Introduction

This is the story of an East Anglian market town and university in the age of Atlantic slavery, and what that colourful history suggests about the nature and extent of Britons' involvement in and connections to enslavement. From the rise of chattel slavery in the early seventeenth century through to its abolition in North America more than two centuries later, the University of Cambridge's students, alumni, fellows, professors, and benefactors held a multitude of personal, cultural, economic, and political ties to enslavement. They owned or leased plantations and invested in colonial, slave-trading, and antislavery organisations. They counted prominent (and not-so-prominent) enslavers as friends and family members. They educated, tutored, mentored, and debated with the sons of slaveholders, merchants, and slave-traders. Cambridge men mounted powerful legal, philosophical, and religious defenses for colonial companies, lobby groups, and individuals involved in these enterprises. They engaged in collecting and scientific work, with the assistance of enslaved Africans and enslavers alike. They facilitated donations and benefactions from men with investments in the slave economy. Furthermore, Cambridge members voiced their opinions on the problem of enslavement, whether they were abolitionists, proslavery activists, or, indeed, occupied a middle ground on the issue. Far from a black and white tale of plantation owners and abolitionists, Cambridge's past illuminates the vast spectrum of associations that Britons, including those who lived outside of the major metropolitan urban centers, had with a transatlantic empire that was integral to the social, economic, intellectual, and cultural worlds of the colonies and metropole.[1]

There are several reasons why Cambridge provides such a valuable lens into Britain's participation in enslavement. First, Cambridge was a vibrant, cosmopolitan town and gown community where students, fellows, benefactors, and residents from all corners of Britain and the empire met and debated, and formed new associations, friendships, and connections; and, second, the market town provides a window into the multi-faceted legacies of enslavement in the interior of the country, as distinct from emerging or established mercantile and financial centers – such as Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, and London – that have received more historical attention. Numerous questions have motivated this study: were university students, alumni, and fellows

connected to slavery and the propagation of racist thought? Why did people hold these connections and how did these linkages manifest themselves and evolve over time, including after emancipation? What do these histories suggest about the abolition and proslavery movements? And what does this history tell us about the many connections that Britons held to the transatlantic slave economy and colonial slave societies? Utilising archival records from Britain, the United States, and the Caribbean, the book is, at its heart, a study of "intellectual culture": the social, political, and intellectual relationships, networks, and institutions that underpinned and enabled slavery, anti-Black racism, and colonisation. Building upon traditional intellectual methodologies, the text examines slavery and race-making in a variety of written and material sources, including stock books, letter collections, benefaction papers, bursar account books, plantation ledgers, wills and testaments, silverware, portraits and paintings, pamphlets, newspaper records, and legal memoranda. Though white middling and elite men have left most of these published and archival records, Cambridge's history contributes to a growing literature examining the multiplicity of different connections that Britons had to the Atlantic world, even for those who did not live on the seacoast.[2]

Despite a recent explosion in institutional histories of enslavement in both Britain and the United States, the methodologies that underpin such studies are decades old, indeed. Historians on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean have long conducted community studies that have examined what more localised spaces suggest about broader shifts in society, culture, and the economy. Aside from villages, towns, and cities, community histories have broadened to include transatlantic mercantile trading partnerships and guilds, religious groups, plantations, universities, and families. By thinking small, scholars have thought anew about wider regional, national, and imperial webs of commerce, politics, war, and religious belief. Regarding universities, Lawrence Stone wrote some decades ago that academic institutions neither served as a superstructure, an ideological justification, for events beyond their metropolitan, parish, or national borders – nor did they reflect radical changes in Britain and its empire. He called for further research on the academy's connections to wider society, noting that a university's most significant dichotomies were between its 'own built-in conservatism' and the 'pressures' to 'adapt to new external conditions'.[3]

Students were a pillar of this community, yet the book will primarily focus on fellows (senior academic members of a college), masters (college heads), and professors (who provided lectures and led their fields in particular subjects). These men had long-term (and often life-long) connections to Cambridge. In integrating the enormous and growing field on slavery and its afterlives with community studies, the history of singular academic institutions can make significant claims concerning the economic, social, cultural, and intellectual processes of Britain and its slave empire, particularly – in the

case of Cambridge – how those connections helped to shape people's lived experience. By focusing on the interconnections between an educational institution (and the surrounding local community) and the Atlantic world, the narrative works within a longstanding historiographical tradition in imperial history of highlighting how the 'histories of the colonisers and colonised' were 'inextricably linked'.[4]

Newspapers, diaries, and pamphlets receive their due, however there is much to be said for the significance of personal and collegiate financial records for uncovering the thoughts and opinions of individuals, families, and institutions toward the Atlantic enslavement system. If an investigation into a nation's taxation and fiscal mechanisms reveals the 'skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies', then account books, subscription lists, investment accounts, and probate records provide – alongside other sources – a similar insight into Britons' many entanglements with enslavement. Subscription lists, which record investments in colonial enterprises and political causes, have been particularly helpful as they show that Cambridge men were financial supporters of antislavery and slave-trading organisations in the absence of correspondence records. Issues abound with such sources, of course, as with other traditional intellectual material. Historians are often unable to uncover whether intellectual support or the pursuit of profit (or both concerns simultaneously) drove their investments, and, again, these sources are skewed towards middling and elite Britons (men who, respectively, worked in businesses and the professions, or those who wielded political power), who possessed the surplus resources to fund imperial endeavours, whether those goals included the Christian conversion of enslaved people or the expansion of enslavement. These problems are not insurmountable though: financial manuscripts can be placed in conversation with other written records and material culture to discern people's opinions, and a concern with the middling and elite men, who at one time or another were educated at or employed at Cambridge, is a sensible point of focus given that the University's existence was, increasingly, predicated on fostering a class of gentlemen who were able and willing to lead and forge the nation in a variety of professional fields.[5]

