The two decades spanning the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries are widely recognized to be a major watershed in British political, economic, and intellectual history. As a single factor of change within a general atmosphere of transition, the movement to abolish the British slave trade has been subjected to a variety of interpretations. Sir Reginald Coupland and historians influenced by him treat the abolitionist movement as a major aspect of the growth of humanitarianism in Britain, while Eric Williams has attempted to explain abolition as a part of British economic development and to show the economic motivations of the groups involved. These accounts tend to isolate the humanitarian and economic elements in slave-trade abolition, thus regarding it as a part of some larger movement. But there was a further aspect of abolition, one in which the movement, and the reaction to it, acted as creators of new beliefs rather than as contributors to them. The debate over the abolition of the slave trade in the years before 1807 produced a set of political aims and attitudes toward Africa which, amplified in the nineteenth century, constituted an ideology that helped to determine the African policy of Britain. Preeminent among these was the notion of the British mission toward "backward peoples" in its official sense. Regarded in this way, economic and humanitarian factors can be seen as coming together in a political setting and having primarily a political significance.

What we are concerned with here is not simply the formation of a British image of Africa and the African, which has been ably described by Philip Curtin. The ideology that developed during the slave trade debates revolved around preconceptions about African society and the relationship between Britain and Africa, preconceptions that implied, and to some extent demanded, direct British official involvement in Africa. Since the debates took place in a political setting, and since the arguments on all sides were shaped in the course of making an important political decision, it happened that the attitudes which evolved during the debates became associated with the

2. Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (Chapel Hill, 1944).
implementation of that decision. These attitudes were rooted in misconceptions of African political and economic realities, mainly because of the lack of reliable information about Africa and because, given this lack of information, arguments presented in the slave-trade debates had been framed in terms of the political situation in England rather than conditions in Africa. Government actions associated with slave-trade abolition, therefore, were not entirely successful. This meant that later in the nineteenth century, in a large number of individual cases, the decision had to be made whether to drop anti-slavery policies altogether, or to transcend the obstacles in the African situation through increased British involvement. In most cases the latter option was taken. One of the reasons for this, besides the large amount of humanitarian feeling in Britain, may have been that the African ideology was generally accepted in the administrative classes and that the postulates of which it was made up were singularly well adapted to British political practice. In this paper we shall describe the formulation of the official African ideology in Britain and suggest its relationship to developments after 1807.

The actual process by which the slave trade was abolished in Britain is very well known and need only be outlined here. Following many years of Quaker agitation against slavery and the growth of popular anti-slavery feeling in the 1770's and 1780's, a committee of twelve was formed in London in 1787 to lead a campaign against the slave trade. Granville Sharp was president, but by this time his role in the movement had become largely honorific.\(^4\) Thomas Clarkson, the really active force on the committee, was employed in collecting evidence for presentation during the investigations of the Privy Council and the House of Commons. He also solicited popular and official support for the abolitionist position both in England and in France. The most famous of the group was of course William Wilberforce, who, while not actually a member of the committee, was its chief advisor. More important, as a Member of Parliament (and a close friend of Pitt), he took upon himself the task of initiating legislation against the trade. Other important abolitionists were Henry Thornton, James Stephan, and Zachary Macaulay.

Wilberforce's first motion for a resolution to abolish the slave trade was not made until 1789, and in the meantime, a major pamphlet debate had taken place between opponents and defenders of the trade. The Privy Council had also prepared a massive compendium of evidence on the slave trade and on West Indian slavery, which included Clarkson's research on the dangers and cruelty of the "middle passage" from West Africa to the West Indies. Despite notable feats of oratory by Wilberforce, Pitt, and Fox and support for abolition from many of the most prominent M.P.'s, the Commons failed to enact abolition legislation after its debates in 1789, 1791, and 1792. It did consent to the regulation of the trade and in 1792 promised to bring about abolition in four years' time, but the Lords refused to take action on the latter motion. With the ensuing diversion of national sentiment from humanitarian reform to war with Jacobin

France, the movement suffered a period of eclipse. Furthermore, the acquisition by Britain of France's West Indian colonies, with their comparatively greater need for new slaves from Africa, may have weakened Pitt's commitment to slave-trade abolition.5

For the rest of Pitt's administration, the major achievements of anti-slavery were unrelated to abolition itself. Granville Sharp, Zachary Macaulay, and a number of other abolitionists were involved in the Sierra Leone project, which began in 1787 with the shipment of destitute free Negroes from England to the West African coast. During this time, anti-slave-trade agitation continued, and the abolitionist arguments which finally came to prevail were more closely defined. In 1805, Wilberforce was able to pressure Pitt into issuing an Order-in-Council forbidding the importation of slaves into areas newly acquired from the French and their allies.

