

## **Freedom's Paradoxes: A Case Study of the Slave Schooner Julita**

Lucy Wickstrom

### ***Abstract:***

*After Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, the British Royal Navy committed one-fifth of its manpower to the cause of capturing other nations' illegal slave ships. This effort to enforce abolition liberated 250,000 displaced Africans over the course of the nineteenth century and brought the crews that had carried them before officials to have their cases tried. Because of the careful documentation of these cases by the Mixed Commissions, there is a wealth of primary sources detailing the circumstances of these captures and the human beings claimed as cargo.*

*This paper utilizes a case study of one such slave ship, the Spanish schooner Julita, to yield crucial insight on the reality of the British Royal Navy's efforts. While abolition is of course an historical moment worthy of celebration, the case of the Julita reveals that the prejudice toward Africans in the Atlantic nineteenth century world led even the British officials tasked with liberating them to often ignore their humanity and treat them with disrespect. By consulting such primary documents as the records of the Mixed Commission in Havana and the British Parliament, this paper will tell the story of the schooner Julita, its capture by the British brig-sloop Racer, and the 353 human beings taken from their homes in Whydah and bound for a life of servitude.*

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## Two Ships

The *Racer* was a recently commissioned brig-sloop of the British Royal Navy, which would later earn a revered and fearsome reputation for being a voracious capturer of slave ships.<sup>1</sup> The *Julita* was a Spanish schooner with a crew of twenty-three and an illegal cargo of 353 human beings, forced from their homes and enslaved, bound for Cuba.<sup>2</sup> On January 22, 1835, these two ships crossed paths, and the *Julita*'s career was over, its captives liberated. These Africans joined the 250,000 who were liberated by the British Royal Navy's efforts to enforce abolition in the nineteenth century; sent to Trinidad, they were then forced into a life of indentured servitude.<sup>3</sup>

This was one of many similar stories that would play out over a thousand times in the course of the nineteenth century, as the British Royal Navy committed one-fifth of its entire strength and manpower to the cause of capturing slave ships.<sup>4</sup> A specific case study of the *Julita*, however, yields intriguing and crucial insight on the reality of the transatlantic slave trade. The story of the *Julita*'s captain, who had

conducted other slave trading voyages and was even previously captured by the Royal Navy, demonstrates the ability of slave ship captains to return easily to their inhumane profession even after capture. The activities of the *Racer*'s captain, who elected to stay out at sea and continue chasing other ships rather than go to Cuba and participate in the *Julita*'s trial, reveals the disregard the British, too, had for the African people, even as they were liberating them. In addition, the language employed, and the motivations detailed in the documentation of the case by the Mixed Commission in Havana, a joint court consisting of British and Spanish officials, divulge a discounting of the Africans' right to freedom. In this essay, I will utilize a case study of a single slave ship, the *Julita*, to argue that the widespread prejudice toward Africans in the Atlantic nineteenth century world led even the British officials who were committed to liberating these captured human beings to often ignore and condemn the Africans' humanity.

Extensive scholarship has been conducted on the history of anti-slavery, the transatlantic slave trade, and the Royal Navy. W.E.F. Ward's *The Royal Navy and the Slavers: The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade* provides a fascinating chronology of the Navy's efforts and reveals the true scope of the operation: it highlights the initial difficulty of the task and tracks a rise in effectiveness that was achieved through steady persistence, with Ward using primary documents and case studies as his main source of information. The seminal work *Opposing the Slavers: The Royal Navy's Campaign against the Atlantic Slave Trade* by Peter Grindal discusses the captures, as well as the ultimate outcomes for the ships and the Africans, with painstaking detail. Grindal skillfully handles international relations and illuminates the various inhibiting factors at work that the Royal Navy had to combat

1 Peter Grindal, *Opposing the Slavers: The Royal Navy's Campaign against the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016), 483.

2 "His Majesty's Commissioners to the Duke of Wellington" (23 Feb. 1835), *Parliamentary Papers*, Irish University Press 14/A/176, no. 91, 143.

3 Henry Lovejoy, "Overview," *Liberated Africans*, accessed November 22, 2019, <https://liberatedafricans.org/about.php>.