Histories of the University of Cambridge have long ignored its connections to enslavement. If Atlantic slavery appears in histories of the colleges or universities, scholars have concentrated on abolitionism (and, even then, on opposition to the slave trade, not plantation slavery). That approach appears, at first glance, rather sensible. After all, abolitionists pivotal to the movement for the ending of the slave trade and emancipation, such as Thomas Clarkson, Peter Peckard, and William Wilberforce, once called Cambridge home. The University Senate, too, sent antislavery petitions to the House of Commons in January 1788 and then once again in March 1792, and individual colleges (as we shall see in Chapter 4) donated money to the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which Clarkson and eleven other men formed

on 22 May 1787.[6] Cambridge has long remained isolated from the growing historical trend to reconsider enslaving and slaveholding connections from an institutional perspective, rather than just a focus on the individuals, businesses, or families involved in these enterprises. Caius, Christ's, Emmanuel, Homerton, Jesus, King's, Pembroke, Queens', St Catharine's, and Trinity colleges have joined other British academic institutions – including All Soul's, Christ Church, Exeter, and St John's colleges in Oxford, and the universities of Bristol, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Manchester, and Nottingham – in investigating their complex histories. Numerous American universities have conducted such projects too, such as Brown, the College of William and Mary, Georgetown, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, and Yale universities. Though these studies concentrate on the economics of enslavement, this book argues that a more holistic historical focus on the social, political, and intellectual life of a town and gown population can better illuminate the vibrant texture of local and regional connections to enslavement and empire, even in predominantly rural and urban areas that were not established along the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean.[7]

Cambridge's past allows one to reconsider, too, how universities made and remade empires. 'The academy', Craig Steven Wilder notes, 'never stood apart from American slavery – in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage'. Despite recent historical efforts, institutional histories of slavery, empire, and its afterlives are often narrated in passive language, with university fellows, lecturers, and students either being the beneficiaries of imperial advancement in white-dominated colonial societies or colluding with enslavers and colonisers to reap profits from plantations, resource extraction, and Indigenous dispossession. The extractive relationships of British universities to land, with Oxford and Cambridge benefitting from aristocratic land grants, were reproduced in the Americas, Australasia, South Africa, and Canada. Universities did far more than benefit from enslavement or government land grants. Cambridge men were, like many university-connected individuals, agents of empire who propagated, defended, and often challenged a violent Atlantic slave imperium. Imperial activities, in turn, enabled university figures to enrich themselves, their families, their institutions, and their intellectual reputations – as fellows and professors highlighted their statuses as distinguished thinkers to make their claims heard both at home and abroad.[8]

Universities, as spaces of interaction for the middling and elite classes, therefore, provide an interesting vantage point on enslavement and its afterlives – a historiography that has grown exponentially in recent decades. Historians have stressed that both the abolition and proslavery movements emerged due to concerns about the state of the British Empire following the American Revolution, with abolitionists fearing that Britain's defeat to the United States, finalised in the Treaty of Paris on 3 September 1783, was a providential sign that

the nation was corrupted because it had kidnapped and trafficked African men, women, and children. On the powerful forces that antislavery activists fought against, scholars have highlighted the influence of the enslaver class, who had the money, connections, positions, and educations to protect their perceived right to human property – and those slaveholders included members of the landed aristocracy, clergymen, college fellows, and merchants. Those historians who have discussed slavery and its legacies often distinguish between *indirect* and *direct* connections to enslavement when considering the extent of Britons' linkages to slavery – between those subjects who purchased slave-made goods, and those individuals and organisations who owned plantations. From the vantage point of Cambridge and its history, Britons' many encounters with enslavement encompassed a more complex and colourful spectrum of local, national, and imperial associations and interconnections, from dining halls to tobacco shops to legal chambers to companies to antislavery and pro-slavery lobby groups.[9]

Since its founding in the Middle Ages, the University of Cambridge has shaped (and been moulded by) events beyond the parish borders – both in England and abroad in continental Europe. Seeking refuge from hostile townsfolk in Oxford, scholars fled that university for the thriving market town of Cambridge in 1209. Whilst situated in a commercial entrepôt, Cambridge had humble beginnings – the first scholars congregated in hostels with a Master. By 1226, the scholars had established a Chancellor and, five years later, King Henry III provided his protection through a royal charter, but with the condition that students enrol under a Master if they were to live in Cambridge.

