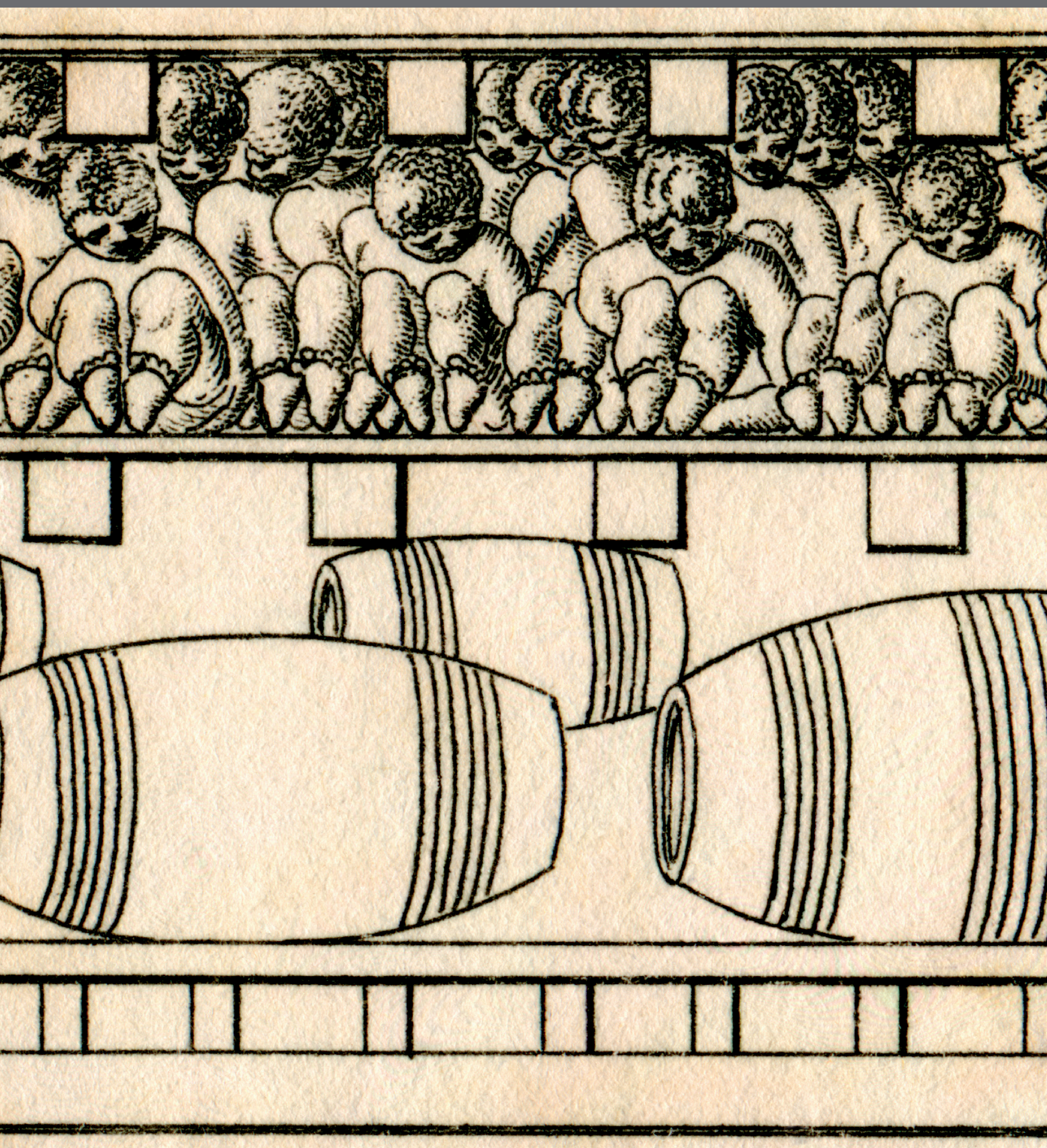


The Long Road to FREEDOM...♦♦♦

The story of slavery and the campaign for its abolition as told through local records



Slavery has a long history and it continues in a variety of forms to this day. The dominance of one group over another has always been marked by enslavement - traffic in human beings has been a feature of every era in history. Slaves are not seen as individuals. They are pieces of property, with an economic value.