4 "Transatlantic Slave Trade Database," *Slave Voyages*, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>; W.E.F. Ward, *The Royal Navy and the Slavers: The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

throughout their mission. Extensive appendixes filled with primary documents are also provided, with lists of relevant international treaties and ships captured, for example. Other scholars have performed case studies of slave ships in order to reveal the individuality of each voyage placed under the blanket term “slave trade,” present new problems not typically considered when generally studying the trade, and demonstrate the courage of the Africans in instances of rebellion and resistance when attention is so often placed squarely on lawmakers and politicians instead.<sup>5</sup> Rosanne Marion Adderley’s book “*New Negroes from Africa*”: *Slave Trade Abolition and the Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-century Caribbean* investigates the African diaspora in the Americas, providing intriguing information and insights about the Mixed Commissions and British Vice-Admiralty Courts that transplanted liberated Africans in the Caribbean to become indentured servants.<sup>6</sup> All of these works, and others, compose an impressive historiography of the transatlantic slave trade, the people it enslaved, and those who tried to prevent it.

In this essay, I will rely predominantly on primary documents to conduct a case study of the schooner *Julita*, its capture by the *Racer*, and the 353 Africans who left Whydah on the second of December aboard

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) ; Sean M. Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare: A Journey into Captivity from Sierra Leone to South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016) ; Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Rosanne M. Adderley, “*New Negroes from Africa*”: *Slave Trade Abolition and the Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-century Caribbean* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

the Spanish ship. I will draw on the original records of the High Court of Admiralty (HCA 35), referring to the correspondence between the Admiralty and the Treasury regarding the capture of the *Julita*. I will utilize the Irish University Press publication of the *Parliamentary Papers* and the FO 84 series of the Foreign Office (UK) records to investigate documentation by the House of Commons pertaining to the schooner and, in some cases, related ships. I will contextualize all of this with relevant treaties between Britain and Spain which allowed and prompted the arrests of Spanish slave ships; finally, the extensively helpful Transatlantic Slave Trade Database will provide supplemental data to situate the story of the *Julita* within the wider history of slavery and liberation.

### **British Antislavery and the Royal Navy**

The movement to end the slave trade in Great Britain was largely a grassroots one. Through the leadership and effort of such abolitionists as William Wilberforce, Olaudah Equiano, and Thomas Clarkson, and the establishment of organizations like the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787, the British public was able to learn truths of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, and many of them mobilized.<sup>7</sup> Historian Lisa A. Lindsay argues in her book, *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, that British abolitionism was “the first massive grassroots movement for political change, mobilizing millions of British citizens to sign petitions, contribute

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<sup>7</sup> Seymour Drescher, “The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism,” *Slavery & Abolition* 33, no. 4 (Dec. 2012).

money, attend meetings and rallies, boycott sugar, and campaign for reformist political candidates.”<sup>8</sup> This remarkable shift in British public opinion led, at last, to the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire, going into effect on the first day of 1808.<sup>9</sup>

After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when the nations of Europe signed a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade under the leadership of Britain, subsequent specified treaties with each individual nation allowed the British Royal Navy to capture illicit slave ships and liberate all the Africans onboard.<sup>10</sup> The Navy invested a significant portion of its resources to this enforcement of abolition and British officers acted courageously in their efforts to capture ships, braving difficult weather and dangerous people, as detailed in the works of Ward and Grindal, but there remained many shortcomings in this new system.<sup>11</sup> In his article “Eyes on the Prize: Journeys in Slave Ships Taken as Prizes by the Royal Navy,” historian Robert Burroughs uses a case study of the captured slave ship *Progreso* and other primary documents to demonstrate the limitations of British abolitionism and the effort to liberate Africans. In keeping with the arguments of previous historians, Burroughs points out that accounts of British mistreatment of liberated Africans, along with capturing efforts that failed or were

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8 Lisa A. Lindsay, *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hill, 2008), 135.

9 Lindsay, 128.

10 “Declaration of the Powers, on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, of the 8th February, 1815” (8 Feb. 1815), Hertlet’s *Treaties, A Complete Collection of the Treaties and Conventions at Present Subsisting Between Great Britain & Foreign Powers*, volume 1, 9-13.

11 *Ibid.*; Ward and Grindal.

exceptionally challenging, were often left out of the national literature, because such stories “provided uncomfortable reminders of the shortcomings of abolitionist policies...[therefore] they were not readily incorporated into the dominant narrative that glorified Britain’s antislavery movement.”<sup>12</sup> The British desire to exclude the darker aspects of the Royal Navy’s mission not only misled the public then, but causes problems for today’s scholars seeking to understand the complete truth of the campaign.