Operating as small academic communities (a *civitas*), academic studies had two principal international models to draw upon in forming a *stadium generale* (or university): southern Europe's focus on law and medicine at universities like Padua, Siena, and Bologna, or Paris's proclivity for philosophy and theology. The latter model largely won out, and the fourteen- or fifteen-year-old students undertook a broad academic programme including grammar, logic, rhetoric, music, arithmetic, and astronomy which was heavily dependent on Aristotle (or Aristotle as interpreted in Christian commentaries, such as those by the Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas). From a foundation in the "arts," students could become doctors in divinity or canon and civil law.[10]

As undergraduate studies took form and function, academic officials and systems of governance were institutionalised. The system of matriculation was invented (so called because students were entered on a master's *matricula* or roll), caps and gowns differentiated degrees, Proctors were appointed to safeguard the University's accounts, valuable treasures, and books and manuscripts, and graduation ceremonies took form. Universities had a unique position in England. Robert Anderson argues that since 'state and church were often in conflict, the universities could carve out space between them… not

subject to the direct control of the local bishops, whilst in the secular world they enjoyed autonomy and privilege as property-owning corporate bodies with their own legal rights' – rights that 'lasted well into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.[11]

Economics, not just academics, enabled Cambridge's rise to prominence and pre-eminence in England. Derived from the Middle English for "passage" or "ford," Cambridge (or Granta Bridge, as it was once known) was a major centre of communications in the Kingdom of England and a clearing house for corn, fish, poultry, cheese, reeds, and oils. The Cam was a major arterial route – so much so that one public orator in 1620 called it 'our river… [the] means of which we enjoy the wealth of the neighbouring country'. The draining of the fens, though resisted by many surrounding farmers and townsfolk, did not significantly harm the region's significance because of its geographical position (though Christians had severely damaged the town's social fabric centuries prior when the Christian inhabitants had expropriated, murdered, and expelled Cambridge's Jewish population after 1275). Of the four trade fairs, Stourbridge Fair was perhaps the largest and most famous in Europe and attracted traders ranging from cabinetmakers to milliners to perfumers. The fairs were a riotous occasion, with music booths established performing operas and instrumental compositions – but the fair's attendees were safe in the knowledge that the charters of 1268 and 1382 had instituted two aldermen, four burgesses, and a mayor and bailiff to keep the peace (subject to annual elections). After the festivities, the town market provided another avenue for dealers to sell their wares, including book traders who congregated around the Church of St Mary the Great, the University's Church (and the host for academic meetings and debates before the erection of the Senate House in 1730). The population grew in line with the trader's profit margins – from 6,490 inhabitants in 1587 (including 1,500 University members) to 7,778 in 1728 (with 100 college servants and 1,499 full University members). From 1801 to 1951, the population exploded again from 10,087 people to an estimated 91,170 residents. Granted in 1575, the coat of arms of the City of Cambridge paid tribute to the region's trading connections, with three ships with furled sails on a river.[12]

Medieval and early modern Cambridge were far from insular ivory towers, therefore. Few students from abroad initially attended, but the University remained committed to educating the servants of the state from its inception, including lawyers, priests, and schoolteachers. After Henry VIII's excommunication from the Catholic Church, the Renaissance prince required conformity and loyalty from the universities (as he did his chief ministers) – and that policy necessitated dramatic changes to the curriculum. The Queens' College fellow Erasmus inspired enthusiasm for classical humanism, or the *studia humanitatis* – with Aristotle now taught amongst a wide range of ancient authorities (such as the Roman statesman and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero) in languages ranging from Hebrew to Latin to Greek. Alongside welcome

changes to the curriculum, sixteenth-century Cambridge experienced equally intense shifts in its academic structure, with canon law, the medieval church authorities, and the rule of the masters the targets of Henry's ire. Bending the University to his will, Henry created five "regius" professors from civil law to medicine (and thereby challenged the Master's rule).

Universities were also fertile ground for new investigations into natural philosophy and modern languages. The liberal arts were ascendant, and the universities became finishing schools for the upper classes, providing a common language of discussion and debate for England's elite. Though the universities would be reformed in the nineteenth century (and enrolments fell precipitously in the eighteenth century), the political economist Adam Smith, an alumnus of the universities of Glasgow and Oxford, judged the two ancient English universities too harshly. He commented that the 'present state of degradation and contempt' with which universities were regarded had much to do with professors, lecturers, and tutors, who, rather than 'being paid by voluntary contributions, which would urge them to increase the number, and to deserve the gratitude of their pupils, the Oxford professors are secure in the enjoyment of a fixed stipend, without the necessity of labour, or the apprehension of control'. Edward Gibbon was more scathing, writing that the 'schools of Oxford and Cambridge were founded in a dark age of false and barbarous science; and they are still tainted with the vices of their origin'. That declension narrative, which historians have since challenged, ignores the vibrancy of academic thought in this era.[13]

Given Cambridge's national and regional significance, it was almost inescapable that the University's intellectual life would become intertwined with England's slave empire. At first, English colonisation was essentially outsourced to companies that sought to acquire resources with the assistance of investors. Chartered by King James I on 10 April 1606, the Virginia Company of London was one of two companies, alongside the Virginia Company of Plymouth, that controlled the North American coast. The first would settle all land that stood between 34- and 41-degrees latitude (from Cape Fear in modern-day North Carolina to the Long Island Sound near contemporary New York), and the second occupied the territory between Nova Scotia and the upper Chesapeake. Yet the Virginia Company was joined by other such enterprises: arriving on 14 May 1625, the colonisation of Barbados was financed by Sir William Courten, a City of London merchant, with the colony exporting goods worth almost £285,000 – twice that of other English colonies – forty years later. Whether they travelled to Barbados or Virginia, the first white colonists were company men, but the original "planters," who were tasked with growing and producing goods that could be sent back to Europe, outlived and outgrew their fledgling employers.[14]