But even in this concession to the abolitionists, Pitt, the man who had actually introduced the motion to discuss the first abolition proposal, acted with great delay. It was not until his death and the accession to power of the Fox-Grenville ministry that Parliamentary efforts against slavery finally succeeded. In 1806 a bill was passed forbidding all slave imports on British ships to either foreign or newly acquired colonies, and in 1807 the ultimate object, an abolition of all trade in slaves by British subjects, received the approval of both houses. Almost immediately, the British Navy instituted anti-slavery patrols on the African coast to implement the law, and in the following years the government attempted to persuade the other major slaving nations -- France, Spain, and Portugal -- either to stop slave trading by their subjects or to allow the British to stop ships flying their flags which were suspected of slaving. The movement leading to the final abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1833 does not concern us here since it did not directly affect Africa (except for the Cape).

The political setting in which the anti-slave-trade movement acted between 1787 and 1807 was an extremely important factor in the development of the African ideology of the British. The arguments on both sides of the slavery question were naturally framed in reference to English politics, and the African ideology developed from those arguments. The work of Sir Lewis Namier and his followers has presented a picture of the pre-Reform British political system which casts an interesting light upon the history of abolition. Although Williams, among others, has made some use of Namier's studies,6 no one has yet attempted to put together a political history of abolition in terms of them.

Parliament, and especially the House of Commons, was the center of British political life in the eighteenth century and the primary arena of the

5. Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 145-149.
6. Ibid., 92, 113.
slavery controversy. 7 M.P.'s were elected to the Commons in a variety of
different ways, ways that were seldom "democratic." Generally, an M.P.,
depended for his election upon either his own wealth or upon the patronage of
some other person who "owned" a "pocket borough." The government in power
was itself an important patron, often basing its control of the House on the
distribution of seats to loyal retainers. 8 The effect of the system was to main-
tain an element of corruption in British politics and to give a great deal of power
to wealthy interests, but there were compensations. The Commons, like the
Lords, were to some degree separated from the pressures of local politics,
which gave a basis in fact to Parliament's claim of being able to legislate for
the good of the whole Empire. 9 The system also helped to ensure a certain
social homogeneity among M.P.'s, despite the actual diversity of their back-
grounds. A type of behavior and outlook patterned after that of the "country
gentleman" pervaded Parliament and the upper classes in general, one that was
characterized by an emphasis on "principle" and honor. The first impulse
of many of the new industrialists, as it had been of the returned West Indian
planters, was to buy land and become gentlemen according to accepted
standards. 10

The combination of all these factors gave a peculiar cast to British
parliamentary politics in the late eighteenth century. While there were plenty
of specific interests represented in the Commons, of which the West Indian
slaveholding interest was one of the more important, when a question at issue
touched neither a Member's particular concerns nor those of his party he could
be expected to vote according to his conceptions of "principle" and the national
good. In such a situation a humanitarian appeal like that of the abolitionists
could be extremely effective even without major interests or large popular sup-
port on its side, as long as they could show that abolition would not hurt Brit-
ain's overall position or personally affect the majority of M.P.'s. Similarly,
the pro-slavery faction had to produce counterarguments along the same lines,
and not just special pleading. These conditions must be considered in evalu-
ating both the ultimate victory of the anti-slavery movement and the ideology
which it produced.

