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“I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see”: Revisiting the Story behind Former Slave Ship Captain John Newton's *Amazing Grace*.

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¹ I would like to thank the Madison Historical Review’s anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.
Few songs are as universally known as *Amazing Grace*. It is arguably the most sung, most recorded, and most loved hymn in the world.\(^2\) No other song, spiritual or secular, comes close to it in terms of numbers of recordings (over three thousand in the United States alone), frequency of performances (it is publicly sung at least ten million times a year), and international popularity.\(^3\) That on a cold day in the winter of 1772, John Newton wrote *Faith’s Review and Expectation*, the song we now know as the celebrated hymn *Amazing Grace*, is not well recognized.\(^4\) Indeed, among the billions of people who have enjoyed singing or listening to *Amazing Grace*, few have any knowledge of its origins, purposes, consequences, or history.

Making a reassessment of John Newton’s *Amazing Grace* in the wake of the 200\(^{th}\) anniversary of the legal abolition of the British slave trade seemed appropriate. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, John Newton (1725-1807) had the dubious distinction of becoming an Anglican minister after having served as a slave-ship captain. Newton traversed the Atlantic and witnessed slavery first hand. It is commonly purported that he was converted during a storm, yet he would continue to traffic thousands of men, women and children from Africa to the auction blocks before becoming an ordained clergyman. Years later, he penned the autobiographical words that make up the six stanzas of *Amazing Grace*. As this paper will show, Newton’s involvement with capitalism, evangelicalism and abolitionism, the main economic and spiritual/humanitarian forces of his time, as can be detected in his *Amazing Grace*, provides a fascinating case study of identity, spirituality and empire within the turbulent age of revolution in which he lived.

\(^2\) See the full lyrics of the original version of *Amazing Grace* as published in 1779 in the attached Appendix. The profits of the hymnal co-written by John Newton and William Cowper went to the poor of Olney parish.


\(^4\) Newton wrote *Faith’s Review and Expectation* in the same year as the *Somerset vs. Stewart* case, which is now infamous for the decision by Lord Mansfield on behalf of the English Court of King’s Bench that slavery was unlawful in England. This decision emancipated thousands of slaves in England.
Amazing Grace was almost certainly conceived by John Newton at Olney Parish Church in December 1772 as part of his preparations for a New Year’s Day sermon to be delivered on January 1, 1773. It was based on his sermon's text about I Chronicles 17:16-17, and was first published in Olney Hymns in 1779. Newton's friend and neighbour William Cowper (1731-1800) wrote sixty-seven of the hymns in the collection, while the remaining 348 were written by Newton. Each hymn was intended to illuminate a particular point or sermon during the weekly Bible study meetings that took place in the Great House of Olney. As his congregation consisted largely of artisans or tradesmen, Newton sought to facilitate an understanding of the scriptures by writing simply worded hymns that illustrated the biblical passages on which he was preaching. Hymn-singing in the Great House of Olney proved popular, but was only occasionally extended into the Olney church itself, for the eighteenth-century Church of England frowned upon anything other than metrical psalms being sung within consecrated buildings. Clarity and simplicity were the cornerstones of Newton’s hymn-writing technique. On these foundations he built his rhyme, rhythm, syntax, and choice of words in Amazing Grace.

Of the 146 total words that appeared, with minor spelling variations, in both the first publication of Amazing Grace in 1779 and the 1808 edition, 125 have a single syllable. Additionally, Newton used fifteen first-person pronouns – I, me, and mine – to call attention to his personal life journey. According to Bruce Hindmarsh, the initial exclamation of “Amazing grace!” invites immediate congregational consent and release of emotional energy. The