From the mid 1640s in Barbados, the growing population of landed enslavers developed a new system of *integrated* plantation management that dwarfed the *latifundium*, the Roman agricultural estates that depended on enslavement for the

production and harvesting of wine, olive oil, and grain in antiquity. Designed as intricate forced labour camps, the plantations had all the components of the supply chain – from the growth of sugar and tobacco (the two most profitable crops in the British Atlantic) to its processing and sale – situated on the estate, rather than dividing these activities into separate operations. The estates had systems of double-entry bookkeeping and carefully tabulated records on debts, produce, and the names, ages, and occupations of the enslaved workforce. The plantations had to be organised because their activities were complex, time consuming, and uncertain given that tropical storms, earthquakes, fires, enslaved uprisings, or European conflicts regularly impacted regional and transatlantic supply chains. Sugar, for instance, had to be grown, planted, harvested, transported to mills where it would be processed, and then processed and distilled into rum or other byproducts.[15]

To hedge against these uncertainties, enslavers engaged in both vertical *and* horizontal integration: the accumulation of rival plantations and capital by a growing slaver aristocracy, and that merger movement precipitated an extraordinary transformation in plantation life. By 1774, a white Caribbean colonist was, on average, ten times richer than that of mainland North America; and in Jamaica (the richest British colony), the average wealth of its free residents was three times that of the average Englishman or Welshman. Alongside the growing numbers of European colonists who searched for fame and fortune in Britain's twenty-six American colonies, the enslavers brought enslaved Native Americans and, in greater numbers, West Africans to labour on the plantations. Whilst free white and Black Jamaicans were on a parity in 1673, enslaved Africans constituted around ninety per cent of the population less than a century later. Extraordinary fortunes could be earned on the American mainland too. For instance, over the course of his life, the Virginia-born George Washington, the first President of the United States, owned 45,000 acres of prime real estate in Indian country, a plantation, and had investments in land and canal companies.[16]

Colonists supplied the land, and transatlantic traders in enslaved Africans, whether state-backed companies or independent partnerships, provided the labour. At first, the Empire's labour supply was predicated, in part, on Native American enslavement, with the colonies of New England, Virginia, and South Carolina dependent on enslaving Indigenous captives, who were traded or captured in colonial conflicts, such as Metacom and Weetamoo's War (1675–78), where many Wampanoag were forced into slavery following their defeat (including Metacom's nine-year-old son who was captured and trafficked to the Caribbean). The status quo of Indian enslavement soon shifted, however, as rampant diseases, such as smallpox, and conflict turned the slave-traders' avaricious gaze to West Africa's shores. Estimates are often updated to account for new information and archival findings; still, historians estimate that 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped and trafficked, and 10.7 million men, women, and children survived the journey from their capture

in regions such as Senegambia and west-central Africa to their arrival in the "New World." Marched overland from the African interior to coastal ports and forts, slave-traders stripped people of their clothing, which ranged from woven robes or gowns to sarongs and loincloths, and (just as forcibly) their names and identities.[17]

The English and then, following that kingdom's union with Scotland in 1707, the *British* Empire joined the Dutch West India Company in establishing powerful monopolistic slave-trading companies. The Royal African Company (RAC) was the most prolific transatlantic slaving enterprise in world history, trafficking 186,286 Africans to the Caribbean – and the relentless pursuit of profit sparked regional conflicts, with the Komenda Wars fought between 1694 and 1700 as the English and Dutch struggled for supremacy over trading rights (conflicts where African kingdoms, like the Equafo, acted as kingmakers). The RAC was not alone: founded in 1600 to trade from the Cape of Good Hope to west of the Straits of Magellan, the East India Company (EIC) trafficked between 10 and 13,000 Madagascans across the Indian Ocean from its inception to 1834, when it was forced to end the practice after the controversial firm had been found to be illegally trading West Africans. The British did not start the transatlantic trade, yet they had more than made up for lost time in becoming one of the leading traders in enslaved Africans.[18]

The South Sea Company (SSC) was particularly notable because of the predilection of students, fellows, and colleges for purchasing its securities (as Sabine Cadeau will prove in her forthcoming systematic analysis of Cambridge's finances). Established by Robert Harley, the then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 1711 to restructure the national debt and expand Britain's trading empire, the Company realised its ambitions in the 'Negro trade' after the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht granted Britain a monopoly to operate in the Spanish Americas. From its inception, Harley and his allies marketed the Company to prospective investors as a slave-trading firm, and, from 1714 to 1740, the SSC transported more than 75,000 enslaved people from Africa and the British Caribbean to the Spanish Americas. Planning for strong returns from slaving and mercantile trading, the SSC's trading stock (and, later, annuities, which were essentially government bonds) were an immensely popular security with private and institutional investors, including monarchs, the Church of England, colleges, universities, hospitals, and other charities. For a prospective British investor, the SSC appeared to be a sure bet: the Company had an element of risk diversification built into its structure because the government paid the firm a fee each year for managing a portion of the national debt, and investors would share slave-trading profits if that ambitious venture was successful. To some, Helen Paul argues, the purchase of Company stock was 'akin to buying a lottery ticket with the small chance of winning a large jackpot'. The jackpot, investors believed, was considerable: the 'lessening of Public Debts', officials acknowledged, would be achieved through the South Sea enterprise

