Calculating a life

Citation for published version:
Jeacle, I 2022, 'Calculating a life: Classification, valuation and compensation in the British abolition of slavery', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-01-2021-5087

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1108/AAAJ-01-2021-5087

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Published In:
Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal

Calculating a life: Classification, valuation and compensation in the British abolition of slavery

Journal:	*Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*
Manuscript ID	AAAJ-01-2021-5087.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Article
Keywords:	slavery, valuation, value, classification, compensation, strategic action field

Calculating a life: Classification, valuation and compensation in the British abolition of slavery

Purpose

This paper examines the calculative practices used by the Slave Compensation Commission to value a slave for the purposes of compensating slave owners on the abolishment of slavery across the British colonies in 1833. It contributes to accounting research in the field of valuation, particularly to understanding the practices of valuing human life.

Methodology

The methodology is primarily archival and draws on the records of the Slave Compensation Commission held at the British National Archives (Kew).

Findings

The paper makes two contributions to the literature. First, it contributes to the valuation studies literature by suggesting the significance of understanding the practice of valuation as a product of the dynamics of strategic action fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Second, it contributes to the theory of strategic action fields by revealing the role of calculative technologies in supporting the organizational apparatus of valuation within the Slave Compensation Commission, and therefore suggests the powerful role of accounting in stabilizing a strategic action field.

Originality

The paper provides novel insights on the monetary commensuration of life and the role of calculative technologies in that valuation process.

Keywords: classification, compensation, slavery, strategic action fields, valuation, value

Article classification: Research paper

1. Introduction

In 1833 the British government approved one of the largest compensation awards in its history. As part of the legislation that abolished slavery throughout nineteen British colonies, the government agreed to a £20 million pound compensation package to slave owners. This was a vast sum, representing 40% of gross government revenue, and payable at a time when the national debt was £800 million (Butler, 1995, p.35). In making this award, the British government effectively acknowledged the rights of slave owners to their property in men, women and children and in distributing this compensation they had to place a value on such 'assets'. The apparatus of valuing these slaves is the focus of this paper. As such the paper seeks to contribute to a burgeoning research in the field of valuation. Practices of valuation are attracting increasing scholarly interest across the social sciences (Kjellberg et al 2013; Lamont, 2012). Indeed, as Boltanski and Esquerre (2015, p.75) aptly observe, valuation has become a "trending topic". Such interest is an important recognition of the significance of practices of valuation in everyday life (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013). It is also an attempt to redress the academic neglect of valuation as a social practice and to ensure that a plurality of perspectives is heard, not just one centred in economic criteria (Haywood, 2014).

Accounting research has started to make an important contribution to our understanding of valuation practices (Coslor, 2016; Crepaz et al, 2016; Plante et al, 2021; Svetlova, 2016). Together with other calculative technologies, accounting plays a role in promoting and reproducing notions of worth and is often enrolled to legitimate valuation judgements (Mennicken and Power, 2015). Calculative practices can also be an integral part of the apparatus of valuation, "the concrete web of rules, instruments, routines, and devices engaged in valuation" (Kjellberg et al, 2013, p.22).

The Slave Compensation Commission, established to distribute the £20 million compensation to slave owners, provides an illustrative example of such an organizational apparatus of valuation. With recourse to thousands of slave sale transactions, market prices of slaves, and registers of slave numbers, the Commission engaged in the enormous task of constructing average slave values for multiple classifications of slave labour throughout the British colonies. What is interesting from a valuation perspective is that these calculations were a product of much more than economic data; the history of slave compensation is bound up with political wrangling, moral outrage, and strategies of manipulation and appeasement. Hence through an examination of the archive of the Slave Compensation Commission (held in the British National Archives at Kew) this paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of the role of calculative technologies in the process of valuation, and in particular, the monetary valuation of life.

The paper is theoretically informed by Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields. With the exception of Spence et al (2017), Modell and Yang (2018) and De Wit and Oats (2022), this theory has been rarely used within accounting scholarship, and even less so within valuation studies. Applying the framework to the valuation practices of the Slave Compensation Commission, provides a new understanding of the practice of valuation. Viewing values as a product of strategic action fields suggests that valuation is influenced by an array of factors such as the interactions between fields (state and non-state), the roles of incumbents and challengers within a field, the impact of exogenous shocks to a field, and the process of field settlement after a crisis. In particular, the paper highlights the significance of Internal Governance Units (a core feature of the theory of strategic action fields) to the practice of valuation. The first contribution of this paper is therefore to suggest the significance of understanding the practice of valuation as a product of the dynamics of strategic action fields.

In addition to contributing to the field of valuation studies, a further contribution of the paper is to enhance Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields by suggesting the powerful role of accounting in stabilizing a strategic action field. In revealing the role of calculative technologies in supporting the organizational apparatus of valuation within the Slave Compensation Commission, the paper provides new insights into the workings of Internal Governance Units (a particular feature of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields) and hence the role of calculative infrastructures in the field stabilizing operations of those units.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 contains two subsections, the first of which provides an overview of the sociology of valuation literature and the accounting studies on valuation. The second subsection summaries the literatures on accounting and slavery and accounting for people, both of which have addressed the issue of valuing human life. Section 3 presents the paper's theoretical framework: Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields. Section 4 explains the paper's methodology, outlining the archival sources consulted for the study: the records of the Slave Compensation Commission held at the National Archives (Kew) and the selection criteria for key secondary sources. Section 5 provides the historical context to the abolition of slavery and the political debates over the issue of compensation for slave owners. Section 6 examines the calculative apparatus of compensation which calculated an average value per slave and a classification of slave labour across every British colony. Section 7 discusses the practice of slave valuation and sets out the paper's two contributions: (1) the potential of viewing the practice of valuation as a product of the dynamics of strategic action fields and (2) the role of calculative infrastructures in stabilizing a strategic action field. Section 8 contains some concluding comments.

2. The sociology of valuation

How values are established and negotiated has become a popular topic of scholarly conversation across the social sciences in recent years (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013, p.3). Examples of such research interest include the launch of a new journal devoted to the theme (*Valuation Studies*) together with journal special issues and edited book volumes[1]. This new sociology of valuation and evaluation (Lamont, 2012) is comprised of many theoretical strands and arguments. However, while it is difficult to do justice to the range of nuanced work that is emerging in this field, it is useful to at least capture some of the dominant themes that have been developing in the literature. In particular, four key themes can be identified that are of specific relevance to this study.

First, a central theme in the valuation literature is the significance of classification and categorisation to the practice of valuation. Valuation is an inherently classificatory process which creates hierarchical categories and orders of relationships (Fredriksen, 2017; Kjellberg et al, 2013; Lamont, 2012). A second key premise of the literature is that valuation is a practical activity (Dussauge et al, 2015b; Muniesa, 2011). This practice based view of valuation is based on the work of the American philosopher John Dewey who argued that values are not naturally inherent but rather established in practice (Dewey, 1913; 1939). So the process of valuation creates value (Hutter and Stark, 2015). Third, it is contended that there is a multidimensionality or plurality to valuation. Not surprisingly, alternative value systems can create conflicting values and hence sites of dissonance (ibid.). Recognising the concept of heterarchies and competing orders of worth is therefore a central component to the study of valuation (Stark, 2009). A fourth and final argument within the literature is that the process of valuation itself is heavily inscribed by social and cultural practice (Lamont, 2012). This is not to disregard the importance of the technical economic component of valuation, but rather to also recognise the role of social and cultural values; in other words, an encouragement to adopt a broader sociology of worth (Stark, 2000). Therefore valuation scholars emanating from within the social sciences are critical of the dominant hold that economics has traditionally exerted on notions of value (Haywood, 2014). They are critical of an ideology which has ignored important cultural agendas in explaining practices of valuation (Zelizer, 1994a). As Fourcade (2011a, p.1769) has argued, economic valuation "does not stand outside of society: it incorporates in its very making evaluative frames and judgments that can all be traced back to specific politico-institutional configurations and conflicts."

Such debates and discussions on the topic of valuation are important for a number of reasons. The rise of neoliberalism and the associated role of quantitative measures of worth makes valuation a significant topic of study (Kjellberg et al, 2013; Lamont, 2012). An understanding of value and prices is also particularly important in the wake of the global financial crisis and the dominance of the market (Aspers and Beckert, 2011). As Boltanski and Esquerre (2015, p.76) have noted, the unfolding discourse after this event led to a "sense of crisis in valuation". The ubiquitous nature of valuation practices in everyday life similarly makes their examination consequential. Helgesson and Muniesa (2013) give the example of the valuations inherent in movie review sites which assess and rate popular movies. This form of rating reminds us, the authors argue, that valuation practices create important socio-technical orderings in contemporary society (ibid). Indeed, the issue of valuation seems to be particularly pertinent given the transformative advances in information technology. Practices of measurement and valuation are inherent in the explosion of search engines and data mining (Adkins and Lury, 2011). The study of valuation is also important because it is an activity engaged in by consultants and those who wish to proclaim their professional expertise (Doganova et al, 2014). Thinking about valuation therefore, is not just an academic exercise, it has practical consequences for the world we live in (Kjellberg et al, 2013). Such is the significance of valuation practices argue Cefai et al (2015), that valuation as a subject should not be considered as simply a subdiscipline of sociology, but rather as a perspective that is common to all aspects of the social sciences.

Accounting scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the research field of valuation. This is perhaps not surprising given that calculative infrastructures are generally used to account for what is deemed valuable (Mennicken and Sjögren, 2015). It is useful to remind ourselves here of Miller and Napier's (1993) seminal thesis which argued that the term calculation has a scope far beyond the boundaries of double entry bookkeeping, hence the term aptly captures the diversity of practices that permeate and redefine the accounting discipline. Accounting scholars working in the field of valuation are particularly aware of this broad conception of calculation when considering the practice and process of valuation.

For example, Crepaz et al (2016, p.39) view accounting as a "valuation producing machine". These authors studied the valuation practices used within funding decisions associated with the European Capital of Culture 2010 (Essen and the Ruhr region). In particular, they investigated the role of calculative technologies in deliberations over which artistic ventures were funded in this cultural showcase, arguing that accounting was central to this process, effectively enabling or limiting cultural activity. They draw on Stark's economies of worth and his concept of heterarchies (2009) to explain the multiple and competing principles of valuation at play.

The significance of both economic and non-economic factors in the determination of value has also been noted by other accounting scholars. For example, Svetlova (2016) argues that marketing techniques play as important a role in the valuation of bonds as mathematical models. Similarly, Coslor's (2016) study of valuation practices in the fine art market suggests that a combination of qualitative and quantitative information is used by art experts in the valuation process, while Perkiss and Moerman's (2018) study of climate change induced displacement in the Pacific Islands, considers competing rationales of accountability in an evaluation regime and highlights the importance of recognising alternatives to the traditional economic account. These studies also subscribe to the practice based view of valuation that values are not inherent or natural but rather a product of discursive practice.

The role of classification and categorization within the practice of valuation has also been investigated by accounting scholars. For example, Plante et al (2021) find that categorization is a key component in constructing value in art works. The use of classification within the digital world has similarly provided accounting scholars with an opportunity to understand practices of valuation and evaluation. For example, the role of calculative technologies in the ranking and review mechanisms increasingly used to make evaluations in contemporary society has been the subject of research by Jeacle (2017) and Bialecki et al (2017). Most recently, Begkos and Antonopoulou (2020) have examined the role of performance measurement in the evaluation of digital platform content.

Consequently, accounting scholars are making important contributions to this new research domain by exploring the often fundamental role of accounting and calculative technologies in creating and legitimating values. In terms of the four key themes noted above, the accounting literature on valuation has highlighted the role of calculative technologies in the process of classification, indicated how values are produced in practice, revealed how heterarchies of valuation emerge, and furthered our understanding of the significance of non-economic factors in the determination of value.

2.2 The valuation of life

While recent years have witnessed a growing attention to the topic of valuation amongst accounting scholars, at the same time, an interest in the value of human life is not entirely new within accounting research. In particular, two strands of accounting research have studied the relationship between accounting and human worth.

