Hostility was visited at an interpersonal level, as in the case of the London correspondent of a Liverpool slave trade supporter, who addressed him as ‘Liverpool man’, as distinct from the Londoner who claimed the label ‘humanity man’ (Wilson, 1998). In an often-repeated story, a famous visiting actor, performing a drunken Richard III, responded to the complaints of his Liverpool audience with a speech that is a model of norm-based scolding:

“What! You hiss me? Hiss George Frederick Cooke? You contemptible money-getters! I banish you! There is not a brick in your damn town but what has been cemented by the blood of a negro! (Broadbent, 1908, 120-121).”

In the face of such stigma, the necessary question to explain the initiation of the slave trade is: “are some individuals are less affected by norms than others?” Various arguments in social psychology and sociology point to status as a moderator of normative control. Phillips and Zuckerman (2001) integrate those arguments and evidence to offer a theory of middle-status conformity. Norms grip most tightly for those in the middle of a status hierarchy. Those at the top and bottom of the hierarchy have more freedom from the norm and are more likely to engage in anti-normative behavior. The key mechanism is security of status. Phillips and Zuckerman describe a status system that is quite sticky for those who are clearly insiders, or outsiders. Since those at the top are safe in their status, they feel autonomy from norms. Since those at the

bottom don't perceive much chance of climbing in the status hierarchy, they too feel autonomy. Those in the middle, however, feel the potential to climb and the risk of falling, and they therefore attend most carefully to normative expectations.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Liverpool's elite citizens were associated with the slave trade. We traced the 41 members of Liverpool's Common Council in 1752 to our data, and identified 24 slaving investors. Only four members were involved in non-slaving overseas trade, so participation in slavery was much more likely among the traders on the Council than in Liverpool overall. However, the political (and probably economic) status represented by sitting on the town council is not what Phillips and Zuckerman rely on to predict middle-status conformity. They are careful to explain that the theory applies when status indicates "the amount of honor or esteem accorded to a person (386)," not power, ability or resources.

To capture the "honor or esteem" accorded to overseas traders, we rely on legal status, particularly the designation of Gentleman. An authoritative contemporaneous account of English law identifies Gentlemen as those who "studieth the laws of the realm, who studieth in the universities, who professeth liberal sciences, and (to be short) who can live idly, and without manual labour, and will bear the port, charge, and countenance of a Gentleman..." (Blackstone, 1765, Book 1: 394). Gentleman was not the top social rank in Britain. The order of ranks were nobility, titles of dignity (Knights; Baronets), titles of worship (Esquires; Gentlemen), Yeomen or Freemen (commoners with enough capital to qualify to vote in elections); and all others. However, there were no nobles or titles of dignity among the investors in overseas trade in Liverpool. Among 200 leading Liverpool slave traders that appear in the index of wills in Pope (2007) four died with titles of dignity, but all of these were obtained after entry to the slave trade.

By statute, individuals were required to identify by rank in legal proceedings and other actions, so these categories were not superfluous. However, unlike the other ranks, there was in practice no explicit regulation over claims of the title Esquire or Gentleman. This creates a question as to whether those titles actually indicate differential status in our data. The evidence suggests there were some barriers to claiming these titles, as they were relatively rare: among the almost 8000 traders we study, there were only 129 Gentlemen and 88 Esquires. There are a number of reasons to believe that the Esquire title was the more likely to be claimed by pretenders. First, it proliferated in the mid-to-late eighteenth century (Leneman, 2000). In wills

and death notices, more than 30% of leading Liverpool slavers were titled Esquire, while less than 10% were titled Gentleman (Pope, 2007). Further, “Esquire” and “Merchant” were regularly combined in occupational listings for our traders, whereas “Gentleman” and “Merchant” were combined only once. Based on these and other facts, we concluded that “Esquire” was often claimed by successful merchants in a way that “Gentleman” was not. We therefore combine Esquires with Merchants in our data and view this category to be second in rank behind Gentlemen.

Figure 1 shows the base-rate of transition to slavery for the status types of Gentleman, Merchants, and Others. Merchants and Others were all freemen. Others performed some designated profession or occupation (e.g., brewers, glaziers). Merchants lived off their capital through importing and exporting, and we therefore categorized them as closer to the “idle” Gentlemen. The effect sizes represent the likelihood of an overseas trader who has not yet invested in slavery taking a stake in a slave voyage. Other is the comparison category. Merchants were 20% more likely than Others to enter the slave trade, and Gentlemen 65% more likely. Traders with higher status were indeed more likely to flout the norms against slave-trade participation.



Figure 1 (Coefficients from Model 1)

Figure 1 indicates that slave trading increased monotonically with status of the trader, which does not on the surface appear consistent with the prediction that the greatest conformity will be at middle-status levels. It is important to remember, however, that our data represent a truncation of the status hierarchy. All overseas traders, even those with the rank of Other, were relatively wealthy. For example, in 1800, when Liverpool had 80,000 residents, our data identify 748 Liverpool traders. These were not necessarily the 748 wealthiest in the town, but they were among the roughly 12% of Liverpool residents that appeared in Gore's directory of "principal residents." The vast majority of residents could not have invested in overseas trade. This was certainly true for the lowest rungs of the status hierarchy, the group that would, according to the middle-status conformity prediction, be expected to join the high-status Gentleman in the slave trade. The fact that the lowest of the low could not invest in the slave trade did not stop them from participating in other ways, particularly as crew. Consider this account of a Liverpool slave ship captain:

"With respect to the mortality amongst the crews of African ships, it must be taken into account that many of the individuals composing them were the very dregs of the community. Some of them had escaped from jails, others were undiscovered offenders, who sought to withdraw themselves from their country, lest they should fall into the hands of the officers of justice. These wretched beings used to flock to Liverpool (Williams, 1897: 688)."