'Ingaging in Sundry Trades', one of which included the 'Advantages that may arise to Great Britain by the Assiento for Negroes' – a sum that was (fancifully) estimated to be around £455,000 a year for 'import[ing]' 4,800 enslaved people. The South Sea enterprise was more than a case study the dizzying animal spirits of the stock market (at one point the price rocketed to £1,050 at the end of June 1720 before crashing). The firm was integral to Britain's ambitions of a slave-trading empire.[19]

Whether South Sea, Royal African, or East India Company vessels, the conditions on slave ships were appalling, with men, women, and children separated and forced to crouch or lie down below deck so that the ships could be packed with captives. Secured by irons, the heat was unrelenting and unbearable, food scarce, and diseases such as dysentery and smallpox were commonplace. Insurrections were a particular threat to the sailors: in 1729, African captives aboard the *Clare* drove the crew from the vessel, landing and liberating themselves near Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast (in modern-day Ghana). Mutinies resulted in fires or explosions – the captives, it appeared, were determined to drag their floating prison to the ocean's depths rather than face a lifetime in bondage. Just as often, enslaved people chose death by suicide, with many captives strangling or stabbing themselves, refusing medicine, or jumping overboard to escape their bondage. In a rather futile and desperate effort to control their captives, white traders distributed tobacco – called 'refreshment' – to their captives. One French slaver even devised a weekly schedule of when the tobacco would be distributed, how much was to be provided, and who was to receive that product. The business of slave-trading, as Nicholas Radburn has shown, was profitable and adaptable, even to antislavery efforts to ameliorate conditions – in fact, the Dolben Act of 1788, which Parliament instituted to curb overcrowding on slave ships halved death rates and thereby 'improved the efficiency of slave traders' businesses'. Though dehumanised as property, Africans smuggled jewellery, pipes, musical instruments, and gaming materials to the plantations, and maintained their families, languages, cultures, and religious traditions.[20]

Resistance to racial enslavement, whether on slave ships or in contemporary writings, predated the late eighteenth-century abolition movement. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have debated slaveholding, more broadly, for millennia. (Gregory of Nyssa asked: 'But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God's?') The debate escalated after racialised distinctions started to become more pivotal in the New World in defining who was enslaved or free in the early modern era. From the sixteenth century, Spanish theologians from Salamanca, such as Bartolomé de las Casas and Francisco Vittoria, denounced Native American enslavement, which colonists had justified on the grounds of paganism (a legal principle that the great Elizabethan jurist Sir Edward Coke utilised in drafting the *Lawes of Virginia* for the Virginia Company). English colonists and missionaries, including Morgan

Godwyn, George Keith, and Samuel Sewall, also attacked African enslavement in sermons and pamphlets from the end of the seventeenth century. European pamphleteering is a limited understanding of antislavery activism, though. Since Euro-American colonisation began, Africans and Native Americans have resisted captivity, petitioned religious organisations such as the Vatican to end the slave trade, published treatises calling for African nations to be recognised as sovereign countries, and engaged in more localised forms of protest – running away, breaking tools, poisoning and killing enslavers and overseers, and interfering with crops – or they have triggered larger enslaved uprisings, with one of the earliest recorded revolts taking place in Santo Domingo in 1521.[21]

Christians did not monopolise writings on enslavement either – in 1614, the Berber writer Ahmad Baba al-Timbukti argued that neither Muslims nor the subjects of Muslim states could be enslaved, and especially not on racial grounds. The Berber scholar, who favoured enslavement predicated on religious belief, recognised the pernicious radicalism of racial slavery: that the belief that one's skin colour and ethnicity was a strict determinant of one's enslavement and freedom was a recent innovation in the seventeenth century. Though religion determined enslavement in the Islamic Middle East and was there more of 'sociocultural significance' than a mechanism for profiteering, the European model of racial enslavement created what historian David Brion Davis calls 'the most extreme and systematic form of personal domination, dishonor, dehumanization, and economic exploitation, a form of domination and exploitation that became a model, in the eyes of successive generations of liberationists, for all Western and white male imperialism'.[22]

Branding was integral to the process of transforming human beings into racial capital that could be transported, purchased and sold, or bequeathed in wills and marriage contracts. The act of branding to indicate ownership or punish resistant enslaved people was practiced in antiquity, yet as enslaved individuals moved between slave-traders, mercantile agents and shipowners these American enslavers added additional brands, identifying, for instance, whether export duties had been paid. Branding had become an important tool in the transmutation of human beings into a marketable commodity. On the West African coast, many of those enslaved by the Royal African Company were marked "DY" for James II, the Duke of York – an indelible tie between the monarchy and enslavement. The South Sea Company proposed branding to discourage theft of their valuable captives awaiting transportation. Their Court of Directors wrote that 'The Mark A' – after *Assiento*, the name for the monopoly contract that the Company had with the Spanish Crown – 'we approve of, and hope it will answer the ends proposed'. They specified that the enslaved be marked 'on the left shoulder, heating the mark red hot and rubbing the part first with a little palm or other oil' – a rather gruesome and unimaginably painful practice common amongst European enslavers.[23]