### **Spanish Antislavery and the Treaty Between Great Britain and Spain**

Britain and Spain’s infamous historical rivalry, going all the way through the Napoleonic Wars, made their bonding together to abolish the slave trade in the nineteenth century highly unlikely, but certain contemporary movements explain this phenomenon. Historian Emily Berquist details the history of Spanish antislavery in her article “Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment in the Spanish Atlantic World, 1765-1817,” revealing that just as there were sincere and passionate abolitionists in Great Britain, such people existed in Spain. One of the most famous was a man named Jose Maria Blanco y Crespo, who moved to Great Britain and began writing anti-slavery articles in 1811; he also translated many of William Wilberforce’s writings into Spanish so that his countrymen could read them, and finally published his own book entitled *Sketch of the Slave Trade, and Reflections about this Traffic*

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12 Robert Burroughs, “Eyes on the Prize: Journeys in Slave Ships Taken as Prizes by the Royal Navy,” *Slavery & Abolition* 31, no. 1 (Mar. 2010): 99.

considered according to *Morals, Politics, and Christianity*.<sup>13</sup> Berquist acknowledges, however, that the efforts of Blanco y Crespo and his counterparts were largely unsuccessful, though “they nevertheless demonstrate that there was an independent legislative movement towards the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the Spanish Empire.”<sup>14</sup> The creation of a new Spanish constitution in 1812 “was exceptionally liberal in granting full representation to indigenous peoples, abolishing Indian forced labor, establishing freedom of the press, and gaining control over the church” in the Empire, but did not make provisions for the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>15</sup>

The first move was made in 1815, when the nations of Europe determined at the Congress of Vienna that “just and enlightened men of all ages” considered the slave trade “as repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality.”<sup>16</sup> This treaty deemed the “universal abolition of the Slave Trade as a measure particularly worthy of their attention,” and the ministers of the nations, including Spain, lent their signatures, anticipating future negotiations between Britain and each individual country at a later date.<sup>17</sup>

For Spain, this later date came on September 23, 1817, when a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade was signed between Spain and

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13 Emily Berquist, “Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment in the Spanish Atlantic World, 1765-1817,” *Slavery & Abolition* 31 no. 2 (Jun. 2010): 192.

14 *Ibid.*, 193.

15 *Ibid.*, 195.

16 Hertslet’s *Treaties*, 11.

17 *Ibid.*, 11–13.

Great Britain. This treaty guaranteed the “Slave Trade shall be abolished throughout the entire Dominions of Spain, on the 30th day of May, 1820.”<sup>18</sup> It declared any Spanish ships sailing north of the equator with enslaved people as “carrying on an illicit slave trade,” and that ships from both Britain and Spain’s “Royal navies...may visit such merchant vessels of the two nations as may be suspected, upon reasonable grounds, of having slaves on board”; this explains why the *Racer* was legally able to capture the *Julita* in January of 1835.<sup>19</sup> Britain also promised that the king of Spain would be paid 400,000 pounds in compensation for the abolition of a trade which, the British admitted, was lucrative.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, this treaty did not prevent all Spanish slave traders from carrying on their business; the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database records 681 vessels flying Spanish flags after 1820.<sup>21</sup>

### **The *Racer*, the *Julita*, and the Capture**

Commander James Hope was twenty-seven years old in 1835, having already been at sea thirteen years. He went on to have an illustrious career until finally retiring in 1878, but his time as commander of the

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18 “Treaty between Great Britain and Spain, for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, signed at Madrid, 23rd September, 1817,” (23 Sep. 1817), Hertslet’s *Treaties, A Complete Collection of the Treaties and Conventions at Present Subsisting Between Great Britain & Foreign Powers, volume 2*, 275.

19 *Ibid.*, 277, 279, 281.

20 *Ibid.*, 277.

21 *Ibid.*, *Slave Voyages*.

*Racer* from 1833 to 1838 was one of great success and renown.<sup>22</sup> The sixteen-gun brig-sloop was commissioned in July of 1833, making it a relative newcomer among its fellow Royal Navy ships; in fact, its January 1835 seizing of the *Julita* was the first capture it ever made.<sup>23</sup>