Phillips and Zuckerman (2001) suggested that the anti-normative behavior of those of high- and low-status could take different forms. With Gentleman being most likely among overseas traders to invest in slaving, and the "dregs of the community" carrying out the dirty business as crew, the result is indeed middle-status conformity.

One appeal of the Gentleman category as a status indicator is that it is independent of trading, or indeed, any economic activity. By decoupling conduct and status, a cleaner view of the liberating potential of high status becomes possible. We do have access to another measure of status among Liverpool traders. A trader's status in the inter-trader network created by co-investments does not have the advantage of being completely separate from slaving, but it nevertheless represents a form of "honor or esteem" in the sense of indicating that a trader is an attractive partner. Furthermore, the Matthew Effect creates stickiness in this hierarchy, such that highly central traders may feel safe in their network status, while low centrality traders may feel sufficiently peripheral as to be emboldened to flaunt the broader social norm against slaving. As

Figure 2 shows, the likelihood of engaging in slaving is highest for those at the high and low end of the network status hierarchy. Conformity to the anti-slaving norm is highest at middle status.

Transition To Slavery as a Function of Status in the Trading Network

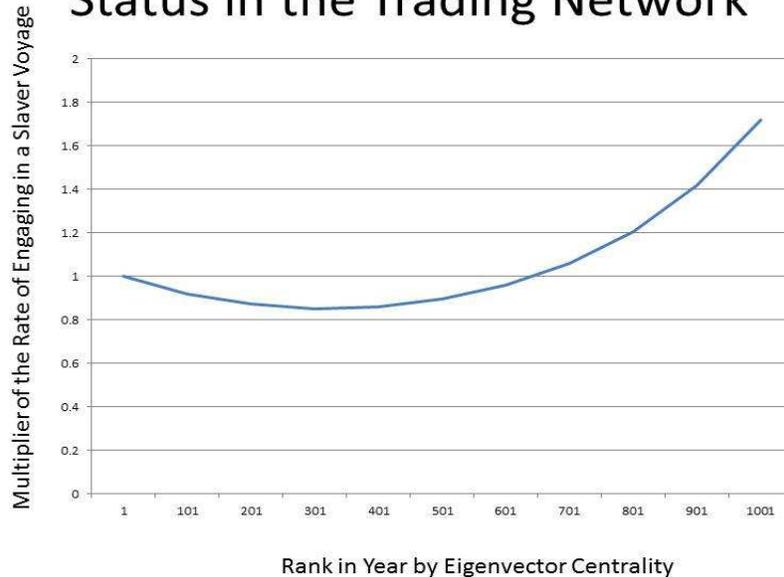


Figure 2 (Coefficients from Model 1)

Finally on trader status, we examine one of Phillips and Zuckerman's (2001) key caveats, that the middle-status conformity prediction holds only when status does not equal power, ability, or resources. Network centrality in particular is a function of previous voyage-investments, and might therefore be expected to correlate with ability and wealth. However, our models include a direct measure of previous non-slaving voyages, an appropriate control for both trader experience and wealth through trading investments. Not surprisingly, this variable is highly correlated with network status (.54). Interestingly, it is negatively associated with the likelihood of participating in a slave voyage (model 1, Appendix). Furthermore, model 1 includes another variable that proxies material resources, the percentage of an investor's previous ships that have been lost (sunk, seized or condemned). That variable has a positive relationship to the likelihood of entering the slave trade. This, combined with the effect of non-slaving experience, suggests that it is not the case that those made wealthy in the non-slave trade

went into the slave trade. Instead, the results suggest that engaging in slave trade was more an act of desperation of traders who had not experienced success in the non-slave trade.

Despite the assurance provided by these control variables, it is possible that the Gentleman category might represent material endowments that facilitated entry into the expensive slave trade. We consulted the data on value of personal estates of leading Liverpool slave traders presented in Pope (2007). Gentlemen in that list left estates with an average value of £5707. Merchants and Esquires left estates averaging £17544; Others left estates averaging £9303. Of course, Pope's list is a sample of leading slavers, not a census, and the figures represent wealth upon death, not at the time of entering the slave trade. Nevertheless, it is consistent with the fact that there is nothing in the legal definition of Gentleman that necessitates wealth, particularly relative to the active merchant class.