Branded as property, the enslaved were treated as such on the North American and Caribbean plantations. Thomas Thistlewood, a white Jamaican

enslaver who regularly sexually assaulted and tortured his workers, was no outlier – he was a well-respected Briton living amongst whites who responded to small infringements, such as starving enslaved people eating sugar cane, with floggings and humiliating punishments. For more significant acts of resistance, enslaved Africans were burnt at the stake, had their arms cut off for raising 'it against a white person', and were quartered and had their corpses chained to trees for killing overseers. Those forms of 'spectacular terror' helped to enforce white enslaver rule over Black majority populations.[24]

Enslavers justified their treatment of Black people through a complex amalgamation of racial ideas. By 1603, when William Shakespeare penned *Othello*, English peoples had access to numerous sources of information on the African continent and its inhabitants that, Virginia and Alden Vaughan argue, 'portrayed African skin as unattractive and, in some texts, as the stigma of divine punishment'. Shakespeare had made Othello the hero, but still compared him to whites – 'Your son-in-law is far more fair than black' – and had other characters denounce him as 'an old black ram' or 'the devil'. Travel narratives, stories and fiction, and the Bible, therefore, were as significant as scientific discourse – at least for poorer enslavers who did not have access to such tomes – in marking Black people (and Native Americans) as degenerated "savages" and evil "heathens," who the European colonists were justified in conquering and enslaving en-masse. As one female American observer commented, slavers 'sought their code of morality in the Bible, and there imagined they found this hapless race condemned to perpetual slavery'. Religious justifications for enslavement became intertwined with more powerful racial attack on Africans, as white colonists erroneously associated the Biblical Curse of Ham myth (see Chapter 3 for further details) with Black skin and thereby argued that Africans were condemned to enslavement from birth.[25]

Enslavers also published literature defending their racial attitudes regarding the African people that they denigrated as "negroes" and "negresses." In Edward Long's 1774 *History of Jamaica*, he maintained that Africans were 'savage[s]' who must 'be managed at first as if they were beasts; they must be tamed, before they can be treated like men'. One Saint-Domingue plantation manual, published in English in 1798, also stated that the "negroe" is 'docile and timid, and because he never thinks of a better condition than what he actually enjoys, unless the thought, as well as the means of attaining, is forced upon his observation… [a] creature whom we are forced to keep in his *natural* state of thraldom, in order to obtain from him the requisite services'. It was the planter's obligation and duty, the manual read, to 'exact from the negroe all the work he can reasonably perform, and use every means to prolong his life'. Whether they assumed that racial difference was environmental (derived from differences in temperature and climate) or inherited (due to differences in blood, anatomy, or skull shape), many whites agreed that that Black people were naturally subservient and therefore naturally suited to their perpetual enslavement.[26]

From weights and scales to chiming bells, the enslavers transformed innocuous objects into powerful tools to stigmatise people as property. Enslaved people were weighed when they were bought or sold at the slave market. Olaudah Equiano, a formerly enslaved man and a leading British abolitionist, remembered that he had 'often seen slaves… in different islands, put into scales and weighed; and then sold from three pence to six pence or nine pence a pound'. Sold by the 'lump', as Equiano described these auctions, husbands were taken from wives (and vice versa), and children from their parents. Timekeeping was crucial to controlling these gang labourers. If you were transported to the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century North American plantations, you would hear the ringing of bells that were used to regulate the dawn-till-dusk workday. Charley Williams, who laboured on a Louisiana cotton plantation, remembered: 'you can hear an old bell donging way on some plantation a mile or two off, and then more bells at other places and maybe a horn… Bells and horns! Bells for this and horns for that! All we knowed was [to] go and come by the bells and horns!' St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, owned one of these bells, inscribed 'DE CATHARINA 1772,' which was donated by a former student who had found it on a sugar estate in British Guiana. Drums were another instrument of plantation timekeeping, though white enslavers heard that sound with a degree of trepidation as its distant rumble often signalled an enslaved insurrection.[27]

Slavery and colonialism underpinned Europe's prosperous consumer economies, even as enslaved people often starved on the plantations in times of drought or war. To keep up with demand, enslavers dedicated vast tracks of land to mass plantation agriculture, devastating soil and vegetation to make room for their estates and livestock. The British Atlantic's 'ghost acres' – the sugar produced in the Caribbean, the timber from Canada and Sierra Leone, meat and dairy from Ireland, and cotton from the southern United States – allowed Britain and other European empires to consume, produce, and grow in population far more than the meagre size of their metropolitan territorial landholdings would suggest. Slavery alone did not alone drive Britain's long term economic growth, yet the historians Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson argue that enslavement was 'formative in the timing and nature of Britain's industrial transition'. Aside from cotton, tobacco, indigo, sugar, and rice, mahogany furniture – "mahogany" being derived from the Yoruba word "M'Oganwo" – was produced with enslaved-harvested wood. Trade goods and sundries such as sugar, tobacco, and mahogany found their way into the University's dining halls and living quarters. In October 1762, Thomas Chapman, the Master of Magdalene, left an extensive inventory of his college lodge, which recorded numerous mahogany tables, chairs, and basons. Upon entering the dining room, the guests also enjoyed 'four Tea and Sugar Canisters'.[28]