There is, however, a possible complication in the previous picture of
British politics: the question of party. Membership in a party might override
considerations of moral principle or national interest in the case of an important
issue on which a party took a stand. According to Namier, in the late eighteenth
century parties were fairly loose groups of M.P.'s surrounding individual lead-
ers, and there were a great number of independent M.P.'s who could not be

7. For the ensuing analysis, see: Sir Lewis Namier, England in the Age of the
American Revolution, 2nd ed. (London, 1963), 3–41, 171–228; Sir Lewis
Namier and John Brooke, The History of Parliament: The House of Commons
8. Ibid., 2–56.
9. For a discussion of the concept of "virtual representation," see R. R.
Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Challenge (Princeton,
1959), 143–181.
Namier, England, 10.
considered members of a party at all. The distinction between Whig and Tory meant little in most issues, and after 1784 the most noticeable grouping of the Commons was in terms of Pittites and anti-Pittites. But these two factions contained only a portion of the M.P.'s, who usually manifested themselves only in voting on officially designated government questions.

Interests and opinions on the slavery controversy cut across all conceivable party lines, and until the wars of the French Revolution were not directly connected with the major questions of the day. In the 1791 debates, for example, six of the twelve M.P.'s who spoke on each side were recognized Pitt supporters. Identifiable anti-Pittites also spoke on both sides. As in the case of Parliamentary reform motions, Pitt supported abolition personally (and usually vigorously) but did not introduce government bills to end the slave trade. It was only after Pitt's death, when slave-trade abolition had acquired general support, that the position of the West Indian interest was compromised, and when the entry of new Irish M.P.'s changed the balance of the Commons, that abolition was made a government motion. Party, whatever the term meant, was not an issue during most of the slave-trade debates.

The Parliamentary power of two major interests lay behind efforts to maintain the slave trade during the years 1787-1807 — the West Indians, who were the principle buyers of slaves, and the port towns and their merchants, who carried on the trade. The West Indians had been an important, wealthy, and cohesive force in politics throughout the century, but by 1787 their influence was waning. Other groups, merchants and industrialists as well as landowners, possessed an increasingly greater share of the money represented in Parliament, while the West Indian economy began experiencing difficulties. With the growth of more productive sugar plantations elsewhere, especially in the French West Indies, planters came to rely more heavily on their legal monopoly of the British sugar market. Many English merchants and sugar dealers began to oppose the monopoly, which eventually produced a breach in the pro-slavery front. But the West Indians in Parliament, men who had made fortunes or who owned property in the islands, were still powerful. Their money was much sought after, especially during elections.

The representatives of the main slaving towns — Liverpool and Bristol — also offered strong opposition to the abolition of the slave trade, as did merchant M.P.'s who had interests in various aspects of the slave system. But here again the position was changing. The proportion of slave traffic to other shipping

12. Figures derived from a comparison between the speeches in The Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade . . . April 18 and 19, 1791, 2nd ed. (London, 1792), and the list of M.P.'s in Namier and Brooke's History of Parliament, volumes II and III.
15. Alderman Watson of London, for example, was concerned that abolition would hurt the Newfoundland fisheries by depriving them of a market for poor quality fish (i.e., the slaves in the West Indies). Debate . . . 1791, 112-113. Also, see Substance of the Debates . . . 1806, 10-13.
in Bristol and Liverpool was declining and free-trade sentiment was growing among the merchant class, a sentiment which made it hard to maintain an alliance with the monopolistic West Indians. In 1787, however, merchant and seaport sentiment still generally supported the slave trade.

Naval officers in the Commons on the whole also favored a continuance of the slave trade, since it was thought to train seamen who could be conscripted in wartime. The fact that an element of naval opinion became strongly abolitionist early in the nineteenth century is one indication of how official groups were affected by the ideas that were spread during the slave-trade debates.

Of course, none of these major interests was uniformly pro-slavery. At least two West Indians spoke against the slave trade in 1791. Between then and 1807 opposition to the slave trade grew in the islands, especially since it was thought that prohibiting slave imports into areas newly acquired from France would prevent them from becoming rivals of the older colonies. Nevertheless, this never became a universal feeling, and in 1805-1806 there was a very virulent reaction among West Indian politicians to impending abolition. In the port towns also, as the slave trade became less important, the anti-slavery movement found converts, and abolitionists eventually formed local organizations. But for the most part, during the period of the slave-trade debates these two interests constituted the mainstay of the pro-slavery faction in Parliament.