To further assess whether Gentlemen brought non-status advantages to the conduct of slave trade, we analyzed the performance of slave-trading Gentlemen. (Appendix, section titled "Did Gentlemen Slavers Perform or Invest Differently?" results summarized in Table A2.) The analysis indicates that slaving investments by Gentlemen were no more or less likely than investments by non-Gentlemen to sink, experience crew deaths, or yield fewer-than-expected slaves. There is a weak indication ships Gentlemen invested in were less likely to be captured, but this may represent a risk trade-off rather than performance advantage. Gentlemen's voyages were shorter than others, because they went to different ports in Africa and the Americas. Again, this could represent a trade-off, and does not necessarily indicate greater profits. Gentlemen invested in smaller ships, but ranked higher on the lists of owners. They were no more likely to invest in particularly risky voyages. In all, the analysis yielded an intriguing result on the duration of Gentlemen's voyages, but no clear evidence that they performed better, invested more, or took more risks than others.

The evidence on wealth, investments and voyage performance offers nothing to refute our conclusion that Gentleman entered the slave trade because their social status gave them autonomy from normative constraint. Overall, Liverpool slavers appear to have followed the middle-status conformity pattern. Gentleman of high legal rank invested, while the "dregs of the community" participated as crew. Among all overseas traders in Liverpool, those with high or low status in the trading network were more likely to enter the slave trade. In the next section,

we build on this individual analysis of status by considering who is more influential for encouraging others to enter the slave trade.

Structural Influences on the Transition to Slaving

A robust literature on social contagion shows that attitudes and behaviors tend to be shared among connected actors. After countless studies, researchers still identify questions such as “who will be influential?” as pressing (see for example Iyengar et al., 2011). Overwhelmingly, however, the literature on social contagion examines the diffusion of opinions, knowledge, and the adoption of innovation. These are fundamentally different from entry to slaving. In the typical social-contagion example, there is uncertainty about the utility of a product or idea (Tolbert and Zucker, 1983). The backdrop is an absence of normative expectations; not, as in the case of slaving, a normative expectation *not* to adopt the “innovation.” Potential slave traders did not face uncertainty as to whether slaving was an effective economic strategy, and neither could they claim uncertainty as to its legitimacy. Moreover, the status of a trader as an “opinion leader” cannot be assumed to be independent of the normative status of their behavior. Social influence in this situation cannot operate according to the same mechanisms as it does in others.

Some studies have identified social contagion in the context of anti-normative behavior (Christiakis and Fowler’s 2007; Bearman and Stovel, 2000). Norms rely on social sanctions, so if one’s social group adopts anti-normative behavior, one could find local social support for engaging in the same behavior. In Liverpool, a trader might feel enabled to enter slaving if his network contacts were slavers. Relevant empirical evidence comes from Younts’ (2008) experimental analysis of the social influences on anti-normative behavior. He identified that endorsement of anti-normative behavior (cheating) by a reference group increased the likelihood of the subject cheating; and the suggestion to cheat was more influential when it came from a higher status confederate.

Figure 3 shows the impact of a trader’s network on the likelihood of entering the slave trade. Our independent variables are “net exposure” measures. For each class of status (Gentlemen, Merchants, Others) we counted the number of slavers to whom the trader is connected in his co-investment network, and subtracted from that the number of non-slavers to whom he is connected. This is an important variant on many models of social contagion, which

often weigh adopters as influential and ignore non-adopters. In our case, the issue is moral suasion, and non-slavers should be expected to be as influential as slavers.¹

The results show that social contagion did indeed operate in the Liverpool slave trade. Moreover, status mattered. The lowest-status traders (Others) actually had a small negative influence on partners' behavior. A trader with net network exposure to Others of +1 (tied to one more slaving Other than non-slaving Others) would be 2% less likely to enter the slave trade. Merchants had a positive social contagion effect. Every additional Merchant slaver in a trader's network increased the likelihood of entering the slave trade by 6%. The really large effect was for Gentlemen. An additional Gentleman slaver in a trader's network increased the likelihood of entering the slave trade by 75%. (Of course, non-slaving Merchants and Gentlemen influenced to keep their network partners out of the slave trade).

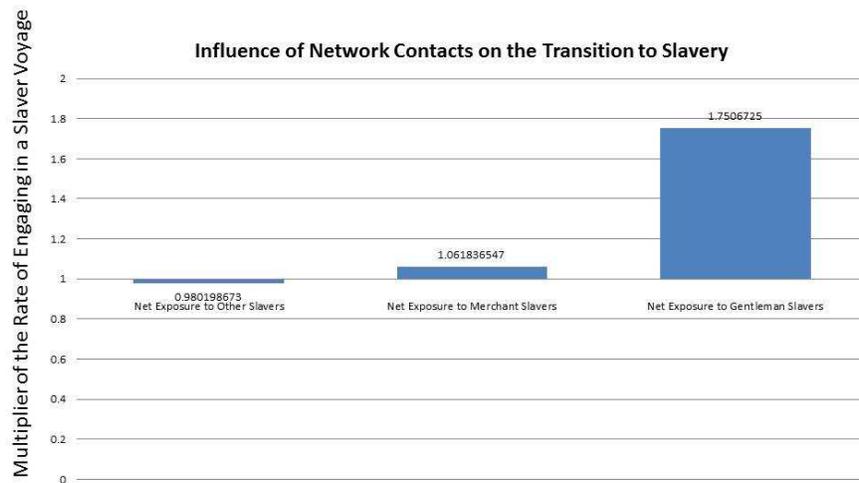


Figure 3 (Coefficients from Model 1)