On the other side of the conflict was Gabriel Perez, aged thirty-five and described by the Commission as a “native of St. Domingo...a Catholic and married,” and he was not only the captain but also the owner of the *Julita*, according to his first mate.<sup>24</sup> A prolific slave trader, Perez had commanded two other successful voyages since 1830, transporting a total of 721 enslaved Africans to Cuba.<sup>25</sup> The *Julita*’s capture, however, was not Perez’s first encounter with the Royal Navy. On February 22nd, 1831, a Spanish brigantine called the *Primera* was captured on its second voyage by the British brig *Black Joke* on the way to the Americas; it carried 311 Africans and was captained and owned by Gabriel Perez.<sup>26</sup> The Africans were emancipated and sent to Sierra Leone, the *Primera* condemned, but Perez was back on the seas in less than a year, the first mate and owner of the brig *Carolina*, which was also captured in September of 1832. The British commissioners from Sierra Leone reported with satisfaction while writing of the *Car-*

22 “Rear-Admiral Sir James Hope (1808-1881),” Collections of Royal Museums Greenwich, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/14253.html>.

23 Grindal.

24 “Abstract of the Evidence in the Case of the Spanish Sch. ‘Julita’” (5 Feb. 1835), TNA, FO 84/171, 119.

25 Ibid., Slave Voyages.

26 “Report of the Evidence in the Case of the Spanish Schooner ‘Primera,’ Gabriel Perez, Master” (21 May 1831), TNA, FO 84/117, 99.

*olina*’s fate that the capture of the *Primera* “has, [Perez] asserts, ruined him; and we hope that similar acts of retribution may befall others of his countrymen, who still outrage humanity by carrying on the slave trade.”<sup>27</sup> Though made an example of by the commissioners, Perez was apparently unaffected by their disapproval--instead, he continued in his chosen profession until the 1835 capture of yet another of his many investments.

The *Julita* set sail from Havana on March 24th, 1834 with a cargo of hard alcohol and dry goods, bound for Whydah, a coastal West African kingdom in modern day Benin. Twenty-one-year-old Francisco Calderin, the third mate, testified in his deposition that it was never the intention of the *Julita* to pick up human beings, but they “were not able to meet [in Whydah] with any gold dust or ivory for sale, and consequently, in return for their cargo took on board 353 slaves of both sexes, as being the only articles to be procured in that country.”<sup>28</sup> The condescending tone in Calderin’s phrasing, suggesting that Whydah did not have any resources of value to contribute other than human beings, denotes a degree of defiance even in the custody of the Mixed Commission. Though he was the one imprisoned now, while the Africans he had overseen onboard would soon go free, he held on to his racism and prejudice.

Gabriel Perez told a different story, swearing that the *Julita* was bound not for Whydah, but for the island of St. Thomas to deliver alcohol,

27 “His Majesty’s Commissioners to Viscount Palmerston” (15 Sep. 1832), State Papers (Presented by Command of His Majesty), 19 January-29 August 1833, 27.

28 Ibid., “Abstract...’Julita,” FO 84/171, 120.

silver, and cotton goods. He testified that “he certainly made at first for St. Thomas, but happening by chance to touch at Ayudah [Whydah] on the Coast of Africa, this deponent was induced there to land his cargo.”<sup>29</sup> Why he was thus “induced,” Perez did not describe. Interestingly, in opposition to what his first mate testified, Perez claimed that he was not the owner of the *Julita*, and that the true owner, a man named Juan Bertinotti, had commanded him to make the journey to St. Thomas in the first place. Whatever the precise truth was, Perez’s attempt to exonerate himself is clear, but surely, his history with the British Royal Navy and the convicting evidence of hundreds of Africans onboard rendered his exaggerations futile. Commissioner MacLeay in Havana reported that “on the passport of the ‘*Julita*’ an entry is made, which states that, although allowed to trade to the Cape de Verdes and St. Thomas, she was, under no pretext, to engage in the prohibited traffic of slaves.”<sup>30</sup>

The *Julita* departed from Whydah on the second of December. In the span of only one month and nineteen days, ten captives had already died, and an eleventh lost his life on the morning of the twenty-first of January, leading to a three percent mortality rate. This is not at all surprising, considering the average mortality rate on the Middle Passage was twenty percent.<sup>31</sup> The next day, the *Julita* was sailing off the coast of Tortuga with its 342 remaining prisoners when it was met by a ship flying the French flag. This vessel subsequently hoisted English col-

29 Ibid., 118.

30 Ibid., “His...Wellington,” PP.

31 “Abstract of the Evidence in the Case of the ‘*Julita*’” (5 Feb. 1835), PP, IUP, 14/A/176, second enclosure in no. 91, 144; Lindsay, 96.

ors, detained the *Julita*, and sent the captured slave ship to Havana.<sup>32</sup> The operation had failed, and once again Gabriel Perez found himself in the custody of the Mixed Commission.