No overriding economic interests can be clearly discerned on the abolitionist side. The abolitionists themselves came from various backgrounds and constituted a group only on the slavery issue. Later, anti-slavery found much support among industrialists and may have done so even in the 1790's, but before 1807 the manufacturing class had little influence in Parliament.

But the most important point to be remembered is that only a very small proportion of the M.P.'s, or of the political classes as a whole, had any direct connection with the slave trade. The real "country gentlemen," the army officers and government placeholders, the appointees of landed patrons -- few of these people had personal interests in either the West Indies or in the slave trade. The trade may have been important to the country and empire as a whole (and the slavery interest insisted that it was), but not many of the M.P.'s would have looked at the problem in much narrower terms than that. Therefore the arguments on both sides of the question had to center around appeals to the wider consciences of the gentlemen in Parliament, to their conceptions of

17. Debate . . . 1791, 47.
19. Mr. Francis and Mr. Stanley. Debate . . . 1791, 61-63, 128-129.
22. Namier and Brooke, History of Parliament, 1, 133.
national interest and also to their moral values.23 These conditions of debate set the pattern for the ideology which resulted from the issue.

Of the major elements in the slave trade, Africa was undoubtedly the least well known to those in Britain concerned with attempting to abolish or defend the trade and to informed opinion in Parliament and among the public in general. Through the research of Clarkson and the frequent intercourse of commerce and residence between Britain and the West Indies, the people who debated over slavery could be said to have some basis of knowledge concerning the Middle Passage and the sugar plantations. Indeed, many of the disagreements took place within a general consensus of recognition as to the brutality of slave shipping and the character of the West Indian planters.24 In the case of Africa, however, a wide disparity of ideas was possible because, in fact, no one knew a great deal about the continent and its inhabitants.

Up to the end of the eighteenth century British contact with Africa south of the Sahara and north of the Cape had been conditioned almost entirely by the slave trade. Consequently, geographical knowledge was limited to the extreme fringes of the western coasts.25 The inhospitable climate of those coasts and the lack of natural harbors prevented the type of trading settlement that in India expanded into empire, even had such expansion been possible on the basis of the slave trade. From the scattered coastal factories no serious explorations were made into the interior. Most of the slaves destined for America came from within Africa and were passed on to the factors and ships' captains by African middlemen on the coast.26

From the sparse body of descriptive literature on Africa, both sides in the slavery dispute built up pictures favorable to themselves. The American Quaker Anthony Benezet, in his Historical Account of Guinea,27 presented evidence in favor of abolition which Clarkson claimed as the basis for his views.28 Bryan Edwards, on the other hand, in defending the slave system maintained that lack of knowledge about the interior "as yet unexplored by any white person" precluded any definitive statements concerning Africa's role in the slave trade.29

One of Edwards' sources was the evidence gathered by the Privy Council and the Commons when investigating the slave trade, the same evidence that served as the basis for Parliamentary judgments on the trade. Two of the most striking characteristics of the testimony presented by witnesses in these inquiries are the general level of ignorance concerning Africa and the differing

23. See, for example, speech of J. Martin, Debate . . . 1791, 52-61.
attitudes toward their knowledge of the pro-slavery and abolitionist witnesses. The usual response of the first group was to fall back on hearsay when questioned about the interior, or else to describe coastal practice or admit lack of knowledge. 30 Abolitionists, on the other hand, often gave judgments based admittedly on no knowledge. As Alexander Falconbridge put it, "I cannot say what the practice in Africa is, not having lived there, but when my opinion is asked, I give it freely." 31 Since it was the abolitionist view that eventually won out, it is interesting to note its essentially non-factual basis. Although the pro-slavery spokesmen did not know much about Africa, they probably knew more than the abolitionists.

It was during the course of the slave-trade debates that the African Association under Sir Joseph Banks published the observations of its first successful explorer, Mungo Park. 32 When they appeared in 1798 and 1799, Park's writings were immediately seized upon by both sides as proof of their claims. Already, new evidence was subsumed within existing systems of belief and did not greatly alter those beliefs.

Within the general atmosphere of ignorance, the political debate revolved around certain key issues and concepts. The debate can be discussed in terms of the two general types of appeal made by both sides to Parliament and to the "informed" public: considerations of morality, and of national interest. Although these categories could be applied to almost all aspects of the slave-trade controversy, we are concerned primarily with the dispute about the African end of the trade.