Younts' (2008) explanation for the status effect on the diffusion of deviance depended on the correlation between status and ability, such that the high-status endorsement is more credible. We are doubtful of that mechanism, at least in our context, because we simply don't believe

¹ In this specification represented in Figure 3, we assume that the influence of slavers and non-slavers on network partners is of equal magnitude. We relax that assumption in subsequent analyses.

there was uncertainty about the efficacy of a slaving investment. Moreover, with an anti-normative behavior as opposed to one whose efficacy is uncertain, the costs of social sanction must be considered. As explained, we don't think that Gentlemen would have been viewed as more competent about trading or slaving—their status comes from a different institutional source. Rather, the contagiousness of Gentlemen slavers comes from the “moral cover” that their status provides. Consistent with this, in supplementary analysis we found that traders with more network status, gained as a function of voyages, were not more influential on their network partners' likelihood to enter slaving. Whether or not one entered the slave trade was not a function of technical uncertainty but moral authority. Legal status provided a dispensation that centrality in the network of traders did not.

Of course, our network of co-investing traders does not capture all of the social structure that surrounded a trader. As an effort to get at the many other sources of social contagion a trader faced, such as clubs, neighborhoods, meetings in taverns and on the street, we included a measure of whether the trader lived in Liverpool, where anti-slavery norms were relatively weak. Controlling for all else, Liverpool residents were 68% more likely to enter the slave trade than non-residents. We also considered the percentage of all traders who were slavers, as a way of capturing influence beyond a trader's immediate partners. This might proxy for weak network ties, or the City's culture. With every 1% increase in that measure, the likelihood of entering the slave trade increased by 5%.

In sum, social structure operated to increase the likelihood of entering the slave trade in Liverpool. Gentlemen slavers were particularly infectious on the likelihood that their partners would enter the trade (similarly, Gentlemen non-slavers were influential in keeping partners out of slave-trading). It was not only the immediate network that mattered. Diffuse influences operated; simply living in Liverpool increased the likelihood of becoming a slaver. Moreover, when more traders were slavers, others were more likely to enter the trade.

Social Movement Influence: Changing the Conversation

The Abolition movement in Britain started in earnest in 1787, and succeeded in legislation twenty years later. In those twenty years Liverpool did not shrink in the face of contention, but rather *increased* its dominance of the slave trade. At the time, the public will was expressed to

Parliament in the form of petitions. Every major British city produced petitions for the abolitionist cause save Liverpool, which instead produced frequent petitions favoring the trade. In Manchester, which had a deep economic interest in Liverpool's slave industry as the source of manufactured goods for trade, 10,000 people signed an abolition petition in 1787.

The support for the movement in Manchester demonstrates that it was not only economic interest in the slave trade that predicted support for abolition. Both Manchester and Liverpool depended economically on slaving, but Liverpool was different because its merchants engaged directly as slave traders. That "being active slavers" made all the difference in the stance to abolition is further indicated by the fact that as soon after British abolition as 1814, Liverpool generated 30,000 signatures on a petition against a re-opening of the French slave trade. Liverpool was also active in the campaign for emancipation that followed abolition, despite persisting economic interest in trade with slave-holding colonies (Howman, 2007).

If abolition itself affected a reversal of Liverpool's position on the slave trade, it was only after a resistance that was unique in Britain. The resistance occurred at a political level, through counter-petitioning and arguments by Liverpool's representatives in parliament. There were occasional episodes of mob violence against abolitionists in Liverpool. But the interaction between the abolitionist and slaving forces necessarily happened every day in the course of business in Liverpool. "The friends of the hapless Africans, and many such are to be found even here, have not been passive and unconcerned in the struggle...They have remonstrated in public and in private (The Picture of Liverpool, 1805: 148)." As Howell (2007: 282) puts it, "It seems that the matter was being widely discussed [in Liverpool] and strong positions on both sides of the argument were being adopted."

Of course, everyday conversations seldom leave a trace on history. But there is evidence of a rhetorical shift in pamphlets from the time. Drescher (1988) observes a shift in the content of arguments that Liverpoolians produced for the consumption of outsiders. Before the abolition movement, there appears almost no explicit defense of the trade, probably because there was no active threat against it. Discussions of the slave trade in guides to Liverpool before the abolition movement were matter-of-fact descriptions. The abolition movement ignited an active defense of the trade. The Liverpool Council commissioned an extensive defense of the trade on religious grounds (Harris, 1788). Others presented secular arguments.

The content of these published documents suggests the discussions and arguments that must have been happening in Liverpool at this time. Harris (1788) cited many non-condemning references to slavery from the Old Testament. Observing that “an argument that proves too much proves nothing” he shrewdly claimed that abolitionists’ frequent use of the golden rule against slavery could similarly be used to invalidate every other hierarchical human arrangement (72). Secular arguments included that Africans were already enslaved in Africa; that the transatlantic trade exposed them to Christianity; and that it presented them with some chance of emancipation. Of course the economic benefits of the trade were also cited, sometimes attached to the observation that they were spread wide in Liverpool through its generous charitable institutions.