The first strand of research emerged in the 1970s when a number of studies sought to place a monetary value on human resources (Flamholtz, 1971; Ogan, 1976). Human Resource Accounting, as it was termed, sought to value human resources using either historical costs, replacement costs, or the value of inputs. Human resource accounting measurement systems were developed to place a value on the human capital in the organisation that could then be included in the financial statements (Grove et al, 1977; Marqués, 1976). There was a lull in interest in human resource accounting in the 1980s, but some further important contributions were made in the 1990s and 2000s. For example, Roslender and Dyson (1992) developed the idea of Human Worth Accounting which recognised the importance of non-financial measures in accounting for people. While the noughties witnessed many lively debates on Human Capital Accounting within the Intellectual Capital literature (Roslender and Fincham, 2001). A recent reflection on the state of the field has suggested the potential for future new possibilities in accounting for people research (Flamholtz et al, 2020).

The second significant body of work that has examined the valuation of human life is the historical accounting research on slavery. For example, the monetising of human life is the theme of Fleischman et al's (2004) examination of slave valuation practices by slave owners in the British West Indies and the antebellum US. Slave valuations were generally based on the prices determined at slave market auctions, adjusted for factors such as the particular skill of the slave (e.g. blacksmith, carpenter), their apparent health, gender, and age. Such record keeping was an essential mechanism for absentee plantation owners to oversee their 'assets'. In this manner, slaves were treated like livestock and their perceived lack of humanity valued accordingly (Fleischman and Tyson, 2004). Similarly, Barney and Flesher's (1994) study of an antebellum Mississippi cotton plantation, found that accounting was used to inventor slaves as assets and to measure their productivity.

Oldroyd et al (2008) provide an account of the moral debates and legal discussions that occurred in the British Empire and the antebellum US throughout the 18th century regarding the classification of slaves as economic property. The authors recount the role of accounting in perpetuating this stance by recording humans as the inventory of slave owners, although they do note that accounting's role was not entirely negative in this regard as in order to preserve the value of their 'inventory', slave owners were forced to address the health of their slaves. In the context of Nazi Germany, Lippman and Wilson's (2007) study of slave labour camps revealed that the value of a life was limited to the revenue stream associated with nine months of work, the latter being the expected life span in these brutal conditions, while Funnell's (1998) seminal work noted how accounting numbers were substituted for individuals and hence used to dehumanise the Jewish population. More recently, Rodrigues and Craig's (2018) examination of the institutionalization of slavery in Brazil exposed the role of accounting in construing human slaves as economic commodities.

However there has been little accounting research on the valuation of human life from a sociology of valuation perspective. To date, only two studies have examined this issue. Le Theule et al (2021) explored the differing valuation regimes used in end of life decisions in a French hospital's palliative care unit. Rather depressingly, they find that cost accounting priorities within healthcare have equated the value of a life with concerns over resource allocation. And most recently Jeacle (2022) has examined the gendered nature of valuation practices when examining the compensation for the loss of lives in the Titanic disaster. This paper seeks to contribute to this literature by exploring the role of calculative technologies in the monetary valuation of the life of a slave.

3 Theoretical framing: the theory of strategic action fields

This paper is theoretically informed by Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields. This theory explains how social orders are established and maintained and the role of social actors in achieving stability and change. The concept of a strategic action field lies at the heart of the theory. These are "units of collective action in society" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.9) comprising of actors with a shared understanding of the mission and rules of the field. They emerge when two or more groups start to develop dependent interests and share worldviews. This may happen in the corporate domain (Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.87) give the example of the emergence of the US motor industry in the period 1890-1920) or the emergence may be a product of state intervention.

The dominant actors within a field are the *incumbents*; it is their interests that influence the organization and direction of the field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.13). Socially skilled incumbent actors engage in framing and mobilizing behaviour to ensure the status quo (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.17). By contrast, *challengers* have little power and influence within the field. Challenging a stable strategic action field in which the incumbents have the advantage is highly difficult (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.96). So challengers too must draw upon their social skills to maintain their oppositional position within the field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.202).

A further common feature of a field is an *Internal Governance Unit* (IGU). These units play an important role in ensuring the smooth running and stability of the field, particularly of newly emerged fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.92). They can provide a range of functions such as acting as the external liaison for the field (particularly in relations with state fields), administering the field, providing information both within and outside the field, regulating the conduct of members of the field, enforcing field rules and certifying membership of the field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.78; p.95). Generally the IGU is conservative in nature and will reflect and serve the interests of the incumbents of the field and seek to reproduce that social order (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.14; p.78).

A significant aspect of the theory of strategic action fields is that it not only focuses on what happens within the field but also considers the broader field environment. Each field is situated within a web of other fields. These other fields may be *proximate fields* such that the actions of one regularly affect the other, *distant fields* which have no bearing on the strategic action field in question, or *dependent fields* which are dependent on a strategic action field for perhaps economic resources or legal authority (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.18). Another important field with which a strategic action field will interact is a *state field,* which in itself is situated within a system of interdependent fields. Given their formal power to intervene in the actions of strategic action fields, state fields wield significant influence on the stability of non-state fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.19). Through legislation or official inquires, they can support incumbents in their quest to control fields or they can actively step in to destabilize the field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.77).

Recognition of the broader field environment within which a strategic action field operates allows for an understanding of the interdependency of fields. Any strategic action field will be constantly exposed to "routine, rolling turbulence" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.19) due to changes occurring in other fields. This type of incremental change is a continuous feature of even the most stable of fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.32). Generally these disturbances will have no serious impact on the stability of a strategic action field. Challengers may marginally improve their positions within the field, but the incumbents will withstand the pressure for major change. The latter will rely on the stabilizing role of the field's Internal Governance Units to maintain the status quo internally, and externally they will seek support from their allies in both the state and other nonstate fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.97).

Occasionally, however, the nature of the shock to the strategic action field may be of such magnitude that it completely destabilizes the field. Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.20) refer to these instances as *episodes of contention*. The field enters a state of crisis in which the existing rules governing the field become uncertain and questionable. Incumbents struggle to keep the status quo and will "fight to the bitter end" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.105) to hold onto their power. Meanwhile challengers seek opportunities for advancing their position (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.21). They may even form new alliances with the former allies of the incumbents (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.106). Indeed, during these episodes of contention, even the state field, which generally prefers the stability of the incumbents' status quo, may switch sides and intervene to solve the crisis (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.108).

These shocks usually come from outside the strategic action field, and Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.99-101) identify three particular external sources of field destabilization: (1) invasion by outside groups, such as when a foreign investor enters a previously nationalized industry (2) changes in related fields upon which the strategic action field is dependent, and (3) a large scale macroevent, such as war or depression that destabilizes the broader socio-political environment in which the strategic action field is situated. Ultimately however, in the wake of the crisis, a new order is established, new fields emerge or old ones are transformed or even collapse, and there is *settlement* around respective positions of power once again (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.22-23; p.32). Internal Governance Units can play a central role in enabling a settlement, helping to solve the crisis and secure the stability of the new field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.95).

In summary, Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields is a useful theoretical toolbox for understanding how fields of actors with shared understandings emerge and reproduce the status quo, how new actors can challenge the social order and replace stability with crisis, and how conflict occurs and is settled.

Given the recency of the publication of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields, there has been, not surprisingly, relatively little accounting scholarship that has deployed the theory to date. Notable exceptions are the works of Spence et al (2017), Modell and Yang (2018) and De Wit and Oats (2022). Spence et al (2017) drew upon the theory to understand change in the field of public auditing in Spain. The authors found the theory particularly useful in explaining how the incumbent public audit was challenged by a new entrant in the strategic action field in the shape of a Big 4 firm. Modell and Yang (2018) used the theory to examine governance reforms in Chinese state-owned enterprises. They explain the dynamics of the relationship between the Chinese state and the World Bank as that between incumbents and challengers, and explore how this dynamic influenced governance reforms. They also examined how various regulatory bodies adopted the role of internal governance units in advancing context-specific governance practices. Most recently, De Wit and Oats (2022) use the theory of strategic action fields to explain the dynamics of the relationship between large corporate taxpayers and the respective tax administrations. They view the introduction of cooperative compliance models between these two actors as creating dynamic strategic action fields. This theoretical perspective facilitated an understanding of how the field was sustained (through an imaginary of cooperation built around mutual trust) and also undermined (by developments in proximate fields).

This paper seeks to contribute to this recent accounting scholarship by deploying Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields within the context of valuation studies, particularly with reference to the valuation of human life.

4 Methodology

While the topic of valuation is very much in vogue at present, and as indicated above, is a topic that chimes with contemporary trends and phenomena, we can also learn much about current practices of valuation from an historical standpoint. One of the important contributions of historical accounting scholarship is the ability to inform current discussions and debates (Gomes et al, 2011). As Carnegie (2014a, p.1246) has argued, "appreciating how accounting has shaped the past may permit a better understanding of the implications of accounting and accounting change today". Indeed, accounting history possesses a unifying power that enables us to both understand the present and deliberate on the future (Carnegie and Napier, 2012). Parker's (2004) observations on the concept of time in accounting historiography are pertinent here. The past, he argues "is a malleable concept that through the historian's gaze, connects with the present and future (Parker, 2004, p.6). Hence although this study adopts a historical perspective to the study of valuation, it is one which no less informs current debate on valuation and the role of calculative practices therein.

The primary source of material for this study are the records of the Slave Compensation Commission which are held within the British National Archives (Kew). The catalogue reference is Division T71, entitled: The records of the Office of Registry of Colonial Slaves and Slave Compensation Commission, 1812-1851. There are two subseries within this Division. One subseries contains the records of the Registers of the Office for the Registry of Colonial Slaves; these are the lists of slaves registered by slave owners during the period 1813 to 1834. The other subseries contains the records of the Slave Compensation Commission for the period 1833 to1842. It is the latter subseries which is the focus of this study.

Table 1 lists each of the categories within the subseries of the Slave Compensation Commission archive. It is a vast collection, comprising of 1,631 records. These records include minutes of the meetings of both the London based Slave Compensation Commissioners and the Assistant Commissioners in each of the British colonies, the returns made by Valuers' of slaves, compensation claims and counter claims by slave owners, and certificates of compensation awarded. The author's investigations focused primarily on the following categories within the collection: the Commissioner's Hearing Notes, the Commissioners' Minutes, the Assistant Commissioners' Proceedings, the Valuers' Returns, the Compensation Certificates, and the Miscellanea category. Each of these categories of archival material was chosen as they seemed most relevant to the paper's objective of understanding the process of valuation in slave compensation. For example, the review of the Commissioners' Minutes and Assistant Commissioners' Proceedings provided a comprehensive understanding of the work of the Slave Compensation Commission and how they went about the task of calculating an average value of a slave for the purposes of compensating slave owners. The Valuers' returns illustrated the process of classification of slaves into set categories of value while the Compensation Certificates exemplified the monetary commensuration of life inherent in the process of slave compensation. The Miscellanea category within the collection was useful in terms of explaining the work of the Valuers in each colony and how they were appointed. This category also shed light on the challenges of exchange rate translation between British sterling and the currencies used in the various colonies, and also the difficulties of verifying slave numbers in cases where slaves were hired out to another colony or working at sea.

The author focused exclusively on archival material relating to the 13 Caribbean colonies and British Guiana (rather than the total 19 colonies which were subject to British rule). The justification for this selection is that of the £20 million compensation award, £17 million went to these Caribbean territories, and of the 770,000 slaves emancipated by the Abolition Act, 650,000 of them resided in the 13 Caribbean islands and British Guiana (Sheridan, 1961, p.547).