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5 William E. Phipps, Amazing Grace in John Newton: slave ship captain, hymn writer, and abolitionist (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 155. It is possible that Newton wrote Amazing Grace with his suicidal neighbour and good friend, William Cowper, in mind.
6 Aitken, 224.
7 Aitken, 225.
following parenthetical response “how sweet the sound!” enacts the amazement just
proclaimed, and forces the whole line back upon the word “grace”. The last two lines of the
first stanza perfectly match cadences with their contrasting images, and the simple antitheses
(lost/found, blind/see) are expressed in equally simple monosyllables. These antitheses are
drawn from the Gospel of Luke, which contains a series of parables with a lost and found
theme, and the story in John’s Gospel of a blind person who, after being healed by Jesus,
testified that he could see. The second stanza of Amazing Grace refers to Newton’s initial
conversion experience which is commonly believed to have occurred aboard the Greyhound.
David Cecil, however, maintains that Newton’s real conversion came when he made his last
delivery of slaves as a slave ship captain. Alternatively, Bruce Hindmarsh, dates his
conversion at nine years after his last command of a slave ship, for it was in 1762 that Newton
wrote his brief autobiography in which he began to express qualms over his former
employment. Irrespective of the exact moment of Newton’s conversion, the precision of “the
hour I first believed” in the second stanza pinpoints the experience of “grace” as gradual. The
last half of the third stanza moves from Newton’s past to turn with faith to face the future, thus
acting as a pivot upon which the whole hymn turns.

The final three stanzas of Amazing Grace trace the path of the believer through,
respectively, the balance of life, death, and the final dissolution of the elements of the world.
Critics and compilers of anecdotes for hymn handbooks have been quick to point out the
biographical significance of the metaphorical description of Newton’s sensational conversion.
It is also important to note that the original title of the hymn, Faith’s Review and Expectation,

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10 Phipps, 126.
11 See Hindmarsh, 29 and Phipps, 208.
12 Hindmarsh, 277.
and the turning from past to future in stanza three, hint at the kind of backwards and forwards looking, along the lines of salvation-history, which Newton practiced in his own devotional life. The force of this is even greater when it is remembered that Newton probably expounded this hymn as part of his regular ministry on Sunday evenings, making all of the implicit theological and personal connections explicit for his parishioners. Thus *Amazing Grace* was grounded not only in Newton’s devotional discipline and his biblical theology, but also in his spiritual autobiography to which I will now turn.

Newton was a wild and angry young man who rebelled against authority at every opportunity, starting with foolish acts of disobedience against his father, a prominent ship captain. Press-ganged at the age of eighteen into the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman on *HMS Harwich*, in March of 1744, he earned himself a public flogging for desertion. Exchanged from a warship to a slave ship in Madeira, Newton became even wilder in his behaviour. “I was exceedingly vile,” he explained. “I not only sinned with a high hand myself but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion.” Newton next worked for a shore-based slave trader in Sierra Leone. Notorious for his cursing and blasphemy, Newton served on a slave ship during the darkest and cruellest days of trans-Atlantic slavery. Accused of stealing, however, Newton fell foul to his employer’s African concubine, a tribal princess who imprisoned him in chains, starved him, and treated him brutally. He later recalled

“My bed was a mat spread upon a board or chest, and a log of wood my pillow. [...] She lived in plenty herself, but [...] she would send me victuals in her own plate after she had dined. [...] Once, I well remember, I was called to receive this bounty from her own hand; but being exceedingly weak and feeble, I dropped the

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13 Hindmarsh, 278.
14 Aitken, 17.
15 Aitken, 17.
16 Quoted in Aitken, 18. According to Aitken, Newton even composed a derogatory song about one of his captains and taught it to the entire crew.
17 Aitken, 18.
plate. [...] She refused to give me any more. [...] slaves in the chain [...] secretly brought me victuals from their own slender pittance.”

Ultimately, Joseph Manesty, a ship captain from Liverpool, rescued Newton from a remote part of the West African coastline.

It was during an awful gale at sea aboard the *Greyhound* after Newton’s rescue that some historians speculate he initially converted. Newton was reading George Stanhope’s *The Christian’s Pattern* (1740) when a terrifying storm hit. In Newton’s words, “I expected that every time the vessel descended into the sea, she would rise no more.” Newton pumped for nine hours straight upon which time he cried out, “Lord have mercy on us!” When the battered ship limped into the nearest port, Newton remembered his desperate appeal and saw the hand of God in his deliverance: “The Lord had wrought a marvellous thing; I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former prophaneness.”

God had saved a “wretch” like him, he felt, yet his promising career in the slave trade had only just begun.