The age of revolutions did not halt these slaving operations in the Americas. The American Revolution had a Janus-faced impact on slaveholding, with at

least thirty-eight slaveholders signing the Declaration of Independence from Britain. In fact, Robert Parkinson argues that wartime consensus building for white Americans was, in part, based upon fear of enslaved African Americans and Native Americans. On the other hand, though, Black and white abolitionists also took advantage of the revolutionary moment to abolish enslavement in all states north of Maryland between 1777 and 1804. The Haitian Revolution, whose Black participants demolished the plantation regime, expelled the enslaver class, and defeated the numerous imperial armies (including the British), had unintended consequences. The United States purchased Louisiana in 1804 (with Napoleon Bonaparte using that money to fund his European conflicts), thereby fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's dream of creating an 'Empire of Liberty' in the south and west. Though Jefferson and his contemporaries thought that enslavement would die of its own accord, that hope was unfortunately misplaced. After Eli Whitney invented and patented the "cotton gin" in 1794 (a wooden drum with interchangeable parts that efficiently cleaned seeds from that crop's fiber), the deep south became a "cotton kingdom" – a vast, immensely profitable territory that stretched from Alabama to Texas.[29]

Whitney had created the "gin" (or engine) as a labour-saving tool for the enslaved, but the device facilitated a dramatic expansion in slavery – and US congressmen soon struggled to reconcile the question of western colonisation with whether these new, fledgling states would be free or enslaver societies. The cotton empire was America's 'second slavery', and there were noticeable continuities with the first European plantations: the cotton estates were as commercialised as the original tobacco farms, which were gradually replaced due to increasing costs and degrading soil. This world was governed, in part, by the cotton scale. Weighing time was filled with anxiety as enslaved people tried to avoid the wrath of a whip-wielding overseer. An ordinary day's work was measured at 150 pounds a day. A survivor of slavery stated: 'No matter how fatigued and weary he may be – no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest – a slave never approaches the [cotton] gin house with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight – if he has not performed the full task appointed him, he knows that he must suffer'. To meet their workload, the enslaved replaced their baskets with others already weighed, and discreetly added cotton or dirt and rocks to their baskets. Despite their efforts at subterfuge and sabotage, the overseers made them 'try it over several times and weighing what cotton they pick every night, the overseer can tell just how much every hand can pick. He then gives the present to those that pick the most cotton, and then if they do not pick just as much afterward they are flogged'. If enslavers were not present for this spectacle, these weights were a constant reminder of their presence and the demands that whites placed on the enslaved. It was this world that the Confederate States of America defended in the American Civil War.[30]

The "age of abolition" was, of course, beset with complications and contradictions too. The abolition of the slave trade did not herald the downfall of plantation slavery, as some abolitionists had hoped – indeed, some plantation owners welcomed abolition. In an April 1818 missive to his sister, a Jamaican enslaver acknowledged that he was 'no friend to the slave trade, it is certainly an infamous traf[f]ick – the Negroes here, are on the whole a happy people, and since the non-importation of Africans, they are greatly improved, more intelligent, more domesticated. – They have also in great measure got rid of that religious fanaticism, which at one time overwhelmed & evinced them'. Slavers hoped that abolition would reinvigorate the plantation system, and the writer proudly observed that his family were 'now very anxious to purchase a Property here, and all his friends are actually on the look out for him'. (The rising price of sugar was another cause for optimism.) The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 did not end coerced labour, with enslaved people below the age of six freed and the rest designated as "apprentices," who were abused until these schemes were abolished in stages from 1 August 1838.[31]

That process came to an end throughout the British Empire in 1843 (the East India Company was initially excluded from the law ending apprenticeships). Having raised £20 million through borrowing or investments in government stock, the British compensated former slaveholders and plantation mortgagees, including Cambridge fellows, masters, and alumni. These compensation claims were awarded around the same time as English merchants and mining companies entered the Brazilian market, with British enslavers operating there until abolition in 1888. To restock their colonies with labourers, however, Britons also relied on new forms of coerced labour to work the sugar plantations that had enslaved Black labourers. Derided as "coolies," Britain trafficked and transported around 2.5 million indentured workers of South Asian or East Asian descent to colonies including Jamaica, Guyana, Malaya, New South Wales, and Fiji, with that system – which many historians call "neo-slavery" – persisting from 1838 until 1922. This system was not unprecedented within the Americas, with many free African Americans – liberated after the Thirteenth Amendment – imprisoned and forced work as convict labourers. The much-heralded age of abolition was an era of forced labour and mass-enslavement too.[32]

The thematic chapters that follow explore the University of Cambridge's entanglement with Atlantic slavery, colonialism, and the plantation system. The first chapter begins from the bottom-up, looking at undergraduates and their personal connections to the fellowship (fellows being the senior administrative and academic members of colleges). Students, the men (at this time) who made the University function, are the perfect place to start a story concerning Cambridge's connections to slavery because their experiences illustrate the fact that slaveholders, far from operating at the peripheries, were prominent (and sometimes pre-eminent) in the halls and rooms of one of Britain's

most prestigious intellectual institutions. Cambridge fellows, in turn, facilitated these transatlantic connections for the betterment of the University and Britain. The story begins with the backgrounds and motivations of enslavers for sending their children abroad for a costly and (potentially, given the dangers of smallpox and hard drinking) deadly education. Following this discussion, the chapter examines the close relationships between fellows and students, with enslavers appointing chaperones – or "superintendents" – as go-betweens for colleges and the young attendees. Although the students examined did not all come from vast fortunes, the discussion will focus on the wealth streams that flowed into Cambridge, as these students spent significant sums on the trappings of metropolitan life. The impact of American independence will then be assessed, proving that, although horror stories about students run amok in Cambridge convinced some to avoid a British education, men with connections to the transatlantic economy continued to see the universities as a necessary pathway to joining the imperial elite.