Table 1: Categories within the Slave Compensation Commission Archive

Categories within Subseries T71	**Number of Records**	**National Archives Reference**
Slave Registers	684	T71/1 - T71/684
Valuers' Returns	167	T71/685 - T71/851
Registers of Claims	91	T71/852 - T71/942
Claims Certificates	230	T71/943 - T71/1172
Counter Claims	121	T71/1173 - T71/1293
Adjudications in Contested Cases	16	T71/1294 - T71/1309
Compensation Certificates	68	T71/1310 - T71/1377
Special Awards in Trust	22	T71/1378 - T71/1399
Parliamentary Returns of Awards	23	T71/1400 - T71/1422
Commissioners' Hearing Notes	76	T71/1423 - T71/1498
Commissioners' Minutes	2	T71/1499 - T71/1500
Assistant Commissioners' Proceedings	62	T71/ 1501 - T71/1562
Accounts	27	T71/1563 - T71/1589
Miscellanea	42	T71/1590 - T71/1631

As Carnegie and Napier (2012) have noted, public archives tend to be well maintained and survive over long time periods. This is certainly the case with the archives of the Slave Compensation Commission. The material, which dates from the first half of the 19th century, is in impeccable condition and is well catalogued and ordered which made it easy to navigate through the multiple layers of material. While the archive is vast in size, the author was guided by Parker's (1997) caution that this should not deter the researcher from a thorough and detailed analysis of the records.

Also fortunately for the archival researcher, there has been a rich vein of scholarship on accounting historiography in recent years (Carnegie, 2014b). This work has called for a methodologically informed approach to accounting history (Parker, 1997). In particular, the importance of clearly articulating the methodology used in accounting history research has been advocated in order to "improve not only the rigour of our research, but the credibility of its findings and messages" Gomes et al (2011, p.395). Consequently, while accounting history may have "ventured far beyond its technical core" (Walker, 2008, p.313) in recent decades, this is not to discredit the diligence of archival examination. This study is theoretically informed but it is also firmly based in the archive. This is a methodological approach advocated by Carnegie and Napier (1996) which avoids the potentially divisive categorization between 'new' and 'old' accounting history. As such this study seeks to reflect a "growing maturity in wiring accounting history" (Carnegie, 2014b, p.738).

In terms of the analysis of the archival material, the author undertook a thematic qualitative analysis as outlined by Kuckartz (2014). This involved an initial interpretive reading of the documents within the collection to develop the main thematic categories. This was followed by a coding process to create categories and sub-categories. Successive readings and consultations of the archive material were a feature of this phase of the analysis and the author followed an abductive research approach that comprised a series of iterations between theory and data (Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

In weaving together the data from the Slave Compensation Commission archive with the paper's theoretical insights from the theory of strategic action fields, the author was conscious of Mills' (1993) caution to accounting historians against decontextualizing historical data to fit with some current interest or a chosen theoretical perspective. Consequently, secondary material was consulted in order to understand the historical context of abolition and compensation. This literature provided invaluable insights into the political machinations in the lead up to the abolition of slavery in British colonies. It also furthered an understanding of the social and cultural norms influencing the practice of compensation. While the calculative practices of valuation are interesting techniques in themselves, it is the broader social, political and organizational contexts, and the role of calculation in that broader domain, that is a feature of accounting history scholarship (Parker, 1999). As Parker (1997, p.123) argues,

> One important challenge to accounting and management historians is to immerse themselves in the literature of the period they select to investigate so that they can gain a broader and deeper appreciation of the perceptions, behaviour and context of the historical participants of that period themselves.

Indeed, secondary data sources, not only provided a useful historical context to the abolition of slavery more generally but also helped to illustrate and interpret some of the primary data itself. In the presentation of the study's findings on the calculative apparatus of compensation (section 6), a number of key secondary sources were drawn upon to contextually explain and interpret the archival material. These secondary sources were selected as follows. An extensive literature search revealed relatively little published research on the work of the Slave Compensation Commission but the work of Butler (1995), Lobdell (2000) and Draper (2009) were identified as the main historical studies of the Commission's work[2]. Consultation of these relatively recent works led to the identification of a 1932 PhD thesis on the topic by Wastell (1932) which provides the first extensive examination of the issue. References to these four studies are littered throughout the presentation of the paper's findings (section 6). In this process of interweaving primary and secondary material, the researcher was influenced by the arguments of Barton (2005), who while recognising the significance of primary sources in history, suggests that historians break through the "myth" that it is the only relevant data source. It is difficult, he contends to construct meaning from primary sources alone (Barton, 2005, p.750). Consequently, he suggests the value of using both primary and secondary data sources "to support conclusions about what happened and why" (Barton, 2005, p.752). Certainly, in this study of the workings of the Slave Compensation Commission, the researcher found that primary and secondary data sources complimented and illuminated each other.

5 Historical context: Abolition and the issue of compensation for slave owners

The history of the abolition of slavery comprises of two key moments: the abolition of the slave trade (the trafficking of men, women and children from Africa to British colonies) in 1807 and then the subsequent abolition of slavery itself in 1833.

The Society of Friends (commonly known as the Quakers) were early advocates for the abolition of the slave trade; they delivered the very first abolition petition to the House of Commons in 1783 (Brown, 2006, p.391). They also comprised the majority of the governing committee of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade which was founded in 1787 (Wastell, 1932, p.3). This society had the political support of William Wilberforce MP (Member of Parliament) who introduced the first motion to abolish the slave trade in the House of Commons in 1789 (Brown, 2006, p.342). Beyond Parliament, the abolitionists (as they were generally known) mobilised the support of the British public to end the shameful trade in people (Drescher, 2010, p.185). Missionary societies that were established in the late 18th century also campaigned heavily against the injustice of slavery (Wastell, 1932, p.3). These various strategies were ultimately successful and the slave trade was abolished in 1807 (Draper, 2009, p.77)

British abolitionists subsequently turned their attention to abolishing the slave trade beyond the British colonies; Spain and Portugal for example continued to trade in human cargo (Higman, 1967, p.11). From 1820, however, their focus returned to the British Empire, pressing this time for the full emancipation of all slaves held in British colonies (Drescher, 2010, p.13). This momentum may be contextualised by observing that the abolitionists were part of a wave of humanitarian reform during this era that encompassed prison reform, parliamentary reform and educational reform (Sheridan, 1961, p.545).

The year 1823 was an important year for the abolitionists: the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions (commonly known as the Anti-Slavery Society) was established (Wastell, 1932, p.5). Also in 1823, a leading member of that society Thomas Fowell Buxton MP reopened the emancipation issue in the British Parliament. He proposed the gradual emancipation of all slaves held in British colonies by granting freedom to the children of slaves from a future point in time (Butler, 1995, p.7). In response, George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, who supported the cause of Liverpool planters and merchants, proposed an alternative scheme; Canning's Resolutions (as they were commonly called) was a consensus position that attempted to improve the condition of the slave population through a number of measures such as legalising slave marriage, preventing families from being separated by sale, and the abolition of corporal punishment for female slaves (Draper, 2009, p.20). Significantly, Canning's proposal had included a statement that any future emancipation of slaves would have to be carried out 'with a fair and equitable consideration for the interests of private property' (Butler, 1995, p.10). This was seen by those MPs with an interest in the slave economy as a commitment to compensation and so Canning's proposal was passed by the House of Commons (Higman, 1967, p.11).

This amelioration policy remained the strategy of the British government for the rest of the 1820s. It was a policy that attempted to satisfy the two parliamentary pressure groups interested in the issue: the abolitionists and the West India interest (Gross, 1980, 64). The 'Interest' (as they were commonly known) comprised of absentee planters who were either Members of Parliament, Members of the House of Lords, or members of organisations such as the Society of West India Planters and Merchants (Butler, 1995, pp.8-9). They organised into a powerful lobbying body called the West India Committee (Draper, 2009, p.33).

The West India Interest in the House of Commons was strong during the 1820s which resulted in them stalling the initiatives of the abolitionists while maintaining support for their own cause (Higman, 1967, p.4). However, the issue of slave emancipation became particularly prominent in parliamentary debate from the 1830s as evidenced by the meetings of the House of Commons Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery and the House of Lords Committee on the Extinction of Slavery throughout the British Dominions in 1832 (Draper, 2009, p.24). The abolitionists also garnered public support for their cause through publications such as the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter (the official publication of the Anti-Slavery Society) which reported on cases of cruelty and oppression in British owned plantations (Wastell, 1932, p.7).

The general election of December 1832 was a pivotal moment for the abolitionists. This was the first election to be held after the passage of the Reform Act which had increased the size of the electorate (Gross, 1980, p.65). The abolitionists used this opportunity to sway public opinion against the cruelty of slavery and managed to secure the commitment of 104 members of the newly elected House of Commons to supporting emancipation (Gross, 1980, p.65). At the same time, the West India Interest lost half their Parliamentary seats and was weakened by internal conflict, both between slave owners and merchant members, and between plantation owners in the new versus old colonies (Higman, 1967, p.5). The latter were much more heavily indebted than the former and were therefore more open to emancipation if it was accompanied by sufficient compensation (Higman, 1967, p.12). Consequently, in February 1833, Thomas Fowell Buxton who was now the leader of the Anti-Slavery Society proposed a motion in the House of Commons for the immediate abolition of slavery (Gross, 1980, p.68). From late March onward, the abolitionists engaged in a public campaign to put pressure on the government which prompted hundreds of petitions to Parliament demanding emancipation (Gross, 1980, p.71).

The abolitionist's cry for the end of slavery was for many slave owners the "scapegoat they needed" (Butler, 1995, p.7). It opened the possibility of a way out of their economic difficulties through the process of compensation (Draper, 2009, p.101). The slave trade had been a highly lucrative venture for planters and investors up until the mid-18th century (Sheridan, 1961, p.539). The triangular trade route, from England to Africa (with manufactured goods), from Africa to the colonies (with slaves) and from the colonies back to Britain (with sugar, cotton and tobacco), had been a successful financial venture (Williams, 1964, p.51). Sugar and coffee had financed country estates and city development across Britain (Butler, 1995). It had also benefited a whole spectrum of society indirectly through annuities and legacies; in this manner, as Draper (2009, p.271) argues, "its nature could be sanitised by monetising it". By the close of the 18th century however, the situation had radically changed and the slave business was in economic decline (Williams, 1964).

The West India Interest blamed the situation on a number of causes: the high duties on imported sugar imposed by the British government, rising production costs, competition from sugar producers in Brazil and the East Indies alongside a fall in demand by America (Sheridan, 1961, p.540). In addition, they referred to the adverse effect of abolition rhetoric on colonial property prices which in turn reduced the ability to secure credit (Butler, 1995, p.11). Indeed, plantation owners had become heavily indebted to the London based merchants and financiers who were essential to their business (Sheridan, 1961, p.542). These merchants were also starting to withdraw from West India investments (Butler, 1995). Such was the degree of economic distress reported by the colonies that a Select Committee of the House of Commons was established in 1832 to investigate the issue (Sheridan, 1961, p.539).

For slave owners, compensation was also an acknowledgement of their legal rights in slave property (Fogel and Engerman, 1974, p.383). Many of the West Indian colonies had previously passed laws that slaves were to be regarded, not just as chattel property, but also real estate (Marshall, 1996, p.536). This legal stance ensured that a plantation's slaves remained with the property and could not be sold off as chattels in cases of inheritance or intestacy (Cranton, 1996, p.515). The West India Interest therefore argued that it would be not only unconstitutional, but indeed a dangerous precedent, to take away legal property without appropriate compensation (Lobdell, 2000, p.3). A belief in the sanctity of property even garnered the support of those not directly involved in slavery (Fogel and Engerman, 1974, p.377). It was an issue which was hotly debated in the House of Commons with many expressing outrage at the idea of regarding men as property (Draper, 2009, p.83). However, the majority supported the notion that existing slaves were a legal form of private property (Marshall, 1996, p.538). The irony of the 'slave as property' argument of course was that slavery was outlawed in Britain (Cranton, 1996, p.521). In addition, even in the colonies, slaves were legally treated as persons, rather than property, when it came to crime and punishment (Cranton, 1996, p.521).

Both through their tales of economic hardship and their legal claims to property, the West India Interest were successful in sustaining an argument for compensation. As Draper (2009, p.92) has observed, "the principle of compensation was so firmly embedded in the discursive field around emancipation that it could not be shifted". Even among the abolitionists the idea of compensation for the loss of free labour was reluctantly accepted (Higman, 1967, p.13).