By 1789, in the face of the first abolitionist onslaught, it was no longer really possible for the slavery interest to defend the trade morally by asserting that the African was not human at all, but a member of some animal species. 33 It could still be, and was, held that the African was "an inferior and very different order of man," 34 and that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible, but to reasonably well educated men like those in Parliament these arguments were not particularly convincing. The first by itself did not justify the horrors of the slave trade, and the second, when presented in the 1791 debates, was not very well received and was not repeated. 35 A more sophisticated moral defense was required and gradually developed by the mercantile and West Indian interests, which related the slave trade to social conditions in Africa and to the "observed" character of the African.

30. Parliamentary Papers, 1789, XXV, 635-648; Also ibid., 1789, XXVI, (646 A).
31. Ibid., 1790, XXIX, 612.
33. Anon., "An Argument used by some writers in defence of the Legality of the Slave Trade, viz. the Mixture of an Ouaran-Outang with a female African, by which they think a race of animals may be produced, partaking of the Nature of each, Refuted," The European Magazine & London Review, XIII (1788), 75-76.
34. Memoirs and Anecdotes of Phillip Thicknesse, reviewed in Gentleman's Magazine, LIV (1788), 631.
35. Debate . . . 1791, 74-75. Speech of Mr. Stanley. Stanley's argument was refuted cuttingly by William Smith immediately afterward.
What slave dealers had experienced on the coasts of Africa could be marshaled in support of their side. As far as anyone could tell, the interior produced nothing but slaves, so that one could assume that "Africans were stupid in proportion to their distance from the converse of coastal negroes," and therefore natural slaves. From what was known about the coast, Sir William Young (who owned property in the West Indies) could claim that he was against the trade in principle, but that African "social custom" and the "severity of the climate" dictated its continuance. Among these social customs was cannibalism, described in frightening detail. No one living under these conditions could possibly have the feelings common to the civilized world, and usually the natives were happy to become slaves in less precarious surroundings. Also, the Negro, through his addiction to indolence when left to himself, was naturally condemned to labor as a slave. And finally, it was clear that the African had institutionalized his own level of existence. This was demonstrated by the infamous slave-trading state of Dahomey, which was ruled by "the most absolute tyrant in the world" and which presented both the most cultivated and the most disgusting aspects of African savagery.

As the slavery interest explained the situation, the trade was therefore not their responsibility. It was "the consequence of the natural law of Africa," and "instead of declaiming against it, we should endeavour, like wise men, to turn it to our advantage." Whatever its natural or historical origins, slavery had existed in Africa "from time immemorial," and would continue to exist there. Even if Britain were to abandon the trade, other Europeans would take it over. And Europeans in general could not be held responsible for a trade the greatest part of which was "with the Moors of Barbary and with the Asiatic powers."

As a subsidiary point, the slavery interest claimed that the trade was legally justified in African terms, since all the slaves taken were in some form of legitimate captivity. Moreover, if the export of numerous inhabitants had an effect on life in Africa, it was not necessarily a bad one. According to a report of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, Africa received from the trade "benefits equal to her state," particularly in getting rid of criminal elements. As a commercial institution, the slave trade was opposed to warfare,

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37. Parliamentary History, XXIX, 836.
38. Parl. Papers, 1790, XXIX (698), 49 ff.
39. Ibid., 1789, XXV (635-648), 203.
40. Ibid., 67.
41. Ibid., 148.
42. Ibid., 1789, XVI (646 A), I, testimony of Weuves. See also Archibald Dalzel, History of Dahomey (London, 1793), and Robert Norris, Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadée (London, 1789).
44. Parl. Papers, 1789, XXV (635-648), 155.
47. Parl. Papers, 1789, XXVI (646 A), I, "Detached pieces of evidence," no. 2.
at least in the coastal areas, and in the case of prisoners, condemned criminals, or victims of famine, it was the only alternative to certain death.\textsuperscript{48} Also, according to the slavery interest, their business was conducted honorably, following open and established practices.\textsuperscript{49}