On the abolition side, the arguments targeted the inhumanity of the practice. They diffused stories of brutality from the ships. They also challenged the anti-abolitionists’ claims about conditions in Africa. The economic-interest argument was met with the response that African trade could continue, with a commodity other than humans. The champion of abolitionism in Liverpool was William Roscoe, who argued for decades against the trade, and in 1807 voted for abolition as a newly elected Member of Parliament from Liverpool. Roscoe was an historian, author of an influential biography of Lorenzo de’Medici, and he frequently compared Liverpool to renaissance Florence. That flattering analogy offered redemption of identity to Liverpoolians who were willing to sacrifice the naked commercialism of slave trade and invest in culture (Wilson, 1998).

Ultimately, the balance of espoused interests in Liverpool shifted. This is apparent in the tone of guides to the town published in the late-nineteenth century (Drescher, 1988). The Picture of Liverpool (1805) begins its discussion by calling the label “metropolis of slavery” an unfounded characterization of the town. The slave trade is attributed to three or four houses, and to merchants from outside Liverpool. It is “the duty of those who feel for the honour of the town, and disapprove of the traffic to rescue it from this general opprobrium by every means in their power (147).” The emerging picture is of a town that separated itself from the slavers. But if the town came to align itself with the abolitionist sentiments of the country, the slavers themselves did not; Roscoe was met by a violent mob when he returned to Liverpool after casting his vote for abolition. They could do nothing besides persist, once they had been stained as “devils” and accused of inhumanity. Devils cannot be redeemed.

What was the effect of the escalation of arguments prompted by the abolition movement? Figure 4 again examines the social contagion of slaving, but allows the influence of slavers on network partners to be different during the years of active abolition. The earlier result that higher-status slavers have more influence maintains in both movement and non-movement years. But there is a striking increase of the magnitude of the effect, over all statuses, but highest for Gentlemen, in the years of the abolition movement. During the abolition movement, when the rhetoric for and against the slave trade was hottest, and the arguments sharpest, traders had much greater influence on whether their partners entered the trade.

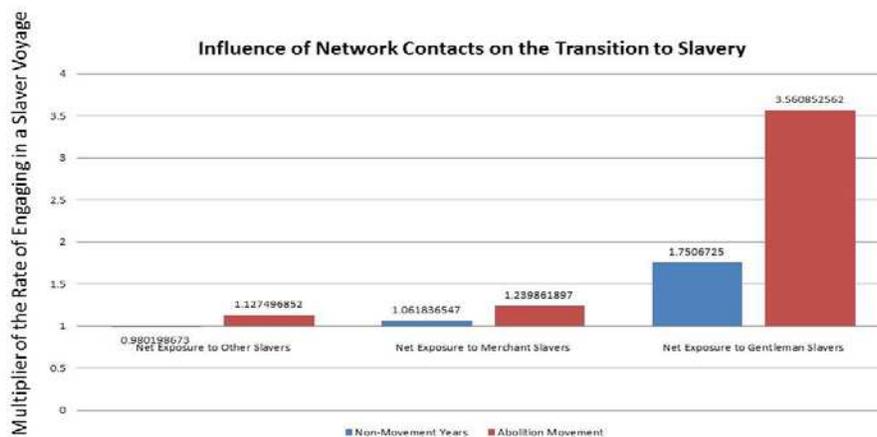


Figure 4 (Coefficients from Model 2)

Both Figures 3 and 4 constrain the effect of slavers to be equal to that of non-slavers. We next relax that assumption. Figure 5 shows the network impact of various ranks, in abolition movement years and non-movement years, allowing the impact of slavers to be different from non-slavers. There is a remarkably consistent ordering of effects. Higher ranks are always more socially contagious; slavers always increase the likelihood of partners entering the trade while non-slavers decrease it; and the magnitude of the influence effects is always greater in the years of the abolition movement.

Network Influence by Slaver vs. Non-Slaver

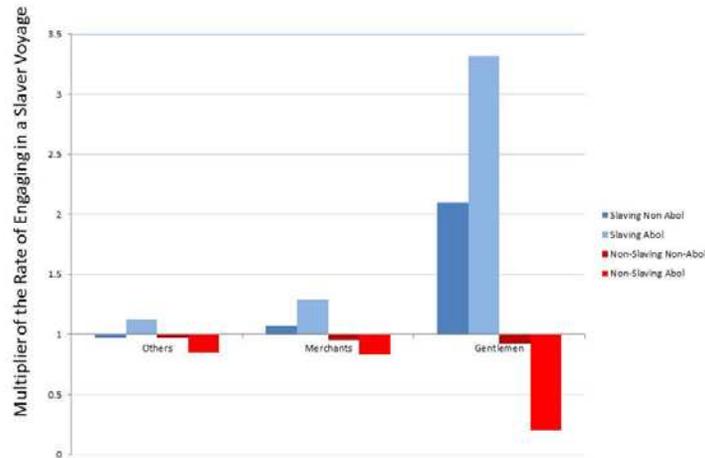


Figure 5 (Coefficients from Supplementary Analysis)

Figure 5 visually understates the magnitude of multipliers of the rate less than one (a multiplier of .5 would offset a multiplier of 2, but would appear smaller on the graph). To make comparison of magnitudes clear, we offer Figure 6. Here we show the net effect on the transition to slaving rate for a trader who had one partner who was a slaver and one partner who was a non-slaver. It is created directly from Figure 5 by multiplying the slaver effect times the non-slaver effect (our logit model is multiplicative). The magnitudes of slaver and non-slaver effects are about equal for Others and Merchants, in both movement and non-movement years. But for Gentlemen, there is a marked shift of relative influence during the abolition movement. Before the movement, Gentlemen slavers were more influential to pull their network partners into the slave trade than Gentlemen non-slavers were to keep their partners out. But during abolition years, Gentlemen non-slavers become more influential.