Turning from the undergraduate community to the fellows, lecturers, and masters, the following two chapters detail how the Cambridge-educated professional classes – the clergymen, natural philosophers, and lawyers – helped to develop the ideological underpinnings of the English and British Empires. Inspired by the colonisation of Ireland, Cambridge fellows served on, invested in, and defended the Virginia Company and its offshoots. From New England to Guinea, Cambridge men promoted the empire through sermons, corporate charters, pamphlets selling these enterprises to potential investors, and legal documents. The University of Cambridge soon became a hub of missionary Anglicanism, with fellows supporting, through their purses and pamphlets, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and its efforts to Christianise enslaved Africans. Natural scientists soon followed the clergymen. Cambridge botanists, geologists, and astronomers, including John Woodward (who did not attend the University but donated his sizeable geological collection to establish the Museum of Earth Sciences), had longstanding connections to slave-traders and depended upon North American and Caribbean slave societies for a significant proportion of their foreign collections. Cambridge men received donations from Caribbean enslavers who used enslaved Africans to collect plants, rocks, and other flora and fauna – ensuring that the University's rich scientific past had an unrecognised linkage to enslavement. At the same time, Cambridge-educated lawyers and jurists, including Sir Nathaniel Lloyd – a judge advocate, the King's legal advisor and a significant benefactor – and Professor Thomas Rutherforth, were involved in the day-to-day legal operations of slavery and the articulation of its theoretical and ideological foundations in the law.

The fourth and fifth chapters explore how Cambridge students, fellows, and alumni sought to defend, reform, or demolish outright the foundations of Britain's slave empire. In the historical literature and public memory,

Cambridge remains associated with abolitionism, particularly the work of Clarkson, Peckard, and Wilberforce. Still, this approach is limited for numerous reasons: it idolises three men (whilst forgetting the numerous white and Black activists who advocated for change); that simplistic history ignores the abolitionists' arguments, which were arrayed along a spectrum of competing approaches to ending or reforming the slave trade and enslavement; it forgets the significant role of Cambridge men, such as the former Trinity fellow Stephen Fuller, in the proslavery lobby; this story omits the personal and familial relationships of abolitionists to the plantation regime, with a number of antislavery activists either being descended from slaveholders or financially benefitting from the institution; and histories of Cambridge focus on abolishing the slave trade, with no attention paid to how the activism of fellows or undergraduates continued, shifted, or ended once the debate over the slave trade changed to a much broader conversation over the abolition of slavery. From reading pamphlets, newspapers, subscription books, broadsides, letters, and petitions, Cambridge was neither a bastion of human rights nor a breeding ground for proslavery activists – it was a community and academic institution as torn as any in Britain or North America over whether to abolish, ameliorate, or defend slavery, and Cambridge abolitionists were divided over whether the paths of immediate or gradual abolition should be taken to halt the plantation machine. Given the deep personal, economic, and intellectual connections between these Cambridge men, histories of abolitionism, amelioration, and proslavery cannot – and should not – be understood as separate movements – each were born from a deep commitment to preserving, spreading, and defending British imperial rule.

On 1 August 1838, freedom was granted to formerly enslaved people in the British Caribbean, but, as the sixth chapter argues, Cambridge men remained committed to either abolishing or defending the plantation regime and the planter class in the United States. From the Jesus fellow Edward Strutt Abdy to the Queens' alumnus Alexander Crummell, the University educated prominent abolitionists who worked within and with American antislavery organisations and Black missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Nevertheless, Abdy and Crummell's enslaver opponents remained powerful within and beyond Cambridge. As with the abolition of British slavery, then, Cambridge was no outlier on the question of African American enslavement – town and gown reflected Britain's politics and prejudices. Pro-Union observers who travelled to the University learned that fact upon arrival. On hearing lectures and student debates, Americans were worried about the strength of pro-Confederate opinion there given that Cambridge was an educator of Britain's governing class – a fact that the white-supremacist Confederates were keenly aware of at the time. Confederate propagandists, such as Henry Hotze, targeted Cambridge students and fellows – many of whom had parents or family members with previous ties to the plantations – as potential recruits to spread Southern opinion

in Britain. Even after the guns fell silent and peace was negotiated between the generals Ulysses S. Grant of the Union and Robert E. Lee of the Confederacy at Appomattox Court House in Virginia on 9 April 1865, Cambridge educators facilitated the safe arrival of former Confederates and donated to institutions predicated on defending white rule in the South. The story of American slavery and freedom at Cambridge illuminates the enduring significance of university men to imperial discussions and debates. As Britain's slave empire fell, Cambridge men became committed to defending a southern empire predicated on white rule and cotton plantation agriculture.