Rather than go to Havana, Commander Hope elected to send the *Julita* ahead with one of his men, Lieutenant William Chambers. The *Racer* continued on with the goal of making more arrests, which it did, beginning with the capture of another Spanish brig called the *Chubasco*.<sup>33</sup> This meant that the verdict of the trial could not be pronounced until Hope’s arrival, for under the law established by Britain and Spain the captor’s attendance was required before adjudication. Hope promised to arrive by February 5th at the latest, but did not make an appearance until the twenty-first, nearly a month after the *Julita*’s capture; apparently, the experience of his first arrest was one so exhilarating that he could not rest until it was repeated.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, his vainglorious delay led to the deaths of two more Africans while they all awaited emancipation, the number of surviving former captives now reaching its final total of 340.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, Commander Hope’s primary concern was not the human lives he had been charged to liberate.

Ultimately, the Commission ruled that the capture of the *Julita* was “good and legal, and that the said schooner, with all her tackle, apparel, and whatever may be mentioned in her Inventory, are subject to confiscation, all except the above-mentioned three hundred and forty

32 “Abstract...‘*Julita*,’” FO 84/171, 120.

33 Grindal.

34 “His...Wellington,” PP.

35 “Abstract...‘*Julita*,’” FO 84/171, 117.

negroes, who are hereby declared free from all slavery and captivity.”<sup>36</sup> The *Julita*’s remains were to be sent to auction, the money earned benefitting the governments of Britain and Spain, and Perez and his crew all placed in prison “at his Excellency’s disposal.”<sup>37</sup> In the end, the “moiety of the proceeds of the ‘*Julita*’ which accrues to his Majesty’s government amounts to \$355,” but unfortunately for Commander Hope, his impetuous decision to keep hunting rather than go to Havana cost “the heavy expense of \$1164...for the maintenance of the ‘*Julita*’s’ negroes prior to adjudication [which] has entirely resulted from the captor’s not coming into Port until long after the detained vessel.”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps it was the Commission’s displeasure, perhaps it was the depletion in his payment, but something prompted Commander Hope to become a more efficient and respectable ship captor. The *Racer* went on to gain an admirable reputation, engaging in lengthy pursuits of slave ships and becoming so feared by insurance companies that they once “hired (at considerable expense) some fast vessels in ballast to intercept and warn two notorious slavers expected to be closing the island” while the *Racer* was relentlessly patrolling the coast of Cuba.<sup>39</sup> All in all, this brig-sloop of the Royal Navy captured a total of seven slave ships over the course of its career.<sup>40</sup>

The relationship between the *Julita* and the *Racer* had come to an end, but the journey of the liberated Africans was far from complete. Once

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36 “Sentence in the Case of the Spanish schooner, ‘*Julita*’” (n.d.), PP, IUP 14/A/176, 145.

37 Ibid.

38 MacLeay to Lord Duke (12 Jun. 1835), TNA, HCA 35/31, 22.

39 Grindal, 577, 586-7.

40 Grindal, 777-780.

emancipated, these people were not escorted home or allowed to go about as they pleased; rather, they were taken by the British to the island of Trinidad, facing indentured servitude. Their lives, before and after their capture, are an essential component of the *Julita*’s story.

### The Slave Trade in Whydah

Eleven voyages took the same route as the *Julita* in the 1830s, from Havana to Whydah to purchase a total of 4,680 captives. Of those, seven were captured by the Royal Navy; the other four arrived successfully in the Americas, having taken 1,666 people away from their homes. One hundred sixty-four of those people died on the Middle Passage before ever reaching the Americas.<sup>41</sup>

Whydah was a booming cosmopolitan city, the capital of the kingdom of Dahomey, located in the Bight of Benin. Its ethnic diversity was due primarily to its high population of enslaved people, imported from many different inland regions and either kept in the city or sold into the transatlantic trade. Historian Robin Law has produced the seminal work on Whydah’s history as a slave trading post, entitled *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port,” 1727-1892*. In this book, Law describes the journey that captives were forced to traverse, revealing that “slaves generally arrived in Ouidah overland from Abomey, via Allada, Tori and Savi...some slaves arrived in Ouidah from the east, from Oyo and other places, brought part

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41 Ibid.; *Slave Voyages*.

of the way by canoe.”<sup>42</sup> The distance from, for example, Abomey to Whydah was sixty-five miles.<sup>43</sup>