Adam Hochschild accordingly stresses that for Newton, at least at this point in his life, “the sin that loomed largest in his mind – and nothing says more of how morally invisible was slavery in the world – was that of blasphemy.” His dramatic conversion on the high seas thus set him on the path to “grace,” but only in part. It is quite possible that Newton saw his “Christian” and “civilized” status as distinguishing him from his “uncivilized” and “unChristian” slave cargoes during the years he continued in the Atlantic slave trade after his conversion. This would have been quite ordinary. While at anchor, awaiting a cargo of

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19 Quoted in Hochschild, 18.
20 Hochschild, 19.
21 Hochschild, 19.
captured Africans, he wrote the hymn “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds.”\textsuperscript{23} That being said, however, in order to win the hand of his childhood sweetheart, Mary Catlett, he needed to show that he had good prospects for earning a living.\textsuperscript{24} This, more than anything, seems to have motivated him to return to sea and, more specifically, to the slave trade, making four voyages to Africa between 1748 and 1754, three of them as a slave-ship captain.

Newton’s diaries, letters, and logbooks provide one of history’s most authentic eyewitness accounts of the mid-eighteenth century slave trade in all of its gruesome details. In writing definitively about the Atlantic slave trade several decades ago, historian Roger Anstey relied heavily on Newton’s log, recognizing it as one of few records of the day-to-day activities aboard eighteenth-century slave ships. When \textit{The African} docked in August of 1754, Newton left slave trading not because of moral or religious qualms, but due to a health issue. As he recounted, “It was not intentionally a farewell; but, through the mercy of God, it proved so.”\textsuperscript{25} He later admitted that he could not consider himself a true believer until a considerable time after his initial awakening aboard the \textit{Greyhound}. This has important implications for \textit{Amazing Grace}, which has usually been associated with a sudden individual change that enables “lost sheep” to be “found,” when as can be seen in Newton’s experience, and as he repeatedly noted, spiritual life and growth increases incrementally.

How Newton gradually came to serve God as a well-known evangelical lay minister and hymn-writer is a riveting part of the story. After studying theology, he applied for ordination to the Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Independents and was rejected by all until at last, seven years later, the Church of England appointed him to a parish in the small

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\textsuperscript{23} Aitken, 11.
\textsuperscript{24} Aitken, 19.
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town of Olney.\textsuperscript{26} During his sixteen years at Olney, Newton introduced Bible study classes for children and adults, carried out a busy schedule of pastoral visits, preached sermons that attracted listeners from neighbouring towns and villages, and oversaw the creation of a gallery, for he had trebled the size of the church’s Sunday congregation from two hundred to six hundred.\textsuperscript{27} Among those who came from London to hear Newton preach was the Wilberforce family, including a young William Wilberforce who would later become the spokesman in Parliament for the London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.\textsuperscript{28} Newton never forgot, nor did he ever deny, the sense of “undeservedness” that marked his life. The words he wrote in his diary soon after moving to Olney are akin to those that would comprise \textit{Amazing Grace}: “I am a poor wretch that once wandered naked and barefoot, without a home, without a friend: and now for me once used to be on the ground, and was treated as a dog by all around me, thou hast prepared a house suitable to the connection thou hast put me into.”\textsuperscript{29}

As we have seen, the hymn \textit{Amazing Grace} portrays Newton’s life in cameo. It affirms Newton’s awareness of being divinely rescued from “many dangers” as well as from a wretched life, and alludes to the blindness that prevented him from seeing the anti-Christian nature of the slave trade. It is difficult to gauge the reception of \textit{Amazing Grace} in Britain at the time of its original publication in 1779. However, it is clear that between 1779 and 1807 the hymn was published in four other collections in addition to the \textit{Olney Hymns}, three of them American, an early indication that the hymn resonated more across the Atlantic than in home territory.\textsuperscript{30} During the late eighteenth century, a given hymn could be sung to a number of different tunes that matched the meter of the text. Only in rare cases were tunes appended to

\textsuperscript{26} Aitken, 21. Newton’s Protestant eclecticism needs to be further examined.
\textsuperscript{27} Aitken, 21.
\textsuperscript{28} Aitken, 21.
\textsuperscript{29} Quoted by Philip Yancey in his forward to Aitken’s \textit{John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace}.
\textsuperscript{30} See Phipps, 130.
hymnals, making it difficult to discern the popularity of *Amazing Grace*. By the mid-nineteenth century the so called “hymn and tune book” began to appear, but this practice remained uncommon until the early twentieth century.