This final effect brings us full circle. We began by showing that high-status Gentlemen exploited their normative autonomy to enter the slave trade at higher rates than lower-status traders. We then showed how the network amplified this individual tendency, as Gentlemen slavers were more influential on the likelihood of their network partners entering the slave trade. Finally, we show that culture, in the form of a social movement, conditions the micro and meso action. The abolition movement brought the anti-normative character of the slave trade into the open, and made it the basis of active argument. This operated to increase the influence that

traders had on their partners. But more than simply amplify influence, the abolition movement also shifted the balance in favor of non-slavers. It operated as a thumb on the scale of debate such that the process of social influence in Liverpool became more likely to discourage entry to the trade.

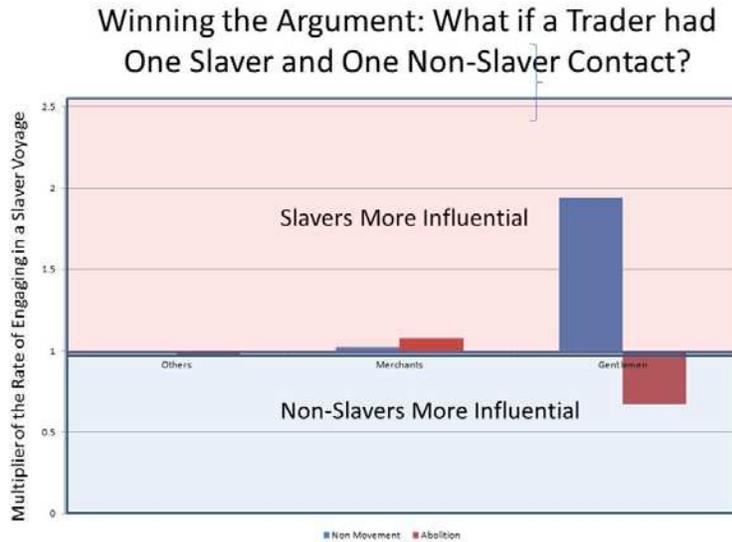


Figure 6 (Coefficients from Supplementary Analysis)

Conclusion

David Fischer (1970) said that history is useful to refine theory, and to help us understand who we are as a people. For theory, we have leveraged the case of Liverpool slaving to understand dirty business, the phenomenon whereby some people pursue economic activities that violate cultural values. Our explanation considers individuals, networks and culture. We harnessed the concept of individual status to explain why some individuals will flout the norms. They become the seeds of dirty business. The role of the network is to spread the seeds. Here again status matters, insidiously, as those high-status individuals most likely to deviate from norms are also the most influential on the behavior of their network partners. Finally we considered the role of a social movement to affect the exercise of norms in human interactions. The abolition movement turned up the heat on the slave trade, and made it impossible for non-slavers to look the other way. It also generated sharper arguments both for and against the trade. The effect was

to increase the magnitude of social influence. A trader's network partners affected the trader more during abolition, because whether they were slavers or not, they had a better case to make, and they were motivated to press it. Slavers and non-slavers were not amplified equally, however. The non-slavers, who had the weight of the culture behind them, were also favored on the edges of the network. In this way the social movement allowed the broader culture to seep back in to the subculture that had developed in Liverpool.

As for who we are as a people, we wonder what case can say more about that than the transatlantic slave trade. In a grand "who we are as Americans" inquiry, Bailyn (2012) attributes American slavery to English racism. We would suggest instead that America did not get slaves from England, but rather from slave traders, most of whom were English. Who are we as a people? We are now as we were then, a set of hierarchically ordered egoists, linked together and looking to each other for guidance, capable of diverging very far from what we ourselves believe to be right if the conditions allow it.

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Appendix Data, Methods and Analysis

We relied on data from three sources: (1) The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database; (2) Liverpool Plantation Register; (3) Gore's Directories. We created a trader network where two traders were connected if they had ever co-invested in an overseas shipping venture.

The *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TAST)* compiles data on all known trans-Atlantic slave voyages between 1514 and 1867. For each voyage, the database includes the following: names of all vessel owners, dates of voyage start/end, location(s) where the vessel embarked and disembarked slaves, and voyage outcome – successful completion, sank, captured, lost, etc. We use these data to identify the number of voyages by year and departure port for Figure 1. We use the data for Liverpool-departing voyages to identify slave voyages undertaken by Liverpool ships, and the shipowners involved in these voyages. Co-ownership of vessels in this database is used as an input into the construction of the shipowner network.