In addition to compensation, the West India Interest sought to secure free labour from their slaves for a set period in the immediate wake of any emancipation. Maintaining an adequate labour supply to work on plantations was obviously a critical concern of slave owners (Engerman, 1984, p.134). Consequently the negotiations over emancipation included the idea of an apprenticeship scheme whereby former slaves were required to continue to work (unpaid) for their masters for a certain time period post emancipation. In addition to providing free labour, the scheme was also lauded as a way of facilitating the transition of the former slave to a free citizen (Wastell, 1932, p.18).

The scheme of apprenticeship was effectively a way of making the slaves themselves pay for their own emancipation; indeed Fogel and Engerman (1974, p.396) estimate that West Indian slaveowners received almost half of the value of their slaves in the form of apprenticeship labour. As Manjapra (2019, p.37) argues, apprenticeship was "a form of racial capitalist accounting that assigned the social debt of centuries of slavery to the enslaved themselves." Initially the apprenticeship time period was set at 12 years, but the abolitionists forced the government to reduce it down to 6 years together with the immediate emancipation of all slave children under six and those born during the apprenticeship period (Wastell, 1932, p.25-27).

While the abolitionists pursued the issue of reducing the apprenticeship period, the West India Interest pushed hard on the issue of compensation (Gross, 1980, pp.74-77). The latter had become resigned to the fact that slavery would be abolished and now sought to maximise their compensation award (Wastell, 1932, p.13). They made it clear to the government that they would withhold their co-operation on the emancipation issue without adequate compensation, but with it, they would use their influence in the colonies to support any abolition proposals (Butler, 1995, p.22). Compensation was therefore essential to the success of abolition (Sheridan, 1961, p.546).

By mid-May 1833 the government placed an emancipation scheme before the House of Commons (Gross, 1980, p.72). The plan was debated and modified for several weeks until agreement was finally reached. The Slavery Abolition Bill was passed and received royal assent on 28 August 1833 (Gross, 1980, p.73). The Act was to take effect from 1st August 1834 (Wastell, 1932, p.29). The government had given in to the pressure of the West India interest and the Abolition Act agreed a compensation award of £20 million to slave owners (Fogel and Engerman, 1974, p.384). In granting compensation, the Abolition Act acknowledged and sanctioned the notion of 'property in man' (Draper, 2009, p.76). As Manjapra (2019, p.36) remarks, "it expressed a schizoid assertion: the enslaved were simultaneously human persons who had the right to freedom and a form of living property on which rent, compensation, and interest could be claimed."

6 The calculative apparatus of compensation: valuing and classifying the slave

The passing of the Abolition Act was the culmination of years of political wrangling, public outrage, and abolitionist campaigning. But it also marked the start of a new and mammoth challenge: how to distribute the compensation monies to the 44,000 owners of 800,000 slaves across nineteen British colonies (Butler, 1995, p.22). The bureaucratic apparatus to oversee the apportionment of the compensation award was the Commissionaires of Arbitration (or the Slave Compensation Commission), established in London in 1833 (Butler, 1995, p.25). This Board in turn established Auxiliary Boards comprising of Assistant Commissioners in each of the colonies (National Archives T71/ 1501). The Commissioners broke their task into two components: first, to divide the compensation fund of £20 million across all of the colonies; and then secondly, to allocate compensation to each of the individual slave owner claimants within each colony. These two tasks are interesting to the valuation scholar because they involved estimating an average value per slave and then classifying the slave into set categories. We will examine each of these two tasks in turn below.

6.1 Calculating an average value per slave

The simplest method of distributing the compensation award to slave owners would have been to divide the £20 million across the total slave population of the colonies. The older colonies such as Barbados and Jamaica were in favour of this method (Engerman, 1984, p.137). However, such a per capita distribution would have ignored differences in slave prices between the various regions (Draper, 2009, p.104). The price of a slave was very much affected by the size of the slave population in each colony with average prices much higher in the less populated new colonies such as Trinidad and British Guiana than the older and more densely populated regions (Butler, 1995, p.28). This situation was exacerbated from 1824 when legislation stopped the transportation of slaves between colonies (Goldin, 1973, p.71). Differences in the quality of the soil also affected slave prices in each colony with the new colonies enjoying more fertile land than the older ones (Higman, 1967, p.6). The newer colonies were therefore in favour of an ad valorem method which took account of slave prices

(Butler, 1995, p.29). The choice between the two methods (per capita and ad valorem) became a topic of much debate during the negotiations around emancipation (Engerman, 1984, p.137).

From a sociology of valuation perspective, this was a site of dissonance where two different calculative technologies of valuation came into contention (Hutter and Stark, 2015). Two alternate slave valuation systems had emerged which constructed conflicting heterarchies of worth (Stark, 2009). Such a plurality of practices is a key feature of valuation; as Lamont (2012, p.208) argues, “central to SVE [sociology of valuation and evaluation] is the notion of an actual or potential heterarchy, multidimensionality, or plurality of criteria/grammars of valuation and evaluation”.

Ultimately the newer colonies prevailed in the political bargaining and the Abolition Act provided for an ad valorem method of allocation (Higman, 1967, p.12). This decision reflects the view that valuation is the interrelation between economic and non-economic factors (Zelizer, 1994a). The technical aspect of valuation is inherently bound up with social construction (Muniesa, 2011). In this case, the choice between the per capita and the ad valorem methods of distributing compensation was influenced by political wrangling and parliamentary debate. As Fourcade (2011b) has argued, economic valuation processes are not neutral but inherently bound up with legal, social and political concerns.

Applying the ad valorem method, the value of a slave was determined as the average price of the slave in that colony during the period 1822-1830 (Draper, 2009, p.104). The use of market prices as an indicator of value is not surprising; the market, argue Aspers and Beckert (2011) usually plays a central role in establishing value through price. The 8 year period (1822-1830) was chosen in order to average out the impact of local conditions such as drought or hurricanes on market values (Wastell, 1932, p.54). But it was also a product of political debate with the West India Interest demanding that the chosen time period reflected slave prices before they were adversely affected by the emancipation debate (Engerman, 1984, p.138). The decision over the choice of years therefore further highlights the significance of understanding valuation as a social and cultural practice (Lamont, 2012). As Fourcade (2011a, p.1724) has argued, “economic valuation processes are deeply bound up with other aspects of social organization”. In the case of slave compensation, economic factors were heavily intwined with non-economic concerns such as political appeasement of the West India Interest.

The slave prices were gathered by the Assistant Commissioners in each colony with recourse to slave and mortgage registers together with the evidence of auctioneers and lawyers involved in the sale of slaves (Butler, 1995, p.27). But the valuation process was no easy task. Commissioners had to be alert to any sales between relatives or sales for manumission (the freeing of a slave by their owner) (Butler, 1995, p.27). Judicial sales of slaves (such as those slaves who had committed a crime) were also regarded as suspect and unrepresentative of average market values (Wastell, 1932, p.58). Establishing the sale price when the slave was sold together with land proved particularly challenging. There was a temptation for owners to inflate the component of the sale relating to the slave (Wastell, 1932, p.58). The sale of old or infirm slaves were often excluded from the process by some of the Assistant Commissioners due to the low price these slaves achieved. However, the London Commission accepted these prices as they reflected the market value for this type of slave (Wastell, 1932, p.59).

In some colonies, to avoid the imposition of a 2% duty on slave prices, a lower price had typically been declared by buyers. This lower average then became the basis for the valuation of slaves in that colony (National Archives T71/1518). By contrast, some colonies boosted their slave prices by arguing for equality with the larger islands on which they were dependent. For instance, slave prices in the Caymans and Jamaica were reported together which allowed the former to secure a higher average slave price than if it had reported separately (Wastell, 1932, p.55). There was also a great deal of confusion created due to the wide variety of local currencies used in slave transactions and how to determine an exchange rate between them and British sterling (National Archives T71/1597).

Such difficulties in capturing and calculating slave prices highlight the practice based view of valuation. As noted previously, valuation scholars have argued that values are not intrinsic but are made in practice, and therefore "a study of values must pay attention to the bricolage of making them" (Dussauge et al, 2015b, p.5). In this case, establishing the sales price of a slave in each colony was subject to a host of factors encompassing currency conversions, price manipulations, inclusions and exclusions, all of which influenced the making up of the final value. As Manjapra (2019, p.41) argues: "the valuation process was certainly no clear-cut actuarial project in enumeration".

In total, some 74,000 transactions involving slave sales were collected by the Commissioners (Lobdell, 2000, p.5). These sales prices were then used by Charles M. Willinck, the Secretary of the University Life Assurance Office, to calculate an average price per slave for each colony (Draper, 2009, p.115). These average prices varied widely across the colonies; the ad valorem method markedly reflecting the differing values of a slave. For example, in Trinidad the average price of a slave was calculated at £105 whereas the price in Jamaica, which had the largest slave population of all the colonies, was only £44 (National Archives T71/1499). Table 2 indicates the wide variation in slave prices across the colonies. Interestingly, no distinction was made between the average price of male and female slaves.

Table 2: The average value of a slave in each colony (National Archives T71/1499).

Colony	Average Value of a Slave (£)
Antigua	32
Bahamas	29
Barbados	47
Bermuda	27
Dominica	43
Grenada	59
Guiana	114
Honduras	120
Jamaica	44
Montserrat	36
Nevis	39
St Christopher's	36
St Lucia	56
St Vincent	58
Tobago	45
Trinidad	105
Virgin Islands	31
Cape Colony	73
Mauritius	69

In the calculation of these average slave values we witness a commensuration process (Espeland, 2001) whereby human lives were converted into a quantitative form. A monetary commensuration of life took place using the economic logic of market prices. Any value of life beyond the market place disappears; it is an "intangible" that cannot be commensurated and therefore ceases to exist (Espeland, 2001, p.1843). But perhaps this is not surprising, the commensuration process was simply consistent with the concept of slavery, the idea of men and women not as humans but as marketable 'assets'. The role of money in this commensuration process is significant. Each unique life was translated into the common metric of money. Money creates equivalences between seemingly incomparable scenarios, in this case human lives. Money makes "qualitatively different objects commensurate on a common scale of prices" (Aspers and Beckert, 2011, p.8). Money is also a very public statement of worth (Carruthers and Espeland, 2002), so the average values calculated by the Compensation Commission provided a very clear indicator of the value of a slave. But this monetary value is not neutral, rather it is influenced by social and cultural structures; as Zelizer (1994b) has aptly argued, money is invested with social meaning.

The average price per slave was then applied to the number of slaves in each colony to arrive at a total valuation of slaves within that colony (National Archives T71/1499). An estimate of the number of slaves in each colony was made by consulting the records of the Slave Registers (National Archives T71/1500). A Slave Registry Office had been established in London in 1819 which required a triennial return to be made of all slaves in the colonies (Draper, 2009, p.22). These registers had been demanded by the abolitionists to provide some visibility on the death rates of slaves across plantations (Wastell, 1932, p.65). But they were not always returned to London on a timely basis and their accuracy was often questionable, especially in cases where a colony imposed a charge for registration (Wastell, 1932, p.66).

Table 3 shows the value of the total slave population for each colony (which was calculated by applying the average price of a slave to the number of slaves in that colony). As evident from the table, the aggregate value of the entire slave population came to £45,281,738. However, as there was only £20 million available in compensation funds each colony received a pro rata share of this total. So the value of slaves in each colony was divided by the value of the slave population in total for all colonies (£45,281,738) and this fraction applied to the £20 million compensation award. The result was the amount of compensation to be allocated to each colony.

For example, the value of slaves in Barbados was determined at £3,897,276, (82,807 slaves valued at an average price of £47, 1 shilling and 3 and a half pence) expressing this amount as a fraction of £45,281,738 (value of total slave population) and applying this fraction to £20 million (the agreed compensation payout), yielded a compensation award of £1,721,345 for the colony of Barbados. Differences in the sizes of the slave population and the average price of slaves in each colony naturally resulted in widely variant awards of compensation, from over £6 million for Jamaica to only £234,064 for Tobago.