Two centuries passed from the time *Amazing Grace* was written until it attained stellar popularity. It was not the most popular of Newton's hymns, the British preferring *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, and How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds*. In 1835, a South Carolinian, William Walker, renamed the tune *New Britain*. *New Britain* is based on a pentatonic scale which was common to early American folk music.\(^{31}\) *Amazing Grace* was subsequently published in William Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1835), a very successful collection that sold an estimated 600,000 copies, mainly in the southern states of America. According to Steve Turner, Walker’s *Southern Harmony* and Benjamin Franklin White's *The Sacred Harp* (1844) made *Amazing Grace* “a vital part of many American lives” by the time of the Civil War.\(^{32}\) Further, the song took root in American culture because it expressed not only “the archetypal evangelical conversion,” but also “the groans of a people who frequently had to struggle with poverty, sickness, and the elements in order to survive.”\(^{33}\) In 1950, hymnologist Albert Bailey discussed several of Newton’s hymns but did not mention *Amazing Grace*. Similarly, in 1951, Erik Routley commented on twenty-five of Newton’s hymns in a chapter devoted to Newton, but omitted *Amazing Grace*. In the first edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1941), lines from some of Newton’s hymns were included, but not until the third edition (1979) was *Amazing Grace* included. Not until its fifth edition (1980) was a stanza from *Amazing Grace* included in Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations*.\(^{34}\) What is certain is

\(^{31}\) Turner, 123.
\(^{32}\) Turner, 126.
\(^{33}\) Turner, 126.
\(^{34}\) Phipps, 130.
that Newton never heard his hymn sung to the New Britain melody. This version is probably to be credited to E.O. Excell, published in his Make His Praise Glorious (1900). In 1972, a bagpipe version by the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards resulted in the melody topping the charts of records sold in Britain and Australia. In 2006, the lyrics and harmony of the hymn were reworked by Chris Tomlin. His My Chains Are Gone rendition of Amazing Grace has been especially well received by contemporary anti-slavery advocates and the general public in Britain, the United States and Canada.

While Newton’s Amazing Grace was not his most recognized hymn, and did not attain prominent status upon its initial publication, the question, “Who was John Newton?” would scarcely have needed an answer two hundred years ago. According to Jonathan Aitken, Newton was far more celebrated in his time than Isaac Newton (1643-1727). While only the educated elite could relate to the author of Principia Mathematica, millions could identify with the account of “a great sinner” as John Newton, a prominent Anglican minister, described himself. In 1780, Newton took up the position of rector of St Mary Woolnoth in the heart of London’s financial district. As in Olney, Newton’s fame as a preacher soon filled the church, attracting worshipers from other parishes and denominations. He developed a writing ministry, dispensing advice to a wide range of correspondents, and further reinforced his reputation by founding The Eclectic Society, a discussion group for young clergymen and devout laymen. Newton’s fame also grew as a result of his success as an author. His autobiography, An Authentic Narrative, published in 1764, is regarded as a classic in conversion literature, and

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35 For more information on the evolution and reception of Amazing Grace, see Phipps, 129-131.
36 Aitken, 17.
37 During the second half of his life, Newton became prominent among those who favoured a Methodist type of revival in the Church of England. That movement stressed personal conversion, simple worship, emotional enthusiasm, and social justice.
38 Aitken, 17.
became a national and international best-seller in the late eighteenth century. In *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (2006), Christopher Leslie Brown argues that the American Revolution inspired the first sustained doubts regarding the moral character of British overseas enterprise to Britons who wished to think of themselves as Christian, moral, and free. Newton’s hymns and tracts, with their emphasis on these themes, suggest that this was true in his case. More specifically, the abolitionist movement presented an opportunity for Newton and others to express their reverence for “liberty, justice, and humanity,” an abiding need Brown suggests Britons felt in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

In the course of his personal journey, Newton left two remarkable imprints on the sands of time. Politically, he used his pulpit in London as one means of raising British consciousness of the immorality of the slave trade.\(^{39}\) Newton was one of the leading abolitionist thinkers and activists to support the founders of the Sierra Leone Company, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, John Clarkson and Henry Thornton, who sought to establish a free settlement for ex-slaves in Sierra Leone.\(^{40}\) Further, it is commonly believed that when William Wilberforce sought his advice on a cold December evening in 1785, Newton firmly advised his young friend not to withdraw from politics, but to stay in the House of Commons and to serve God as a Christian statesman.\(^{41}\) William Wilberforce is the most well known members of the Clapham Sect, which worked with the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, but

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\(^{39}\) Newton may have inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge to become an abolitionist circa 1797 during commemorations of Britain’s naval victories. It is also conceivable that he inspired Coleridge to create a long poem about an “Ancient Mariner” who bears some resemblance to Newton. See Phipps, 234-235, and Patrick Keane, *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 157.