The tragic truth is that for many people who were forced to take this lengthy journey, it was only the beginning of one much more harrowing and treacherous. From the 1670s to the 1870s, Whydah was the second largest slaving port in all of Africa, exporting over a million slaves.<sup>44</sup> So lucrative was its relationship with European countries that the latter referred to the region, the Bight of Benin, as the “slave coast,” and Lindsay argues that “the drastic increase in slave supplies from the Bight of Benin seems to be correlated with the emergence of Whydah.”<sup>45</sup>

European slave merchants had held a presence in Whydah since the early eighteenth century. Historian Ana Lucia Araujo describes the relationship between Whydah and Portugal in her article “Dahomey, Portugal and Bahia: King Adandozan and the Atlantic Slave Trade,” detailing that “in 1721, the Portuguese founded the fort São João Baptista da Ajuda at Ouidah, which led Portuguese and Brazilian slave merchants to settle at the slave ports of the Bight of Benin.”<sup>46</sup> This kind of permanence signaled a strong bond between the governments

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42 Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port,” 1727-1892* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 139-40.

43 Thomas Spencer Baynes, ed., *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed., “Dahomey” (Adam and Charles Black: Edinburgh, 1875-89), 765.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*; Lindsay, 69.

46 Ana Lucia Araujo, “Dahomey, Portugal and Bahia: King Adandozan and the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Slavery & Abolition* 33, no. 1 (Mar. 2012): 2.

of Europe and Whydah. Although Britain’s push toward global antislavery as the nineteenth century dawned presented a commercial predicament for the prosperous city, illegal slave trading was prominent and over a hundred voyages supplied by Whydah after British abolition in 1807 are documented in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. Though this is undoubtedly an improvement from years previous, 44,117 people were still taken from their homes and forcibly enslaved.<sup>47</sup>

Three hundred fifty-three of those people were aboard the *Julita*, liberated in 1835. By examining their ages upon being captured, their names, and their fates after liberation, we may learn just a piece of the great stories of their lives.

### **The Africans of the *Julita***

The captives onboard the *Julita* who survived until liberation were made up of 241 males and 99 females.<sup>48</sup> Of these, 183 were of adult age, meaning that over forty-six percent of the Africans on the *Julita* were children. This alarmingly high number can be attributed to the rise of enslaved children in the early nineteenth century, a phenomenon studied by Paul Lovejoy in his essay “The children of the slave trade – the transatlantic phase.” Lovejoy argues that although children had historically been regarded as inefficient liabilities in the slave trade, the simpler tasks given some enslaved individuals in the nine-

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47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ibid.*; HCA.

teenth century—the picking of coffee beans in Brazil, for instance—meant there was now a purpose and demand for children. Lovejoy explains that “they were a cheap source of labor. More children than adults could be loaded on board ships, enabling so-called tight packing,” and points out “the relative ease of controlling children, as opposed to adult males.”<sup>49</sup> As the enslavement of children became more practical and economically advantageous, higher percentages of them were packed onto ships to be traded. Sixteen of the captives on the *Julita* were ten years old, the youngest age represented on the ship.<sup>50</sup>

One such ten-year-old was Adechima, a boy one inch short of four feet tall. Dada’ was a twelve-year-old girl, Dari sixteen, Obanique’ twenty. The oldest captives were thirty-six years old, two of them being men named Fami’ and Oyo.<sup>51</sup> All these names, and nearly all the others, belong to the language group Yoruba, a tonal language with a myriad of distinct dialects; it is spoken in Benin and Nigeria by about thirty million people today.<sup>52</sup> This almost complete universality in name origin indicates that the Africans aboard the *Julita* were likely nearly all from the kingdom of Dahomey, or very nearby in Nigeria, and brought into Whydah by the same route Law describes in his book. Imagining 157 children on that journey of at least sixty-five miles, let alone thinking of the horrors they must have endured on the Middle Passage, is deeply troubling; and remembering their names and the names of

49 Paul Lovejoy, “The Children of the Slave Trade – The Transatlantic Phase,” *Slavery & Abolition* 27, no. 2 (August 2006), 207.

50 Ibid.; Slave Voyages, African Names.

51 Ibid.

52 University of Georgia, “Yoruba Language,” African Studies Institute, accessed December 1, 2019, <http://www.africa.uga.edu/Yoruba/yorubabout.html>.

all the captives humanizes them, providing a reminder that all 353 of these captives were human beings, individuals with homes they loved and families they wanted to protect and dreams they hoped to fulfill.

