



Key Concepts

Clarkson Thesis:

The argument put forward by English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) in his 1808 two-volume work on the history of the anti-slavery movement. Clarkson believed that abolition was a part of a progressive, Whiggish narrative in which classical Liberal ideas and evangelical morality would bring about beneficial change. He argued that these evangelical humanitarian ideas were the driving force behind abolition.

Williams' Thesis:

Trinidadian historian and politician Eric Williams' argument, first put forward in his Oxford D.Phil thesis, and then in *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944, that slavery ended not because of humanitarian concerns but because it had ceased to be profitable. The classes responsible for abolition, he argued, were also those who stood to benefit from the rise of a new industrial capitalism and the demise of the plantation slavery system.

Econocide:

Seymour Drescher's 1977 book rebutting Eric William's thesis on the decline of the plantation economy as the driving force behind abolition. Drescher put forward evidence on the economic health of the plantation economy, arguing that new forms of mass printing, political organisation and mobilisation ultimately undermined the legitimacy of slavery as an institution. The slave trade was thus 'econocide', economic suicide.