\(^{40}\) David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles, Eds. *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 256.

\(^{41}\) As Hochschild explains, a conversation about religion with John Newton had been a spiritual turning point for Wilberforce – although on that occasion, Newton seems to have said nothing to him about slavery. See Hochschild, 123. Christopher Leslie Brown contends that Newton publicly opposed the slave trade only after William Wilberforce asked him to do so in 1788. This point is debateable, for other accounts suggest that Newton was vocal on the immorality of the slave trade much earlier even if he was hesitant to publish on the topic. See Brown, 337.
behind him Thomas Clarkson, James Stephen, Granville Sharpe, Henry Thornton, Hannah More, former slaves like Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano the African, women’s anti-slavery societies across Britain, Anglican and Evangelical ministers like John Newton, and many others coordinated campaigns, gathered information, wrote tracts and books, organized local committees, and circulated petitions. They recognized that the law had come to reflect the interests of the upper class, and were determined to gather evidence to present to Parliament and the English people which would then sway MPs to vote in favour of Wilberforce’s bill to abolish the slave trade in England.

The efforts of the Clapham Sect, also known as the Teston Circle, initiated a debate that extended into the public realm via the press. Reflecting the viewpoint of those in favour of maintaining the slave trade for labour and economic reasons, on 5 March 1788, an article in the *Times* read

> If the Slave Trade be prohibited, the Creoles will want human creatures to perform labours which have been found too severe for the endurance of beasts….The famous Coventry blue flannel will rise considerably in its price for want of Indigo….The common people of England will find it difficult sipping tea twice a day, from the high price of sugar….Snuff and tobacco will rise considerably in their prices, and many other consequences equally ferocious will inevitably result.⁴²

In 1789, a year after Newton published his *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, debate over this issue was still very much a preoccupation of the *Times*. In opposition to Wilberforce’s motion in Parliament to abolish the slave trade, a contributor to the *Times* argued “that the trade may be abolished from the country directly is certain, but indirectly it cannot; the consequence will be the removal of it to the Ports of France, Spain, Holland, Denmark, and America.”⁴³ The abolition of the slave trade was perceived by many as dangerous for “the

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⁴² *Times* (London), 5 March 1788.
⁴³ *Times*, 4 April 1789.
good sense of the nation,” for it seemed likely that British colonies would quickly be taken over by foreign nations after such a radical measure.\textsuperscript{44} In response to this popular perception, the Clapham Sect with whom Newton was in contact, allied with the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade led by Thomas Clarkson. They presented the public a remarkable amount of evidence on the horrors of slavery and the slave trade, using lectures, publications, sermons, tracts, evidence to Parliament and personal persuasion. Information on the slave trade gleaned from Clarkson’s travels, which covered 35,000 miles in Britain alone between 1787 and 1794, was very influential.\textsuperscript{45} He had uncovered that almost 2,000 British seamen perished in the slave trade annually, a most notable and useful statistic for anti-slavery arguments.\textsuperscript{46} The London Society also continued to publish letters, slave narratives, and testimonies that offered first-hand accounts of the atrocious conditions on plantations as well as on slave ships, notably Newton’s \textit{Authentic Narrative} and \textit{Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade}.

Advertisements for slave sales in British newspapers and regular slave cases in the courts also brought attention to the existence, injustice and horrors of the slave trade, and a number of prominent blacks in Britain helped disseminate information about slavery. The most well-known, Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano the African, published his \textit{The Interesting Narrative} in 1789. With the support of the London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Vassa’s testimony aimed at the English-reading public, sold 50,000 copies within a period of two months, and facilitated efforts to recruit more of the general public to the London Society’s cause by highlighting the existence of slavery in the English colonies. In the

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Times}, 4 April 1789.
\textsuperscript{46} Thomas Clarkson, \textit{A summary view of the slave trade, and of the probable consequences of its abolition} (London, 1787), 12.