All these arguments were basically defenses against a generalized appeal to the moral sense, particularly to that of Parliament. Since the slave trade had a moral justification, the abolitionists’ assertion that the trade was immoral according to Christian standards was therefore invalid. But this defense did no more than meet the abolitionists on their own ground, and was susceptible to very effective attack.\textsuperscript{50} Perhaps more telling was an ideological argument frequently advanced by pro-slavery M.P.’s representing the merchants and the port towns. The prohibition of the slave trade by law would be an unjustified interference with private enterprise, and would be an attack on the concept of private property. This was one of the most common positions taken during the 1791 debate.\textsuperscript{51} It went beyond a simple moral defense and was intended to touch both the general political conceptions and the personal interests of the members of the unreformed Parliament. While most of the members had nothing personally to do with the slave trade, almost all represented some kind of property -- and events in France made them a bit sensitive about it.\textsuperscript{52}

In order to make its point in Parliament and to counter the more sophisticated pro-slavery arguments, the abolitionist group had to do more than simply preach evangelical moral dogma (although they did that as well). And it is in the abolitionist reaction that we see the beginnings of the new ideology. From the point of view of the anti-slavery movement, it was the slave trade which had disturbed the peace of Africa and had turned the African into a natural slave. Before slave traffic began, the Africans "were wholly a pastoral and pacific people, passing their golden hours in careless ease and social comfort under their palm trees."\textsuperscript{53} (Little evidence of this state could, of course, be adduced.) Native slavery was in no way comparable to West Indian and was of a domestic, patriarchal variety like that of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{54} The African was a human being, capable under favorable circumstances of developing into a normal (i.e., European-type) man. But nevertheless, the abolitionists did not usually look upon the natural condition of the African as ideal. "Their state of civilization [is] in general very imperfect, their notions of morality extremely rude, the power of their governments ill-defined."\textsuperscript{55}

To the abolitionists, then, the slave trade and the social conditions prevalent in Africa were the responsibility of the Europeans; African slavery had

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 1789, XXV (635-648), 84, 170.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 120 ff.

\textsuperscript{50} See Substance of the Debates . . . 1806, 116-122.

\textsuperscript{51} Debate . . . 1791, 48-49, 73, 131.


\textsuperscript{53} "Letter to the Rev. Mr. B," Gentleman’s Magazine, LXI (1795), 708.

\textsuperscript{54} Hansard, II, 547; James Ramsay, Examination of the Rev. Mr. Harris’ Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade (London, 1788), 13.

\textsuperscript{55} Parl. History, XXIX, 251. Speech of Wilberforce.
no relation to West Indian practices, and the horrible customs described by the slavers were really their own fault. African coastal society was entirely the product of European intervention and corruption: "We have stopped the natural progress of civilization, we cut off Africa from the opportunity of improvement, we kept down that continent in a state of darkness, ignorance, bondage and blood." As evidence for this responsibility and as a refutation of the slave traders' claims of benevolence, it was pointed out that British demand for slaves had incited Africans to kidnap, raid, and wage war against one another and had inspired the transformation of erstwhile native judicial systems into devices for rapacious enslavement.

But there was enough apparent truth in the pro-slavery description of African society to cause the abolitionists to modify their position as the debate went on. Although the anti-slavery spokesmen could bring forth plenty of evidence of irregularity in the trade, so as to prove that even among supposedly allied black and white traders it was impossible to deal in human flesh as a normal commodity, it also appeared that these irregularities had very little effect on the trade or on African attitudes. In the report of the infamous Old Calabar massacre of 1768, Wilberforce was perturbed to learn "that the English were as well received [by the local Africans] afterwards as before." Since African states such as Dahomey and those of the Oli Rivers, regardless of whether or not they possessed the customs they did because of European influence, were nevertheless committed to slave trading of their own will, and since it was likely that other European traders would continue to provide a market for slaves, merely ending the British slave trade would not be enough. Both these considerations and the assumption of moral responsibility on the part of the Europeans dictated a forward policy to change African social conditions when the trade was banned. This was in keeping with the practical cast of British morality. If Parliament were to take the risks of endangering the concept of private property and perhaps harming large parts of the British economy, then there would have to be very tangible moral results. If not, then it was not worth while.