Table 3: Value of slaves in each colony and their proportion of £20 million award (National Archives T71/1499).

Colony	Total Value of Slaves (£)	Proportion of £20 million awarded (£)
Bermuda	114,527	50,584
Bahamas	290,573	128,340
Jamaica	13,951,139	6,161,927
Honduras	230,844	101,958
Virgin Islands	165,143	72,940
Antigua	964,198	425,866
Montserrat	234,466	103,558
Nevis	341,893	151,007
St Christopher's	750,840	331,630
Dominica	624,715	275,923
Barbados	3,897,276	1,721,345
Grenada	1,395,684	616,444
St Vincent's	1,341,491	592,508
Tobago	529,941	234,064
St Lucia	759,890	335,627
Trinidad	2,352,655	1,039,119
British Guiana	9,729,047	4,297,117
Cape of Good Hope	2,824,224	1,247,401
Mauritius	4,783,183	2,112,632
Total	**45,281,738**	**20,000,000**

6.2 The classification of slaves

The determination of the proportion of the £20 million that each colony was to receive was only one part of the compensation process. It was then necessary to determine the amount of compensation that each individual slave owner would receive for each of their slaves. The Slave Compensation Commission decided to address this task by a process of classifying slave labour.

As noted earlier, in addition to abolishing slavery and granting compensation, the Abolition Act of 1833 had included a requirement that former slaves continue to provide free labour (apprenticeship) to their owners for a specified period after 1 August 1834 (Paton, 2004, p.7). Three broad classes of apprenticeship had been determined. The 'praedial attached' apprentice category encompassed slaves working in agriculture on land owned by their owners. The 'praedial unattached' apprentices also worked in agriculture but on land not owned by their masters. Both of these categories carried a six year apprenticeship from 1834-1840 (Manjapra, 2019, p.39). The third category was the 'non-praedial' apprentices who comprised of domestics, dock workers, and artisans. This grouping had a shorter apprentice period of four years, from 1834-1838 (Butler, 1995, p.30).

Recognising that slaves performed different duties within these three broad categories, the Slave Compensation Commission subdivided the apprentices into a further 18 classes (Butler, 1995, p.31). Each class was associated with a set compensation value. This value varied across colonies, reflecting the differences in the market prices of slaves in each colony. Table 4 shows the values determined for each class of slave in Jamaica.

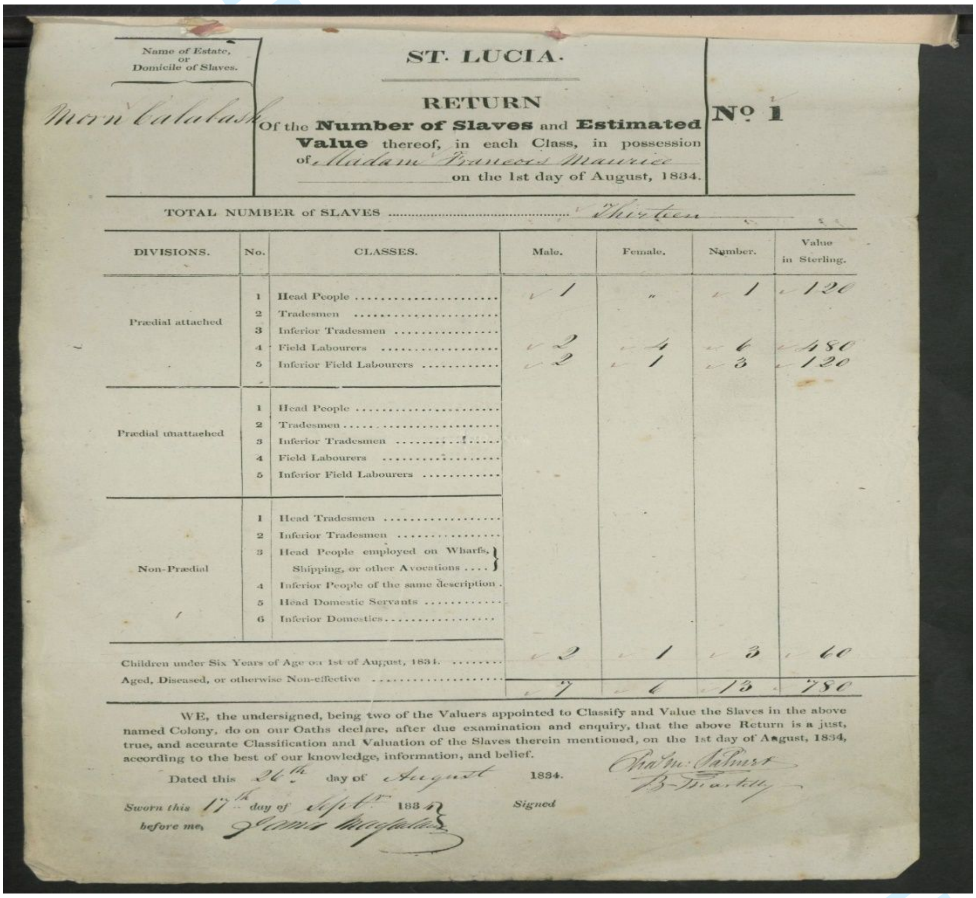
Table 4: Classes of slave and their compensation value for Jamaica
(National Archives T71/701)

Class of Slave	Compensation per Slave (£)
Praedial attached	
Head People	31
Tradesmen	31
Inferior tradesmen	20
Field laborers	26
Inferior field laborers	12
Praedial unattached	
Head People	31
Tradesmen	31
Inferior tradesmen	20
Field laborers	26
Inferior field laborers	13
Non-praedial	
Head Tradesmen	30
Inferior Tradesmen	20
Head People on wharves or shipping	30
Inferior people on wharves or shipping	22
Head domestics	29
Inferior domestics	19
Children under six years	5
Aged, diseased, or noneffective	4

Examination of the archives of the Slave Compensation Commission reveals the variety of valuations in each class across the colonies. For example, non-praedial labours were more valuable than praedial in Tobago (National Archives T71/779) while in Antigua and British Guiana, praedial labours were more valuable than nonpraedial (National Archives T71/735; T71/757). In Jamaica, St Lucia and the Bahamas, an Inferior Field Labourer (someone old or with disability) was valued at half that of a Field Labourer (who was in the prime of life) (National Archives T71/701; T71/754; T71/772), whereas in Antigua it was a third (National Archives T71/735). In Tobago and the Virgin Islands an old person had no value (National Archives T71/779; T71/753) whereas in Jamaica s/he was valued at £4 (National Archives T71/701). Consequently, a slave's compensation value was determined by both the class to which the slave was assigned and the particular colony in which the slave resided. The differences in compensation values across the colonies were accepted because they had effectively been created by each colony (from the average market price of slaves in that colony) rather than being imposed upon them (Wastell, 1932, p.240).

In this manner, the value of a human life became bound up with a process of classification. As noted previously, classification and categorisation are critical components of the debates within the sociology of valuation (Kjellberg et al (2013). Valuation involves ordering persons or objects against each other and categorizing them within a hierarchy (Lamont, 2012). Bundles of unique individual lives were grouped into categories and within these categories became "homogeneous, interchangeable units of property" (Draper, 2009, p.115). Meanwhile, across categories, slaves were valued at different rates creating nonsensical distinctions between the worth of one human life and another. Essentially slaves were ranked against each other; in valuation terms, they were measured and compared "according to a scale" (Aspers and Beckert, 2011, p.6). The scale used here was monetary in nature, a common means of creating clear differences and distinctions in value (Carruthers and Espeland, 2002).

In an attempt to conduct the categorization as accurately as possible, the Slave Compensation Commission delegated the task to the Assistant Commissioners in each colony who in turn appointed Valuers to undertake the classification process (National Archives T71/1597). These Valuers visited the plantations and inspected records and other evidence to assess the type of work that each slave had conducted during the last year (ibid.). This information was recorded in a Valuation Return. Figure 1 provides an example of a Valuation Return for 13 slaves owned by Madam Francois Maurice in St Lucia.



Name of Estate, or Domicile of Slaves.

Morn Calabash

ST. LUCIA.

RETURN

Of the **Number of Slaves** and **Estimated Value** thereof, in each Class, in possession of Madam Francois Maurice on the 1st day of August, 1834.

No 1

TOTAL NUMBER of SLAVES .... Thirteen

DIVISIONS.	No.	CLASSES.	Male.	Female.	Number.	Value in Sterling.
Prædial attached	1	Head People	1	"	1	120
	2	Tradesmen				
	3	Inferior Tradesmen				
	4	Field Labourers	2	4	6	480
	5	Inferior Field Labourers	2	1	3	120
Prædial unattached	1	Head People				
	2	Tradesmen				
	3	Inferior Tradesmen				
	4	Field Labourers				
	5	Inferior Field Labourers				
Non-Prædial	1	Head Tradesmen				
	2	Inferior Tradesmen				
	3	Head People employed on Wharfs, Shipping, or other Avocations				
	4	Inferior People of the same description				
	5	Head Domestic Servants				
	6	Inferior Domestics				
Children under Six Years of Age on 1st of August, 1834.			2	1	3	60
Aged, Diseased, or otherwise Non-effective						
			7	6	13	780

WE, the undersigned, being two of the Valuers appointed to Classify and Value the Slaves in the above named Colony, do on our Oaths declare, after due examination and enquiry, that the above Return is a just, true, and accurate Classification and Valuation of the Slaves therein mentioned, on the 1st day of August, 1834, according to the best of our knowledge, information, and belief.

Dated this 26th day of August 1834.

Sworn this 17th day of Sept. 1834 before me,

Signed

Figure 1 Valuation Return (dated August 1834) (National Archive Ref T71/754)

But the categorization of slaves into the various apprenticeship classes was not a neat exercise, rather it was highly variable across the colonies. In British Guiana, for example, Head People was a category only used if the master owned 20 or more slaves (National Archives T71/1514) whereas in the Bahamas, the respective number was 10 (ibid.). In Barbados, Field Laborers was a category occupied by those between the years of 16 and 60, whereas in Bahamas it was assigned to those aged between 14 and 50 (National Archives T71/1514). Also, the slaves themselves were not always on site for this inspection process; some had absconded or left the plantation. In Antigua, for example, they had quickly dispensed with the apprenticeship period and so many of the former slaves had left their plantations (Wastell, 1932, p.79). In Bermuda, many slaves who had been domestic servants were hired out to other colonies while in the Bahamas, slaves often worked away at sea (National Archives T71/1597).