The *Liverpool Plantation Register* database covers a range of data, including information on all vessels registered at the port of Liverpool between 1734 and 1784 and on all voyages known to have been undertaken by these vessels. For each voyage, the database includes: names of vessel owners, occupations of many vessel owners, date of voyage start, voyage destination(s), and voyage outcome. These data cover both slave-trade and non-slave-trade voyages. We use these data to identify the non-slave voyages undertaken by Liverpool ships, and the shipowners involved in these voyages.

Gore's Liverpool Directory was published roughly every three years from 1766 through the mid-1800s. We used it to identify occupations of shipowners whose occupations were not provided in the Liverpool Plantation Register database. Between Gore's Directory and the Liverpool Plantation Register database, we identified occupations for more than 98% of owners in our data.

Analysis of Transition to Slavery

Our statistical analysis looks at the likelihood of a trader who was not previously a slaver entering the slave trade by investing in a slaving voyage. The unit of analysis is the trader-investment, and the dependent variable is a zero if that investment is not slaving, one if it is. The models below are logit models. We have also estimated event history models with comparable results. Results appear in Table A1.

Did Gentlemen Slavers Perform or Invest Differently?

We argue that Gentlemen entered slaving at a higher rate, and influenced others to enter, as a function of their social status. We have already explained why we don't believe their entry into slaving or infectiousness was due to superior resources or capabilities. In this section of analysis we explore this idea with an in-depth analysis of the slave voyages that Gentlemen invested in.

Specifically, we seek answers to two questions. First, were Gentlemen more effective slavers? If their voyages were more successful, that would be an alternative explanation to status as to why they were more influential on network partners. Second, whether Gentlemen's investments in the slave trade suggest that they may have had more capital, or been less risk-averse than other traders? If that was true, it would be an alternative explanation to status as to why they were more likely to enter slaving.

We explored those questions by looking at all Liverpool voyages in the Slave Voyages data base, and considering whether Gentlemen were among the ownership team for the voyage. We differentiated between whether the Gentlemen was first in the ownership list or occupied a subordinate position. We differentiated this position on the possibility that the first ranked owner represented a larger share of ownership, or acted as "ships husband", the leader of the venture who gave instructions to the captain. The variable *Gentleman Husband* indicates that the first owner was a Gentlemen, *Other Gentlemen* is a count of how many other Gentlemen were among the ownership group. Additionally we control for the year of the voyage, the size of the ship (tons), whether the voyage was in wartime, the size of the ownership group, the experience of the first owner (potential husband), and whether the captain had an ownership stake in the venture.

Our dependent variables for performance include the likelihood of being captured or sunk, the number of crew who died on the voyage, the shortfall in slaves (the number planned for the voyage less the actual number obtained, which is a negative indicator of performance), the time of the overall voyage and the time spent in the Americas selling slaves and acquiring cargo (shorter voyages are better because they increase the likelihood of time for a voyage the following year). Gentlemen slavers were neither more nor less likely to see their ships sink, their crew die, or to incur a shortfall of slaves on a voyage. There is a weakly significant ($p < .10$) effect of *Other Gentlemen* on the ownership team to be associated with a lower risk of capture. Since the effect is weak, and it does not occur when Gentlemen are in the strategic husband role, it is not a strong indicator of performance. It may mean that Gentlemen sought out voyages that were less risk in terms of capture. An obvious strategy for reducing the risk of capture was to sail as part of a convoy, however this was associated with economic costs in terms of time and increased competition from having a group of ships reach their destination at the same time (Crowhurst, 1977).

A more notable performance effect was with regard to time. Voyages with Gentlemen Husbands were overall shorter and less time in the Americas. To further investigate this interesting effect we re-estimated both of these duration models using fixed effects. In the overall voyage length model we included an effect for the first destination in West Africa. In the time in the Americas model, we included an effect for the first port reached in the Americas. In both cases, inclusion of those fixed effects causes the Gentlemen variables to become insignificant. This means that the shorter durations of voyages with Gentleman Husbands was due to the fact that they went to different places in Africa and the Americas. The choice of places to acquire and sell slaves was a strategic one and typically represented trade-offs. For example at places in West Africa with a

centralized slave fort, acquiring slaves was faster but also more expensive. So, it could well be that Gentlemen slavers paid a higher price, or received a lower price, for slaves in exchange for their shorter voyages. Alternatively, it could be that Gentlemen had some particular advantage that allowed them to operate more quickly. For example, African traders like the Efik in Old Calabar had a banded status system that in some ways mirrored that of Britain (Behrendt et al., 2010). Perhaps high-status African traders favored high-status English traders. Alternatively, Gentlemen may have received preference in American ports due to their status. Both of these mechanisms are different from our focus on “freedom from normative control”, however they both depend on Gentlemen’s high status.