After the *Julita* was captured, the Africans remained in Havana, awaiting the return of the *Racer* and liberation. When the *Racer* returned at last on the twenty-first of February, Commissioner Miguel Tacon wrote to the Commissary Judge, entreating him to “please to have the goodness, without loss of time, to direct a medical gentleman to visit the negroes of the ‘*Julita*,’ and to set apart such of them as may be fit for the voyage” which would bring them to indentured servitude—the Mixed Commission’s idea of liberty for Africans. Tacon’s letter has an air of well-meaning genuineness, until he betrays his ulterior motive by telling the Judge that he trusted “that, taking into consideration the expenses arising from the delay caused by the detention of the ‘*Racer*,’ you will cause this operation to be executed speedily.”<sup>53</sup> His next letter was even more explicit in expressing the cause of his impatience, reminding the Judge that “I begged of you to direct the Medical Officer to lose no time in examining them, in order that all further expense might be saved to the Royal Treasury.”<sup>54</sup> Tacon’s urgency to have the Africans of the *Julita* examined was not due to his desire that they stay healthy or his urgency for them to receive their liberation; rather, he was concerned with expenses and wanted to remove the captives from Havana as soon as possible so the Treasury would no longer have to pay for their preservation.

53 “Don Miguel Tacon to His Majesty’s Commissary Judge” (21 Feb. 1835), PP, IUP, 14/A/176, third enclosure in no. 92, 147.

54 Fourth enclosure in no. 92.

These Africans from Benin and Nigeria must have noticed the persistent presence of this irreverent disregard for their humanity. Their capture and forced transportation first to Whydah, then on the Middle Passage is an obvious manifestation of this; but the Royal Navy's treatment of the captives they liberated is marked by much of the same disrespect. Rather than responsibly travelling with the *Julita* to Havana, where he was required for emancipation to proceed, Commander Hope continued on to chase the self-serving thrill of catching more slave ships. He did not bother to return even when he reported that he would, only making an appearance a month later, by which time two more Africans had needlessly lost their lives. Miguel Tacon was impatient for the Africans to leave Havana, not because he wanted them to experience freedom, but because they were costing the Royal Treasury. Admittedly, the Royal Navy had many matters to attend to and many other slave ships to capture, so it was in their best interest economically to conduct the liberation process speedily; but the Africans of the *Julita* must have felt that their human dignity and basic right of freedom could have been afforded more respect from these people who were supposedly concerned with restoring that right to them.

At last, on February 21st—the very day of the *Racer*'s return—Dr. David Scott Meikleham examined the captives and “found them sound and healthy.”<sup>55</sup> Two days later Commissioner MacLeay reported that 92 of the males and 92 of the females from the *Julita* were bound for Trinidad, stating that he regretted “exceedingly that the peculiar circumstances of the Island of Trinidad should render necessary the strict

<sup>55</sup> “Medical Officer’s Certificate” (21 Feb. 1835), PP, IUP, 14/A/176, sixth enclosure in no. 92, 147.

observance of the equality of sexes, in the shipments of Africans to be made from this city to Trinidad.”<sup>56</sup> This, indeed, regrettable ruling, which likely separated many families and friends—and the fact that these Africans were sent to Trinidad at all—was the result of a new agreement with the governor of Trinidad, made by the British government in 1834. Peter Grindal records that the governor “had expressed his willingness to take emancipated slaves from Havana, on condition that he was given a month’s notice of their arrival, but he was not prepared to accept a disproportionate number of males.”<sup>57</sup> Since many more men than women were being found on slave ships and emancipated, this agreement necessitated the equal disbursement of the sexes after liberation.

Before the Africans were sent to Trinidad, the Mixed Commission recorded all their names, which is the reason they are available to us today; beside their African names, however, the Commissioners wrote new “Christian” names. Twelve-year-old Dada’, for example, was renamed “Genoveva”; twenty-year-old Obanique’ was christened “Margarita.”<sup>58</sup> After receiving their Christian names—names in Spanish, the language of their captors—the Africans of the *Julita* were declared free and sent to Trinidad, where they would become indentured servants.

<sup>56</sup> “His Majesty’s Commissioner to Sir George Hill” (23 Feb. 1835), PP, IUP, 14/A/176, ninth enclosure in no. 92, 148.

<sup>57</sup> Grindal, 478.

<sup>58</sup> “Nombre Africano, Nombre Cristiano” (n.d.), TNA, FO 84/171, 144.