The obvious answer was to send missionaries to spread moral enlightenment, and to plant colonies to support them and to encourage legitimate commercial behavior. Much of the slave-trade debates came to center around the concept of this kind of penetration. The idea of increased English presence was a logical extension of the abolitionists' feeling of European responsibility for the slave trade, and Coupland is right in maintaining that little more was intended

56. Ibid., XXIX, 328. Speech of Pitt.
57. Parl. Papers, 1789, XXVI (646 A), 10.
60. Wilberforce, Life, 1, 262; cf. Parl. Papers, 1789, XXVI (646 A), I, evidence of Capt. Hall. The "massacre" was in effect an intervention by British traders in an internecine Calabar quarrel.
61. This point was made very often in debate: e.g., Debate . . . 1791, 67.
than stations for missionaries and traders. But the slavery interest, in arguing against this position, showed a greater awareness of African realities and pointed out many of the problems that would later be experienced in trying to carry out a policy of limited "corrective" involvement. The slavers' whole image of their impact on Africa led them to predict resistance to anti-slavery by the African middlemen, which could lead only to chaos.

As for Christianity, the pro-slavery faction could point to the abortive experiments of Portugal in the Congo, where, they claimed, the priests had failed because "their proposals were contrary to the laws and customs of the country." British Protestant efforts were no more successful. The one African whom the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had trained and sent out as a missionary had "quite deviated from the Intentions of the Society and his proper line of Duty by paying more Attention to the Purposes of [slave] Trade than of Religion."

Obstacles to colonization most frequently cited by the slavery interests were the climate, which made the area a "white man's grave," and the probable opposition of the coastal African states. The difficulties which would ensue were put into the mouth of the King of Dahomey by the slave dealer Archibald Dalzel. Reforms could only be accomplished "by the points of your bayonets" and such measures "would militate against the very principle which is professed by those who want to bring about a reformation."

All of these objections to proposals for simultaneously altering social conditions in Africa and ending the slave trade turned out in many ways to be correct predictions of what would happen later. But they did not prevent abolition from being ultimately enacted. The reasons for the success of abolition, which have already been mentioned, are of less interest here than the fact that the idea of increased, reform-oriented English penetration into Africa became a part of the whole notion of ending the slave trade. It is not surprising that the abolition of the slave trade marked the beginning of serious missionary work by the British, supported by the government. Indeed, one reason why abolition was enacted may have been the fact that the abolitionists were able to counter the pro-slavery image of Africa with a program for changing it, regardless of later objections. But it is nevertheless true that the anti-slavery ideology, which became widely accepted by those dealing officially with Africa, was incorrect in many respects. More than partial penetration was needed to end the trade, and the very presence of missionaries and diplomatic representatives on the West

62. Coupland, Anti-Slavery Movement, 82-83.
64. Ibid., 1790, XXIX (698), 53-54.
65. Ibid., 1789, XXVI (646 A), "Detached pieces of evidence," no. 3. See also Margaret Priestly, "Phillip Quaque of Cape Coast" in Philip D. Curtin (ed.), Africa Remembered (Madison, 1968), 99 ff.
67. Dalzel, Dahomey, 218.
68. Coupland, Anti-Slavery Movement, 82.
African coast involved Britain more deeply in local politics than had been intended. This involvement eventually helped to initiate the process of partition. 69

The second major aspect of the slave-trade debates, equally as significant as the moral part, was the argument over the practical effects of abolition. While the merchants and seaports were directly affected by regulations dealing with the slave trade and therefore were generally against the ending of the trade, most M.P.'s were naturally concerned about the consequences for Britain as a whole. The slavery interest emphasized that '...with this Traffick are... deeply blended the interests of this country, and those of numerous individuals.' 70 A large part of the trade of Liverpool and Bristol was traditionally in slaves, and although the abolitionists might point out that the proportion of slave traffic to other kinds was declining in those towns, it was very hard to convince Parliament that national commerce would not be hurt in some way by the banning of the trade. 71 Therefore a further refinement of abolitionist doctrine was called for, and it was found in the concept of 'legitimate trade.'