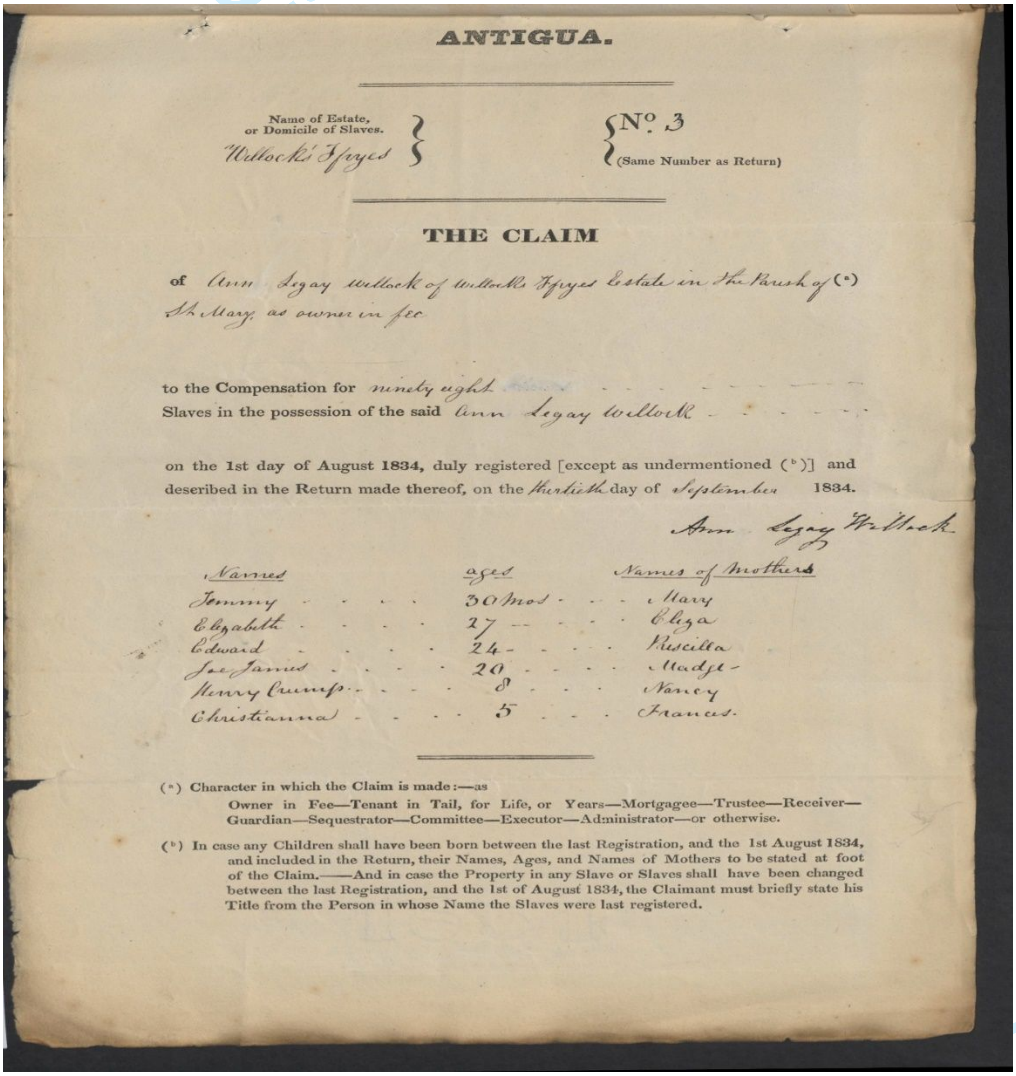
Such challenges in the classification of slaves reflects the practice-based view of valuation (Dewey, 1913; 1939; Dussauge et al, 2015b; Muniesa, 2011). This stance contends that value is not inherent but is established in practice. From this perspective, the valuation of each slave was not a natural process that reflected some intrinsic value of that slave; rather the value was created in practice through the process of classification. Humans were valued according to the category they were assigned to by the Valuer on their visit to the slave plantation. Through the apparatus of the Slave Compensation Commission, classification was practiced and values awarded accordingly. As Wastell (1932, p.43) observes, "From a bewildering variation of slave holdings, influenced by local custom and local usage, the Central Commissioners had to evolve certain classes, into which it would be possible to fit the former slaves of every colony."

As the classification of a slave determined the length of time they were apprenticed and also their compensation value, there was a clear incentive on the part of slave owners to 'game' the classification system (Draper, 2009, p.104). In particular, the classification of slaves as praedial as opposed to non-praedial apprentices provided masters with an extra two years of free work (Manjapra, 2019, p.39). So domestic slaves who had never worked in agriculture could be classified as praedial apprentices thereby providing their owners with a further two years of free labour (Butler, 1995, p.32). Indeed, in Jamaica, the changing of a slave's classification (by the slave owner) from domestic to praedial was legalised in 1834 (Butler, 1995, p.33). Another strategy, which was deployed by Barbados slave owners, was to underestimate the number of slaves in the 'aged, deceased, or otherwise non-effective' category, a category which received the lowest compensation (ibid.). A delay in compiling the slave registers in Barbados and St. Vincent meant that the different classifications were well known to slave owners for many months before the slave register was updated with details of the work performed by each slave, potentially allowing slave owners to change the classification of their slaves (Butler, 1995, p.32). Nor was it only the slave owners who might manipulate the classification system. In an environment where the Valuers were also often members of the slave owning community, their independence and objectivity with regard to classification was suspect (Butler, 1995, p.32). Indeed as the majority of members of both the London and Colonial Boards of the Slave Compensation Commission were either slave owners or otherwise engaged in the slave economy, the compensation process, argues Manjapra (2019, p.39), was never going to be neutral or bias free.

Once again therefore, we are reminded of the importance of understanding valuation not just as an economic practice but also one that is heavily inscribed by social, political and cultural contexts. Drawing on the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), Stark (2000) has argued for a sociology of worth which recognizes the significance of both economic value and social and cultural values. Values might appear to reflect some seemingly objective measure of worth, but they are inherently socially constructed, being subject to a process of negotiation, contestation and provocation (Doganova et al, 2014). As Espeland (2001, p.1839) has argued, "how we value is an important social and political relationship".

6.3 Claiming for a life

The final act in the slave compensation process was for slave owners to submit their claims for compensation to the Assistant Commissioners in the relevant colony. All claims had to be submitted by 1 March 1835 (National Archives T71/852). The number of slaves claimed for had to match the number officially registered by that owner in the Colonial slave register, although claims were accepted in cases without registration if some other proof of ownership was produced (Wastell, 1932, p.117). The claim also had to include the Valuer's return confirming to which class each slave had been assigned. The claim was then sent to the Slave Compensation Commission in London for approval and in the interim, the Assistant Commissioners published lists of claims locally to allow counter claims to take place. All counter-claims were adjudicated by the Slave Compensation Commission in London (National Archives T71/1173). Figure 2 illustrates a claim for compensation made by the Willock's Fryes estate in Antigua in respect of their 98 slaves.



ANTIGUA.

Name of Estate, or Domicile of Slaves. Willock's Fryes

No. 3 (Same Number as Return)

THE CLAIM

of Ann Legay Willock of Willock's Fryes Estate in the Parish of (a) St. Mary, as owner in fee

to the Compensation for ninety eight Slaves in the possession of the said Ann Legay Willock

on the 1st day of August 1834, duly registered [except as undermentioned (b)] and described in the Return made thereof, on the thirtieth day of September 1834.

Ann Legay Willock

Names	ages	Names of Mothers
Tommy	30 mos	Mary
Elizabeth	27	Eliza
Edward	24	Priscilla
Joe James	20	Madge
Henry Crump	8	Nancy
Christianna	5	Frances

(a) Character in which the Claim is made:—as Owner in Fee—Tenant in Tail, for Life, or Years—Mortgagee—Trustee—Receiver—Guardian—Sequestrator—Committee—Executor—Administrator—or otherwise.

(b) In case any Children shall have been born between the last Registration, and the 1st August 1834, and included in the Return, their Names, Ages, and Names of Mothers to be stated at foot of the Claim.——And in case the Property in any Slave or Slaves shall have been changed between the last Registration, and the 1st of August 1834, the Claimant must briefly state his Title from the Person in whose Name the Slaves were last registered.

Figure 2 - Claim for compensation, September 1834 (National Archives Reference: T71/1027).

Successful claimants, or their authorised agents, were paid in at the National Debt Office in London (Draper, 2009, p.114). This requirement proved challenging for smaller claimants who resided in the colonies (Butler, 1995, p.38), but it was a successful strategy to steer the compensation monies into the hands of the English merchants and creditors to whom the plantation owners were indebted (Butler, 1995, p.43).

By the end of the process, the Slave Compensation Commission had paid out a total of £18,669,401 in compensation and had handled 39,790 uncontested and 4,651 contested claims (Butler, 1995, p.37). The majority of these claims were made by small scale slave owners (less than 5 slaves) who lived in the colonies (Draper, 2009, p.204). Large scale slave owners, comprising a mix of absentee owners and those who resided in the colonies, received the bulk of the compensation money (Draper, 2009, p.148). Other claimants included Members of Parliament, merchants and even Anglican clergymen (ibid., p.160)[3]. The process was completed efficiently, with 80% of the monies being paid out by 1836, two years after the Abolition Act had taken effect (Fogel and Engerman, 1974, p.384). The contentious apprentice system did not last as long as intended. It was abandoned after 4 years so all of the slave population of the West Indies was effectively emancipated by August 1838 (Wastell, 1932, p.136).

7 Discussion: understanding valuation as a product of strategic action fields

In this section, we theoretically frame the above history of slave compensation using Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields. This discussion has two objectives: (1) to contribute to the accounting scholarship within the valuation studies literature and (2) to theoretically develop the theory of strategic action fields itself.

7.1 The strategic action fields of the abolitionists and the anti-abolitionists

One way in which to understand the history of slave compensation is to frame the actions of the abolitionists and the anti-abolitionists during the early decades of the 19th century as the interactions between two strategic action fields. Both groupings were, following Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.9) "units of collective action", the members of which had a shared understanding of the purpose of the field, the rules of the field and who held power within the field. For example, the abolitionists comprised a strategic action field which emerged in the late 18th century with the mission to abolish the slave trade and subsequently to abolish slavery. Prominent members of this field included the Society of Friends (the Quakers), the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, and Members of Parliament such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton.

By contrast, the purpose of the anti-abolitionists was to secure the status quo in terms of the continued use of slave labour, or in strategic action field terminology, to *reproduce the field*, which they had effectively done over a long period of time. Members of this strategic action field comprised of the slave plantation owners, many of whom were Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords, and the merchants who invested in the slave trade, both of which were represented in the Society of West India Planters and Merchants. Consequently, the anti-abolitionists were a *stable strategic action field* with allies in both government and the private sector, or what Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.97) might term the state and nonstate fields. As noted earlier, the West India Committee was a politically strong lobbying body; they were, following Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.13) the "incumbents" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.13) of the anti-abolitionist strategic action field and their views held the dominant position in the field.

These two fields (abolitionists and anti-abolitionists) can be regarded as *proximate fields* in that the actions of each routinely affected the other (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.18). The campaigning of the abolitionists regularly caused "rolling turbulence" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.19) for the anti-abolitionists. However, the West India Interest in the House of Commons was politically strong during the 1820s and so they were able to stall the various initiatives of the abolitionists. From the perspective of the theory of strategic action fields, the strength of the West India Interest's incumbent position implied that they could count on the support of key allies within the state to maintain the status quo (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.106). In this way they were able to withstand the pressure coming from the abolitionist field.

The other relevant strategic action field to this history is the British government or what Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.19) would call the "state field". The state is highly influential in maintaining stability or in facilitating change in nonstate fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.77). We see the stabilizing role of the state in Canning's Resolutions of 1823, a move that attempted to improve the condition of the slave population, and also to satisfy the two parliamentary pressure groups (Abolitionists and Anti-Abolitionists). This amelioration policy on the part of the British government reflects Fligstein and McAdam's (2012, p.108) contention that state legitimacy depends on minimising instability in fields, so their initial response is often to "resist destabilizing change in any major strategic action field".

However, as noted earlier, 1832 was a significant year for the abolitionist cause. Garnering public support for the abolition of slavery through publications such as the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter, which reported on cases of cruelty and oppression in British owned plantations, the abolitionists used the general election of December 1832 to secure the commitment of 104 Members of Parliament to their cause. The West India Interest by contrast lost half their Parliamentary seats. This paved the way for Thomas Fowell Buxton, the leader of the Anti-Slavery Society, to propose a motion in the House of Commons in 1833 for the immediate abolition of slavery.

This powerful push for the abolition of slavery presented a serious threat to the stability of the anti-abolitionists' strategic action field; it placed that field in a state of flux. From the perspective of the theory of strategic action fields, this situation can be regarded as an *episode of contention* (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.20). It is an example of one of the rare cases where "the sheer magnitude of the perturbation" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.20) creates a crisis in a strategic action field. Specifically, it can be regarded as a macroevent, one of the three types of external *exogenous shocks,* that destabilizes "the broader social/political context in which the field is embedded" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.99).

Old allegiances often break down when a field is in crisis. As Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.106) observe, "external allies, sensing the inevitable collapse of the settlement, shift their allegiance to other parties to the conflict". We see such a shift in the way in which British investors and financiers who had previously invested in plantations now wanted to move their funds out of the slave business. There were shifts within the anti-abolitionist field too with planters in the older colonies, who had experienced particular economic decline in slave trade and were heavily financially indebted, much more open to the idea of compensation. So relations between members of the field were renegotiated (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.31).