### Liberated Africans in Trinidad

Trinidad became the property of Spain in the fifteenth century and remained so until 1797, when it was seized by the British; the 1802 Treaty of Amiens awarded it officially to Great Britain. In her article “Trinidad: A Model Colony for British Slave Trade Abolition,” historian Gelien Matthews details the anxiety of abolitionists like William Wilberforce in the face of the acquisition of Trinidad, as they feared that “its abundant availability of virgin soil would inevitably lead to the increased demand for labor and an indefinite delay in the abolition of the slave trade.”<sup>59</sup> Remarkably, however, Trinidad “never attained a settled economy based on slavery”; rather, the British utilized it as a place in which to deposit liberated Africans.<sup>60</sup>

In her book *“New Negroes from Africa,”* Rosanne Marion Adderley discusses in fascinating detail the lives of liberated Africans in their new homes, determined by the Mixed Commission. She addresses the interesting subject of gender imbalance that caused such concern for Trinidad, and relates that “British officials...certified...that the slave trade refugees had agreed to leave Cuba voluntarily and that no separations had occurred between husbands and wives or parents and child...the British wanted to avoid the inhumane attitudes toward Africans that characterized the slave trade.”<sup>61</sup> This is highly reassuring, and we can only hope that the British officials were telling the truth when they recorded this. In turn, before sending the Africans to Trin-

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59 Gelien Matthews, “Trinidad: A Model Colony for British Slave Trade Abolition” *Parliamentary History* 26 (2007): 94.

60 Ibid., 96.

61 Adderley, 131.

idad, authorities obtained a guarantee from those on the island that once there, the liberated people would “not be allowed to remain in idleness,” but would be put to work performing “moderate and regular labor.”<sup>62</sup> Upon arriving in Trinidad, the Africans liberated from the *Julita* would have been expected to begin work immediately, seemingly as though they were paying back a debt to the British Empire for giving them their freedom.

Fascinatingly, there are records of instances when genuine freedom was exercised in Trinidad by the Africans who arrived there. Adderley retells one such story of six women who were brought from their former relocation site of Antigua to Trinidad in 1826, since the ratio of women to men was so low and the island’s government earnestly desired balance. All six women declared they refused to stay in Trinidad, demanding they be returned to Antigua; and the British disappointedly consented due to, Adderley hypothesizes, their “pride in their treatment of Africans they had rescued from foreign slave ships.”<sup>63</sup> Though I have found no such record concerning the women of the *Julita*, it is gratifying to suppose that perhaps some of them may have exercised a similar freedom.

### Conclusion: The Paradox of Abolition

The abolition of the slave trade in Britain was undeniably an exceptional and inspiring moment in human history. The fact that through a

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62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 136.

grassroots movement by the people, as Lisa Lindsay phrases it, “after thousands of years in which slavery as an institution was not even questioned, they convinced the world’s most powerful slave trader to abolish it,” is remarkable and nearly unbelievable.<sup>64</sup> Britain’s goal to involve all of Europe in its fight against the slave trade is admirably idealistic, and the mission of the Royal Navy should be appreciated for the courage of its officers and its liberation of 250,000 Africans who were torn from their homes.

Nevertheless, there is an inherent paradox in Britain’s great ideal of abolition. Africans *were* removed from the horrors of the Middle Passage and slavery in the Americas, but rather than be allowed to return home or choose their next destination, they were ushered into a life of indentured servitude in the place of the Mixed Commission’s choosing; even the officers of the Navy and the officials of the Commission often disregarded the humanity of these people and their inherent right to be free, made evident by the language and behavior of these British authorities. As this case study of the Spanish schooner *Julita* has shown, these Africans were rarely afforded the respect and dignity they deserved, even upon emancipation.

While it is wholly appropriate to celebrate the abolition of the slave trade, it is also of the utmost importance to remember the millions of Africans who were taken from their homes, their families, and their aspirations to build such significant parts of the societies we enjoy today. The 353 Africans who left Whydah on the *Julita* in December

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<sup>64</sup> Lindsay, 135.

of 1834, and the remaining 340 who set out for Trinidad in February of the next year, all had names and stories of their own. In our study of the transatlantic slave trade and the Royal Navy’s efforts to end it, we must not forget that the recorded number of enslaved Africans on any given ship is not a mere number; it represents beautiful, individual lives. Every single one of those lives was forced to reckon with the paradoxes of freedom, even after they had been told they were free, in a society and a world that was not ready to treat them with the love and respect they deserved as human beings.

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