Turning to the nature of the voyages Gentlemen engaged in, they were less likely to employ the governance mechanism of extending an ownership stake to the captain. Silverman and Ingram (2012) argued that captain ownership solved some of the agency problems of a far flung enterprise. It is interesting that Gentlemen were less likely to employ it. We speculate that high social status may have presented a barrier to sharing ownership with lower status captains. When Gentlemen were among the owners, ships tended to be smaller. However, in an analysis not reported, we found that Gentlemen did tend to be higher on the ownership list than non-gentlemen (average rank 2.9 for Gentlemen, 3.1 for non-Gentlemen). This effect is due mainly to the higher likelihood the Gentlemen will be listed first among owners. If that tendency indicates a higher ownership stake, it might mean that Gentlemen invested more than others, but this possibility is offset by the fact that the ships they invested in were smaller. The mixed evidence does not support a conclusion that Gentlemen entered slaving because they had more capital. Furthermore, Gentlemen were no more likely to invest during wartime, which represents particularly high risks and rewards. Again, this is counter to the alternative explanation for our status results, that they are driven by Gentlemen with more wealth willing to engage in more risk.

Table A1

Logit Models of The Likelihood of Trader Investing in The Slave Trade for the First Time

	(1)	(2)
Gentleman	0.503*** (0.171)	0.498*** (0.172)
Merchant	0.179*** (0.0492)	0.180*** (0.0493)
Network Status	-0.000866*** (0.000311)	-0.000875*** (0.000313)
(Network Status) ²	1.51e-06*** (2.70e-07)	1.44e-06*** (2.74e-07)
% Ships Lost	0.672*** (0.185)	0.668*** (0.185)
Network Influence from Gentlemen	0.699*** (0.112)	0.625*** (0.122)
Network Influence from Merchants	0.0896*** (0.00691)	0.0828*** (0.00731)
Network Influence from Others	-0.0165* (0.00885)	-0.0232** (0.00937)
Log(Non-Slaving Voyages)	-1.011*** (0.0372)	-1.012*** (0.0384)
% Traders who are Slavers	4.960*** (0.339)	5.024*** (0.340)
Liverpool Resident	0.521*** (0.0494)	0.590*** (0.0524)
U.S. War	-1.235*** (0.226)	-1.237*** (0.226)
Abolition Year	-0.591*** (0.0729)	-0.351*** (0.130)
Abol. * Net. Inf. Gentlemen		0.666* (0.345)
Abol. * Net. Inf. Merchants		0.131*** (0.0372)
Abol. * Net. Inf. Others		0.148*** (0.0332)
Abol. * log(Non-Slave Voyages)		0.198** (0.0934)
Abol. * Liverpool Resident		-0.485*** (0.148)
Constant	-3.519*** (0.148)	-3.562*** (0.148)
Observations	28,568	28,568
Standard errors in parentheses		
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

Table A2
Did Gentlemen Slavers Invest or Perform Differently?

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
	Shipwreck	Captured	Crew Died	Slave shortfall	Voyage Length	Voyage Length	Time in Americas	Time in Americas	Captain Owner	Ship Size	Wartime Voyage
Year	0.01** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-2.43*** (0.09)	-1.77*** (0.14)	-2.36*** (0.17)	-0.44*** (0.07)	-0.36*** (0.07)	-0.01*** (0.00)	2.74*** (0.05)	-0.03*** (0.00)
Number Owners	-0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.06)	1.20** (0.54)	3.15*** (0.88)	0.71 (0.96)	-0.93* (0.48)	-0.92** (0.46)	0.31*** (0.02)	-1.84*** (0.47)	0.04*** (0.02)
Captain Owner	-0.33* (0.19)	-0.19 (0.17)	0.49 (0.45)	5.31 (3.30)	12.68** (5.51)	15.67*** (5.75)	2.64 (3.17)	1.42 (2.96)			-0.01 (0.10)
Husband Exp.	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.06)	0.20** (0.10)	0.08 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.04*** (0.00)		0.01*** (0.00)
Ship Size	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.29*** (0.01)	0.04 (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)		-0.00*** (0.00)
Wartime	0.11 (0.14)	1.57*** (0.12)	-0.20 (0.38)	-9.94*** (2.85)	16.26*** (4.76)	14.71*** (5.04)	1.86 (2.76)	-1.46 (2.65)	-0.05 (0.10)		
Gent. Husband	-0.20 (0.28)	0.15 (0.22)	-0.02 (0.48)	3.98 (5.28)	-20.74** (9.31)	-10.13 (9.94)	-7.52* (4.28)	-2.50 (4.13)	-0.29 (0.27)	-8.92* (5.26)	-0.22 (0.19)
Other Gents	0.05 (0.19)	-0.35* (0.20)	-0.55 (0.37)	5.33 (3.79)	-9.96 (6.31)	-6.51 (6.77)	-7.55** (3.17)	-3.91 (2.98)	-0.63*** (0.16)	-7.71** (3.83)	-0.05 (0.12)
Constant	-20.04*** (7.22)	-83.23*** (7.84)	249.95*** (27.53)	4,320.68*** (156.64)	3,523.12*** (246.60)	4,573.16*** (309.22)	845.16*** (119.05)	679.90*** (120.28)	12.64** (5.15)	-4,705.5*** (95.19)	46.11*** (4.09)
Observations	4,591	4,591	2,159	3,860	3,317	2,646	1,746	1,746	4,591	4,810	4,591
R-squared			0.06	0.19	0.10	0.27	0.05	0.21		0.36	
Standard errors in parentheses											
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1											