Recognising the crisis within the field, the government stepped in, not to stall matters as previously, but to directly confront the issue of the abolition of slavery. As Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.108) argue, while the state is often reluctant to intervene, preferring the stability of the status quo, if "they perceive the old system as no longer viable … they will be motivated to aggressively enter the fray to quickly restore order".

Intense negotiations between the three strategic action fields of the state, the abolitionists and the anti-abolitionists on the issue of compensation followed. The idea of granting compensation was a point of fierce conflict between the latter two groups but the West India Interest ultimately prevailed in the compensation battle. In the Anti-Abolitionists' fight for compensation, we are reminded here of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) explanation of how incumbents may act when fields are restabilized after a period of conflict, and how they will fight "tenaciously to preserve the settlement that is the political and cultural source of their advantage" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.105).

Episodes of contention are generally resolved through the imposition of a new settlement by the state (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.108). The Slavery Abolition Bill passed in August 1833 represents such a new settlement. It reflected the state's authority to legislate for the operation of nonstate fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.207).

7.2 The Slave Compensation Commission as an Internal Governance Unit (IGU)

A settlement often involves the establishment of an Internal Governance Unit (IGU) (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.92). In this scenario, the IGU functions to solve the crisis and produce stability (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.95). IGUs "help institutionalize and stabilize field practices and understandings" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.205). The Slave Compensation Commission can be regarded as an Internal Governance Unit (IGU) in that it was established to bring about order and stability to the post abolition period through the administration of slave compensation. This IGU was a central feature of the new strategic action field which had emerged with the mission of compensating slave owners.

One of the key functions of an IGU is managing external field relations (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.78). The Slave Compensation Commission was the state's active agent in managing and co-ordinating relations with a host of actors involved in the compensation process (slaves, slave owners, Valuers, Assistant Commissioners). In addition, the Slave Compensation Commission exhibited all of the other five features of an IGU: administration, information, regulation, enforcement, and certification (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.78).

First, it was the state's administrative apparatus of compensation. It oversaw the huge administrative task of establishing the average sale price of slaves by collecting and recording the 74,000 transactions involving slave sales. As noted above, slave prices were not the clear cut outcome of market transactions, rather they were a product of a confusing array of currency conversions, the manipulations of slave owners to avoid slave registration duties, and strategies to over state the value of slaves in sales also including land. The Commission had to navigate this administrative quagmire and then undertake the task of applying slave prices to the actual number of slaves with recourse to slave registers.

Second, the Slave Compensation Commission was the information clearing house for compensation. It produced and disseminated all information regarding the compensation process. For example, it created the three broad classes of slave apprenticeship (praedial attached, praedial unattached, and non-praedial) together with the further classification of 18 categories of slave work. Third, it monitored and regulated the behaviour of members, part of which often involved acting as “private courts that adjudicate between member grievances” (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.95). This feature of the Slave Compensation Commission’s work can be seen in how it mediated the choice between the two methods of valuing slaves (per capita and ad valorem) and the tensions between the newer and older colonies in this regard. The adjudicating role of the Compensation Commission is also evident in the choice of an 8 year period for determining the average market value of a slave, this chosen period being a strongly contended issue of the West India Interest. The Commission also played a key adjudicating role in dealing with contested compensation claims. Fourth, the Slave Compensation Commission was the body that enforced the rules of compensation; the Commission’s agents, the Valuers, conducted visits to every plantation with the purpose of assigning each slave to a classification order. And finally, the Slave Compensation Commission officially approved and certified all 39,790 claims for compensation and investigated any counter claims.

Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.95) have noted that IGUs often “bear a strong imprint of incumbent interests and even personnel”. This is perhaps evident in the potential gaming of the classification system (maximising the number of slaves allocated to the praedial class) by Valuers, who were often slave owners themselves, and hence *incumbents* of the previous order. But despite this possibility, and despite a host of practical challenges and arbitrary decisions made by the Slave Compensation Commission, including translating local currencies into British pounds, valuing slaves not physically on the plantation, and the differing customs which affected classification meanings across the Colonies, the Commission managed to complete its task two years after the Abolition Act had taken effect. Arguably therefore the Slave Compensation Commission had stabilized the field and, in strategic action theory terms, had conferred legitimacy on it “through the appearance of order, rationality, and equity.” ((Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p.78).

7.3 Valuation and the theory of strategic action fields

What can the above discussion mean for our understanding of the practice of valuation? What further insights can it yield to the valuation studies literature? This paper suggests that understanding valuation through the lens of Fligstein and McAdam’s (2012) theory of strategic action fields provides a fresh understanding of the practice of valuation. The theory has never been applied within valuation studies so it is a completely new contribution to that literature. Viewing values as a product of the dynamics of strategic action fields suggests that valuation is influenced by an array of factors such as the interactions between fields (state and non-state), the roles of incumbents and challengers within a field, the impact of exogenous shocks to a field, and the process of field settlement after a crisis. In particular, the paper highlights the significance of Internal Governance Units (a core feature of strategic action theory) to the practice of valuation. The workings of the Slave Compensation Commission provide a useful illustration of the role of the IGU in the practice of valuation. The calculation of the average value of a slave and the classification of slaves, to which these values would apply, was all administered by this IGU.

We know from the prior accounting research in the area of valuation, reviewed earlier, that calculative technologies can play a fundamental role in the practice of valuation (Mennicken and Sjögren, 2015). But how they might play that role is still open to interpretation and investigation. Viewing valuation as a product of strategic action fields, and in particular, the product of the workings of IGUs, casts new insights on the study of valuation. Lamont (2012, p.208) has argued that the study of valuation is about "bringing to light the devices, institutions, or cultural and social structures that support or enable them." This study contributes to that objective by bringing to light the significance of IGUs to the practice of valuation.

In addition to contributing to the valuation studies literature, the paper also seeks to theoretically contribute to the theory of strategic action fields itself. It does this by arguing that Internal Governance Units, a central feature within strategic action fields, depend on a calculative infrastructure for their successful operation. Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p.205) have acknowledged that "to fully understand the history and routine dynamics of any field, the analyst will need to be aware of the presence of any internal governance units and seek to account for their influence within the strategic action field." Yet, arguably, the theory of strategic action fields is relatively weak on the detailed workings of Internal Governance Units. There is scant attention within the theory to the practical operation of IGUs. Given the importance of IGUs to a strategic action field, and particularly their role in stabilizing a field in the wake of a crisis, it is problematic not to fully address this issue. However, applying the theory within accounting research, reveals the significance of calculative technologies in the operation of Internal Governance Units. A calculative infrastructure supported the whole organizational apparatus of the Slave Compensation Commission. Indeed, the case of the Slave Compensation Commission suggests the powerful role of calculative technologies in stabilizing a strategic action field.

8 Concluding comments

Compensation for a human life, as is the case in slave compensation, offers an opportunity to examine the valuation techniques that attempt to overcome incommensurability (Barbot and Dodier (2015). On the face of it, it seems impossible to compute a monetary equivalence for a human soul. Such an argument builds on the dichotomy between the sacred and profane (Durkheim, 1976) and sacralisation and monetization (Simmel, 1978). However, compensation was calculated and paid to slave owners; humans were treated as marketable chattels for valuation purposes. On the face of it, this compensation was the product of a simple economic calculation: an average value per slave calculated on the basis of market prices, a pro rata allocation across the colonies, and a classification of categories of slave labour. Economic methods, however, are invariably infused by political processes and moral debate. The history of slave compensation is a history of multiple strands beyond the mere economic, encompassing the moral outrage of the abolitionists, the lobbying of the West India Interest, the political appeasement tactics of government, and the manipulation strategies of local colonial interests. Consequently, this study recognises the significance of social and cultural contexts on the practice of valuation (Stark, 2000), a mantra that accounting scholars have long since recounted in explaining the operation of calculative technologies.

The paper makes two contribution claims. First, it seeks to contribute to the growing field of accounting scholarship on the theme of valuation, specifically the value of human life. By drawing on Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields, the paper suggests the importance of understanding the practice of valuation as a product of the dynamics of strategic action fields. In particular, the paper highlights the significance of Internal Governance Units to the practice of valuation. A second contribution of the paper is to enhance Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields by suggesting the powerful role of calculative technologies in the workings of Internal Governance Units (a particular feature of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields) and hence the role of calculative infrastructures in stabilizing a strategic action field.

These contributions are limited by a number of factors. The primary data set comprises of the compensation records of colonies under British rule at the time of the British abolition of slavery. Consequently, the issue of compensated emancipation does not consider the varied forms of compensation arrangements deployed by other countries engaged in slavery. The author's decision to focus only on the data set of the 13 Caribbean colonies and British Guiana (rather than the total 19 colonies which were subject to British rule) also limits the paper's findings. In addition, the decision to draw on theoretical insights from Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields to interpret the data has obviously led to a particular set of outcomes; an alternative theoretical lens would no doubt have produced significantly different findings and contributions.

In terms of future opportunities for research in this field, given the relative recency of both the research field of valuation studies and the theory of strategic action fields, there is enormous scope to use the latter to investigate the former. While this study was historical in nature, Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) theory of strategic action fields could be usefully deployed to investigate more contemporary valuation practices. These might be valuation practices of compensation - as Dussauge et al (2015c) have observed, compensation provides a fruitful research setting to examine the interplay between economic and non-economic values. Or they could be valuation practices more generally, which form part of a calculative infrastructure that maintains or brings about stability to a strategic action field. So while this study has used the atrocity of slavery as a vivid backdrop against which we witness the morally repugnant ways in which calculative practices are often used and abused, a much wider research domain is on offer by viewing valuation as a product of strategic action fields.

Notes

1. See for example the special issue on the Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation in *Human Sciences* in 2015, the edited volumes by Antal et al (2015), Kornberger et al (2015), and Dussauge et al (2015a) and the recent themed section in *Accounting, Organizations & Society* on Accounting and Valuation Studies (Milo et al, 2021).

2. Interestingly, although not the prime focus of their paper, Oldroyd et al (2008) had identified the accounting practices at play in the Commission's work.

3. A major research project on identifying the recipients of compensation monies has been carried out by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership at University College London – see https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs//

References

Adkins, L. and Lury, C. (2011), “Introduction: special measures”, *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 59 No.2, pp.5-23.

Antal, A., Hutter, M. and Stark, D. (Eds.) (2015), *Moments of Valuation: Exploring Sites of Dissonance,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Aspers, P. and Beckert, J. (2011), “Value in markets”, in Beckert, J. and Aspers, P. (Eds.), *The Worth of Goods: Valuation and Pricing in the Economy,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.3-38.

Barbot, J. and Dodier, N. (2015), “Victims’ normative repertoire of financial compensation: the tainted hGH case”, *Human Studies*, Vol. 38 No.1, pp.81–96.

Barney, D. and Flesher, D. L. (1994). “Early nineteenth-century productivity accounting: the Locust Grove Plantation slave ledger”, *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, Vol. 4 No.2, pp.275-294.

Barton, K. (2005). "Primary sources in history: Breaking through the myths." *Phi Delta Kappan,* Vol. 86 No. 10, pp.745-753.

Begkos, C. and Antonopoulou, K. (2020), “Measuring the unknown: evaluative practices and performance indicators for digital platforms”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 33 No.3, pp.588-619.

Bialecki, M., O’Leary, S. and Smith, D. (2017), “Judgement devices and the evaluation of singularities: The use of performance ratings and narrative information to guide film viewer choice”, *Management Accounting Research*, Vol. 35 No.1, pp.56-65.

Boltanski, L. and Esquerre, A. (2015), “Grappling with the economy of enrichment”, *Valuation Studies,* Vol. 3 No.1, pp.75–83.

Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L. (2006), *On Justification: Economies of Worth,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

Brown, C.L. (2006), *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolition*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London.

Butler, K.M. (1995), The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica & Barbados, 1823-1843, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London.

Carnegie, G.D. (2014a), “The present and future of accounting history”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol.27, No. 8, pp.1241-1249.

