

Oldfield, J.R. **Popular politics and British anti-slavery: the mobilisation of public opinion against the slave trade, 1787-1807**. Manchester, 1995. (Dist. by St. Martin's), 197p index ISBN [0-7190-3856-1](#), \$69.95. Reviewed in 1996jan CHOICE.

The petition campaigns of 1788 and 1792 demonstrated considerable popular support for the abolition of the slave trade. Oldfield's book explains how this support was organized and how it furthered the political awareness and power of middle-class Britons. Public opinion was masterfully cultivated by a group of practical abolitionists versed in marketing strategies. Members of the London Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade were not "saints," argues the author. Rather, they were propagandists who, through the distribution and selling of prints, medallions, and other paraphernalia, made abolition fashionable. By highlighting its opinion-building activities, Oldfield revises the traditional view of the London Committee as a low-level parliamentary lobby. Emphasis on the commercial nature of antislavery also produces a useful profile of late 18th century Britain as an emerging consumer society, where middle-class economic and political power increased. In a well-documented cross-disciplinary approach, Oldfield effectively makes use of poetry, children's literature, and artifacts to show that the consumerist tendencies of the middle classes resulted in a grassroots movement for abolition. An innovative and valuable study. Undergraduates and above. -- R. J. Palin, St. Thomas University