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Evangelical journal *The Christian Observer* Wilberforce wrote that “the greatest evil of our condition that I know is the continuation in our name of a Traffic in Human Beings, the reproach of which we ought no longer to endure.”\(^{47}\) Newton’s public testimony against the slave trade to a select committee of the House of Commons, and his sensational pamphlet *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (1788), certainly assisted in the passage of legislation during his lifetime to abolish the British slave trade, and made him a great ally of Wilberforce’s in the abolitionist cause.\(^{48}\) Newton concludes his firsthand testimony by stating that “Though unwilling to give offense to a single person, in such a cause, I ought not to be afraid of offending many, by declaring the truth. If, indeed, there can be many, whom, even interest can prevail upon to contradict the common sense of mankind, by pleading for a commerce so iniquitous, so cruel, so oppressive, so destructive, as the African Slave Trade!”

Important though he was to the political battle over the slave trade, Newton played an even more vital role in the evangelical reform movement.

Few evangelicals engaged in politics in the eighteenth century.\(^{49}\) Even where Anglican evangelicals gathered, they rarely shaped the character of a community as Newton did in Olney before he moved to London in 1780. Based on a review of Newton’s life, work, and religious thought, it is evident that he was a moderate or “latitudinarian” on most matters of theological debate among evangelicals during the last half of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, through the exposition of his stranger-than-fiction story of his own conversion from reprobate slave trader to born-again gospel minister in *Amazing Grace* and his other hymns, Newton’s life

\(^{47}\) Anstey, 182.  
\(^{48}\) See Newton, 113.  
\(^{49}\) While I have taken the liberty to make use of the word “evangelical” in this essay, Newton and his contemporaries did not use it very often. They employed the word “Gospel” to the same effect as a ubiquitous prefix of approval. See Hindmarsh, 1.
became a potent symbol of the whole evangelical experience.\textsuperscript{50} Some might conclude that the life and times of John Newton illustrate that changes in the material mode of production alone did not bring about political reforms, namely the abolition of the slave trade.\textsuperscript{51} At a time when it was greatly to England’s economic disadvantage to abolish slavery, middle-class John Newton, William Cowper, and Hannah More, as well as the upper-class William Wilberforce, among others, were motivated by religious ideology to place human value higher than monetary gain.\textsuperscript{52}

Against all odds, \textit{Amazing Grace}, written some 235 years ago, still endures. Although it still holds its original meaning, it now has a parallel existence outside the church, where often the only link is a shared belief that it is a song about hope.\textsuperscript{53} The lyrics now grace countless key chains, refrigerator magnets, bumper stickers, and t-shirts. As I have attempted to emphasize, when carefully examined, \textit{Amazing Grace} provides a unique lens through which we can view the Protestant, literary, economic and political culture of eighteenth-century England. In effect, Newton’s hymnody can be used as a site for locating and understanding the origins and character of the evangelical revival in England, as well as the changing conceptions of slavery that were coterminous with Newton’s life span.

For Newton it was yet another “amazing grace” that he should live to see the legal abolition of the British slave trade seven months before his death in 1807. That his hymn has become so acclaimed internationally underscores Newton’s tremendous capacity to universalize his own experience. Hundreds of versions and dozens of books relating to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{50} Hindmarsh, 331.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Phipps, 243.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Again, I think it is important to stress, as Christopher Leslie Brown has shown, that the Evangelical turn against the slave trade was genuine, but also a strategic choice in a wider campaign against nominal Christianity. Moreover, in some respects, the abolitionist campaign merely provided an opportunity for its campaigners to express Britain’s reverence for “liberty, justice, and humanity.”
\end{itemize}
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*Amazing Grace* reflect the varied ways in which it has inspired generations of people. *Amazing Grace* was heard from civil rights protesters on that famous day when Dr. Martin Luther King shared his dream, it rang out too when Nelson Mandela was freed from prison and was sung when the Berlin Wall came crumbling down, to name a few examples. Newton was recently inducted in the Gospel Hall of Fame, and *Amazing Grace* is the title of a recent film about William Wilberforce and the British campaign against the slave trade. Perhaps the surest emblem of the transformation Newton alludes to in *Amazing Grace* is found in a town in Sierra Leone where he once docked his slave ship. The town is now named Newton in his honour.

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APPENDIX

Full lyrics of the original version of *Amazing Grace* as published in 1779 in *Olney Hymns*, pp. 53-54.

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I. Chronicles.

HYMN 41

Faith’s Review and Expectation
Chapter 8, 16-17.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
We have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.

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