Carnegie, G.D. (2014b), “Historiography for accounting: methodological contributions, contributors and thought patterns from 1983 to 2012”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 715-755.

Carnegie, G. and Napier, C.J. (1996), “Critical and interpretive histories: insights into accounting’s present and future through its past”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 7-39.

Carnegie, G.D. and Napier, C.J. (2012), “Accounting’s past, present and future: the unifying power of history”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 328-369.

Carruthers, B. and Espeland, W. (2002), “Money, meaning, and morality”, in Woolsey Biggart, N. (Ed.), *Readings in Economic Sociology,* John Wiley, Hoboken, New Jersey, pp.292-314.

Cefai, D., Endress, M., Nicolae, S. and Zimmermann, B. (2015), “Introduction: special issue on sociology of valuation and evaluation”, *Human Sciences,* Vol. 38 No. 1, pp.1–12.

Coslor, E. (2016), “Transparency in an opaque market: Evaluative frictions between “thick” valuation and “thin” price data in the art market”, *Accounting, Organizations & Society,* Vol. 50 No.1, pp.13-26.

Craton, M. (1996), “Property and propriety: land tenure and slave property in the creation of a British West Indian plantocracy, 1612 to 1740”, in Brewer, J. and Staves, S. (Eds), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, Routledge, London and New York, pp.497-529.

Crepaz, L., Huber, C. and Scheytt, T. (2016), “Governing arts through valuation: The role of the state as network actor in the European Capital of Culture 2010”, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting,* Vol. 37 June, pp.35–50.

Dewey, J. (1913), “The problem of values”, *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods,* Vol.10 No.10, pp.268–269.

Dewey, J. (1939), *Theory of Valuation,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

De Wit, D. and Oats, L. (2022), “Imagining cooperative tax regulation: Common origins, divergent paths”, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, in press.

Doganova, L., Giraudeau, M., Helgesson, C.F., Kjellberg, H., Lee, F., Mallard, A., Mennicken, A., Muniesa, F., Sjögren, E. and Zuiderent-Jerak, T. (2014), “Valuation studies and the critique of valuation”, *Valuation Studies,* Vol.2 No.1, pp.87–96.

Draper, N. (2009), *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Drescher, S. (2010), *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abo*lition, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London.

Dubois, A., and Gadde, L. E. (2002), “Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol.55 No.7, pp.553–560.

Durkheim, E. (1976), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* Routledge, London.

Dussauge, I., Helgesson, C.F. and Lee, F. (Eds.) (2015a), *Value Practices in the Life Sciences and Medicine,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Dussauge, I., Helgesson, C.F. and Lee, F. (2015c), "Valuography: studying the making of values", in Dussauge, I., Helgesson, C.F., and Lee, F. (Eds.), *Value Practices in the Life Sciences and Medicine,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.267-285.

Dussauge, I., Helgesson, C.F., Lee, F. and Woolgar, S. (2015b), "On the omnipresence, diversity, and elusiveness of values in the life sciences and medicine" in Dussauge, I., Helgesson, C.F. and Lee, F. (Eds.), *Value Practices in the Life Sciences and Medicine,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.1-28.

Engerman, S. (1984), "Economic change and contract labor in the British Caribbean: the end of slavery and the adjustment to emancipation, *Explorations in Economic History*, Vol. 21 No.2, pp.133-150.

Espeland, W. (2001), "Value-matters", *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 26, pp.1839-1845.

Flamholtz, E. G. (1971), "A model for human resource valuation: A stochastic process with service rewards", *The Accounting Review,* Vol.46 No.2, pp.253-267.

Flamholtz, E. G., Johanson, U., and Roslender, R. (2020). Reflections on the progress in accounting for people and some observations on the prospects for a more successful future. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol.33 No.8, pp.1791-1813.

Fleischman, R., Oldroyd, D. and Tyson, T. (2004), "Monetising human life: slave valuations on US and British West Indian plantations", *Accounting History,* Vol. 9 No.1, pp.35-62.

Fleischman, R.K. and Tyson, T.N. (2004), Accounting in service to racism: monetizing slave property in the antebellum south, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 15 No.3, pp.376-399.

Fleischman, R.K., Oldroyd, D. and Tyson, T.N. (2011), "The efficacy/inefficacy of accounting in controlling labour during the transition from slavery in the United States and British West Indies", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 24 No. 6, pp. 751-780.

Fligstein, N. and McAdam, D. (2012), *A theory of fields*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Fogel, R.W. and Engerman, S.L. (1974), "Philanthropy at bargain prices: notes on the economics of gradual emancipation", *The Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 377-401

Fourcade, M. (2011a), "Cents and sensibility: economic valuation and the nature of 'nature'", *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol.116 No.6, pp.1721-77.

Fourcade, M. (2011b), "Price and prejudice. on economics, and the enchantment/disenchantment of nature", in Beckett, J. and Aspers, P. (Eds.), *The Worth of Goods,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.41-62.

Funnel, W. (1998). “Accounting in the service of the Holocaust”, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 9 No.4, pp.435-464.

Fredriksen, A. (2017), “Valuing species: the continuities between non-market and market valuations in biodiversity conservation”, *Valuation Studies,* Vol.5 No.1, pp.39-59.

Goldin, C.D. (1973), “The economics of emancipation”, *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 33 No.1, pp. 66-85.

Gomes, D., Carnegie, G.D., Napier, C.J., Parker, L.D. and West, B. (2011), “Does accounting history matter?”, *Accounting History*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 389-402

Gross, I. (1980), “The abolition of Negro slavery and British parliamentary politics 1832-3”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 63-85.

Grove, H., Mock, T., & Ehrenreich, K. (1977), “A review of human resource accounting measurement systems from a measurement theory perspective”, *Accounting, Organizations and Society,* Vol.2 No.3, pp.219-236.

Haywood, G. (2014), “Valuation studies: a collaborative valuation in practice”, *Valuation Studies*, Vol. 2 No.1, pp.71–85.

Helgesson, C.F. and Muniesa, F. (2013), “For what it’s worth: an introduction to valuation studies”, *Valuation Studies,* Vol.1 No.1, pp.1–10.

Higman, B.W. (1967), “The West India ‘interest’ in parliament, 1807–1833”, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 13 No.49, pp.1-19.

Hutter, M. and Stark, D. (2015), “Pragmatist perspectives on valuation: An introduction”, in Antal, A.B., Hutter, M. and Stark, D. (Eds.), *Moments of Valuation: Exploring Sites of Dissonance,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.1-14.

Jeacle, I. (2017), “Constructing audit society in the virtual world: the case of the online reviewer”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 30 No.1, pp.18-37.

Jeacle, I. (2022), “The gendered nature of valuation: valuing life in the Titanic compensation claims process”, *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *99*, 101309.

Kornberger, M., Justesen, L., Madsen, A.K. and Mouritsen, J. (Eds.) (2015), *Making Things Valuable,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Kjellberg, H., Mallard, A., Arjaliès, D.L., Aspers, P., Beljean, S., Bidet, A., Corsin, A., Didier, E., Fourcade, M., Geiger, S. and Hoeyer, K. (2013), “Valuation studies? Our collective two cents”, *Valuation Studies,* Vol.1 No.1, pp.11–30.

Kuckartz, U. (2014), *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice and Using Software,* Sage, Los Angeles.

Lamont, M. (2012), “Toward a comparative sociology of valuation and evaluation”, *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 38 No.1, pp.201-221.

Le Theule, M. A., Lambert, C., and Morales, J. (2021), "Accounting to the end of life. scarcity, performance and death", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 102377.

Lippman, E. and Wilson, P. (2007), "The culpability of accounting in perpetuating the Holocaust", *Accounting History,* Vol.12 No.3, pp.283-303.

Lobdell, R. (2000), "The price of freedom: financial aspects of British slave emancipation, 1833-1838, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Social Sciences History Association, October 2000, Pittsburgh.

Manjapra, K. (2019), "Necrospeculation: postemancipation finance and Black redress", *Social Text 139,* Vol. 37 No. 2, pp.29-65.

Marqués, E. (1976), "Human resource accounting: some questions and reflections", *Accounting, Organizations and Society,* Vol.1 Nos.2-3, pp.175-178.

Marshall, P.J. (1996), "Parliament and property rights in the late eighteenth century British Empire", in Brewer, J. and Staves, S. (Eds), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, Routledge London & New York, pp.530-544.

Mennicken, A. and Power, M. (2015), "Accounting and the plasticity of valuation", in Antal, A.B., Hutter, M. and Stark, D. (Eds.), *Moments of Valuation: Exploring Sites of Dissonance,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.205-228.

Mennicken, A. and Sjögren, E. (2015), "Valuation and calculation at the margins", *Valuation Studies,* Vol.3 No.1, pp.1–7.

Miller, P. and Napier, C. (1993), "Genealogies of calculation", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 18, Nos. 7-8, pp. 631-647.

Milo, Y., Power, M., Robson, K., & Vollmer, H. (2021), "Editorial: Themed section on accounting and valuation studies", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 91, 101155.

Mills, P.A. (1993), "Accounting history as social science: a cautionary note", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 18 Nos 7/8, pp. 801-803.

Modell, S., and Yang, C. (2018), "Financialisation as a strategic action field: An historically informed field study of governance reforms in Chinese state-owned enterprises", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 54, pp.41-59.

Muniesa, F. (2011), "A flank movement in the understanding of valuation", *The Sociological Review,* Vol. 59 No.1, pp.24-38.

Ogan, P. (1976), "A human resource value model for professional service organizations", *The Accounting Review*, Vol.51 No.2, pp.306-320.

Oldroyd, D., Fleischman, R.K. and Tyson, T.N. (2008), "The culpability of accounting practice in promoting slavery in the British Empire and antebellum United States", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol.19 No.5, pp.764-784.

Parker, L.D. (1997), “Informing historical research in accounting and management”, *The Accounting Historians Journal*, Vol. 24 No.2, pp.111 – 150.

Parker, L.D. (1999), “Historiography for the new millennium: adventures in accounting and management”, *Accounting History*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 11-42.

Parker, L.D. (2004), “Presenting’ the past: perspectives on time for accounting and management history”, *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 1-27.

Paton, D. (2004), *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870*, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

Perkiss, S. and Moerman, L. (2018), “A dispute in the making: A critical examination of displacement, climate change and the Pacific Islands”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol.31 No.1, pp.166-192.

Plante, M., Free, C., and Andon, P. (2021). Making artworks valuable: Categorisation and modes of valuation work. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 91, 101155.

Rodrigues, L.L. and Craig, R. (2018), “The role of government accounting and taxation in the institutionalization of slavery in Brazil”, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 57 Dec, pp.21-38.

Roslender, R. and Dyson, J.R. (1992), “Accounting for the worth of employees: a new look at an old problem”, *The British Accounting Review,* Vol. 24 No. 4, pp.311-329.

Roslender, R. and Fincham, R. (2001), “Thinking critically about intellectual capital”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 383-399.

Sheridan, R.B. (1961), “The West India sugar crisis and British slave emancipation, 1830-1833”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 539-551

Simmel, G. (1978), *The Philosophy of Money*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Spence, C., Carter, C., Husillos, J., and Archel, P. (2017), “Taste matters: cultural capital and elites in proximate Strategic Action Fields”, *Human Relations*, Vol. 70 No.2, pp.211-236.

Stark, D. (2000), “For a sociology of worth”, keynote address at the Annual Conference of the European Association of Evolutionary Political Economy, November 2000, Berlin.

Stark, D. (2009), *The Sense of Dissonance. Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Svetlova, E. (2018), “Value without valuation? An example of the cocos market”, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 52 May, pp.69-78.

Walker, S.P. (2008), “Innovation, convergence and argument without end in accounting history”, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 296-322

Wastell, R.E.P. (1932), *The History of Slave Compensation 1833 to 1845*, M.A. Thesis London University, London

Williams, E. (1964), Capitalism and Slavery, Andre Deutsch, London.

Zelizer, V. (1994a), *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Zelizer, V. (1994b), *The Social Meaning of Money,* BasicBooks, New York.