It was urged that trade in products other than slaves would make up for any aggregate loss occasioned by abolition, while having the added advantages of showing the Africans the benefits of morally acceptable commerce. 72 "Legitimate trade" became a cornerstone of British African policy in the nineteenth century, an article of faith espoused well after 1850 by such figures as Livingstone and Kirk. 73 But in its origins, the idea seems to have been developed for domestic British consumption. The lists of possible substitute products which the abolitionists suggested hardly mention the most important nineteenth-century West African export, palm oil. 74 The pro-slavery representatives quite rightly insisted that most of the other items either would not make up for the loss of the slave trade, or else were impractical under tropical conditions. 75 But legitimate trade was an appealing concept, both to M.P.'s who wanted to follow their consciences without endangering the country and to business sentiments in general. And because of the sudden rise in English demand for palm oil after 1800, legitimate trade actually functioned. But it was not understood at the beginning that the slave trade could exist quite comfortably with the oil business, and that legitimate trade would lead the British government later on to penetrate African politics on behalf of its traders. 76

70. Substance of the Debates... 1806, 142.
71. Debate... 1791, 35-37. Speech of Wilberforce.
74. Parl. Papers, 1789, XXVI (646 A), Part I, "Produce."
75. Ibid.
A second practical objection to slave-trade abolition raised by the pro-slavery faction was that even if Britain were to stop its traffic in slaves, other countries would simply take it over. Often this was expressed in moral terms: other countries would continue the trade "without the humane regulations which were applied to it by the English." But essentially the point was practical. Could England afford to give up such a lucrative activity to foreign nations, especially when, as the slavers argued, no moral result would be obtained? Originally the anti-slavery spokesmen thought that France at least could be persuaded by England's example to give up the trade, but this proved doubtful—especially when the war started. The obvious solution was to apply pressure directly to the trade of all countries. The movement to establish international anti-slavery conventions after 1807 was one method of doing this. The other, partly suggested by the necessity of enforcing the anti-slavery laws against Englishmen, was to establish anti-slavery patrols by the British Navy. With continual diplomatic effort by the British government, it became possible for the Navy eventually to search non-British ships suspected of slaving. Here again, although anti-slavery patrols received great support in England and brought the Navy over to the side of abolition, the idea was essentially badly conceived with regard to Africa. Patrons were dangerous and expensive, and until Europeans could exercise some form of direct control over coastal states, they did not prevent the slave trade. They did lead, however, to the establishment of a permanent station at Fernando Po, and were at least a factor in producing British hegemony over parts of the West African coast.

By the time that Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807, the ideology that was to characterize British relations with Africa for most of the century had been formed, and it had been formed in the course of the slave-trade debates with regard to British political realities, not African conditions. Abolition itself was adopted for a number of reasons: changing economic patterns which made the West Indies and the slave trade less important, political changes in the House of Commons, loss of cohesiveness by the pro-slavery faction. Undoubtedly the pressure applied by the abolitionists and their ability to develop a coherent theory about slavery, the West Indies, and Africa were a major factor in ending the slave trade. Part of this theory became accepted as a basis for African policy, and developed into a full ideology. Its permeation of the governing and educated classes was perhaps related to the growing influence of the Evangelical abolitionists in many areas of political and social life, which meant that the abolitionist ideology was maintained through regular institutions as well as through association with the anti-slave-trade laws themselves. The major aspects of the ideology, the emphasis on missionary work and a limited British political presence in Africa, the advocacy of "legitimate trade," and the support for naval patrols and an active attack on slave trading, all contributed to involving Britain more fully in Africa. And since the ideology, although essentially

77. Debate... 1791, 51.
78. Ibid., 88.
79. See the discussion in Lloyd, The Navy and the Slave Trade, 39-60.
80. Dike, Trade and Politics, 55.
the accepted view of Africa, was in many respects conceived in error, it helped to set the stage for further British penetration. The natural reaction when a policy which is thought of as being correct is not working is to intensify the same efforts. Thus the limited objectives of the abolitionist policy with regard to Africa led by stages to the actual establishment of British control over places like Lagos, Zanzibar, and the Oil Rivers. Furthermore, the peculiar form taken by British imperialism in Africa, the idea of "Imperial trusteeship" for the betterment of native societies, had its origins in the debates over the slave trade. The ideas put forward during the slave-trade controversy, therefore, constituted one major impulse leading to British imperialism in Africa.