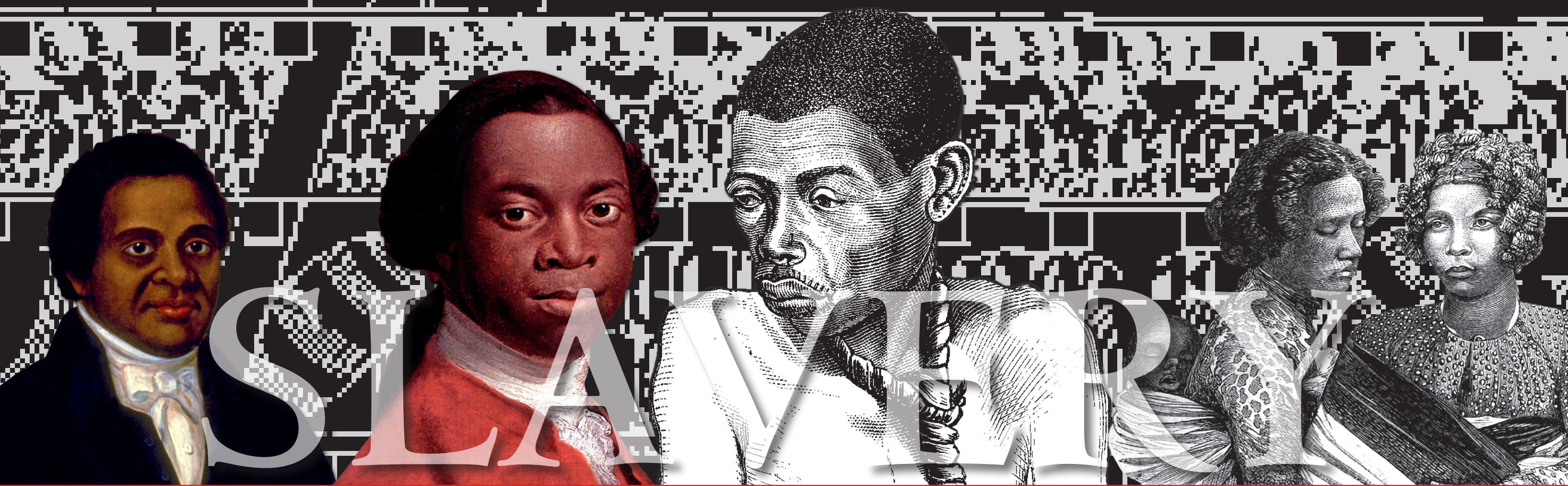
Nothing has been like black slavery, in its scale, importance or consequences. No other slave system removed forcibly so many people, or scattered them so widely across the world. Britain was a world-leader in trading and employing slaves during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Sugar was important in the British diet. The British-held Caribbean islands could meet the increasing demand, but only with an ever-growing labour force. The result was the notorious 'triangle trade': British goods were taken to West Africa to be exchanged for slaves. Slaves were shipped to the Caribbean plantations, and the product of their labour, sugar, was exported to Britain.

By the late 1780s, the voices of opposition to this barbaric trade were being heard in Britain, and the long process of abolishing slavery began. The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 was only one step along The Long Road to Freedom. It was not until 1833 that slavery itself was abolished in British possessions, but it continued for over 50 years elsewhere.

The slave trade affected each part of Britain, no matter how far from the coast, and Leicestershire was no exception. Many of the county's dominant families invested in sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Former slaves were brought to Leicestershire, and settled here. At the same time, the anti-slavery movement had some strong supporters in city and county.

This exhibition tells the story of slavery and its opponents in Leicestershire, in Leicester and in Rutland - a story which has not yet come to an end.



Leicestershire and Rutland Plantation Owning Families



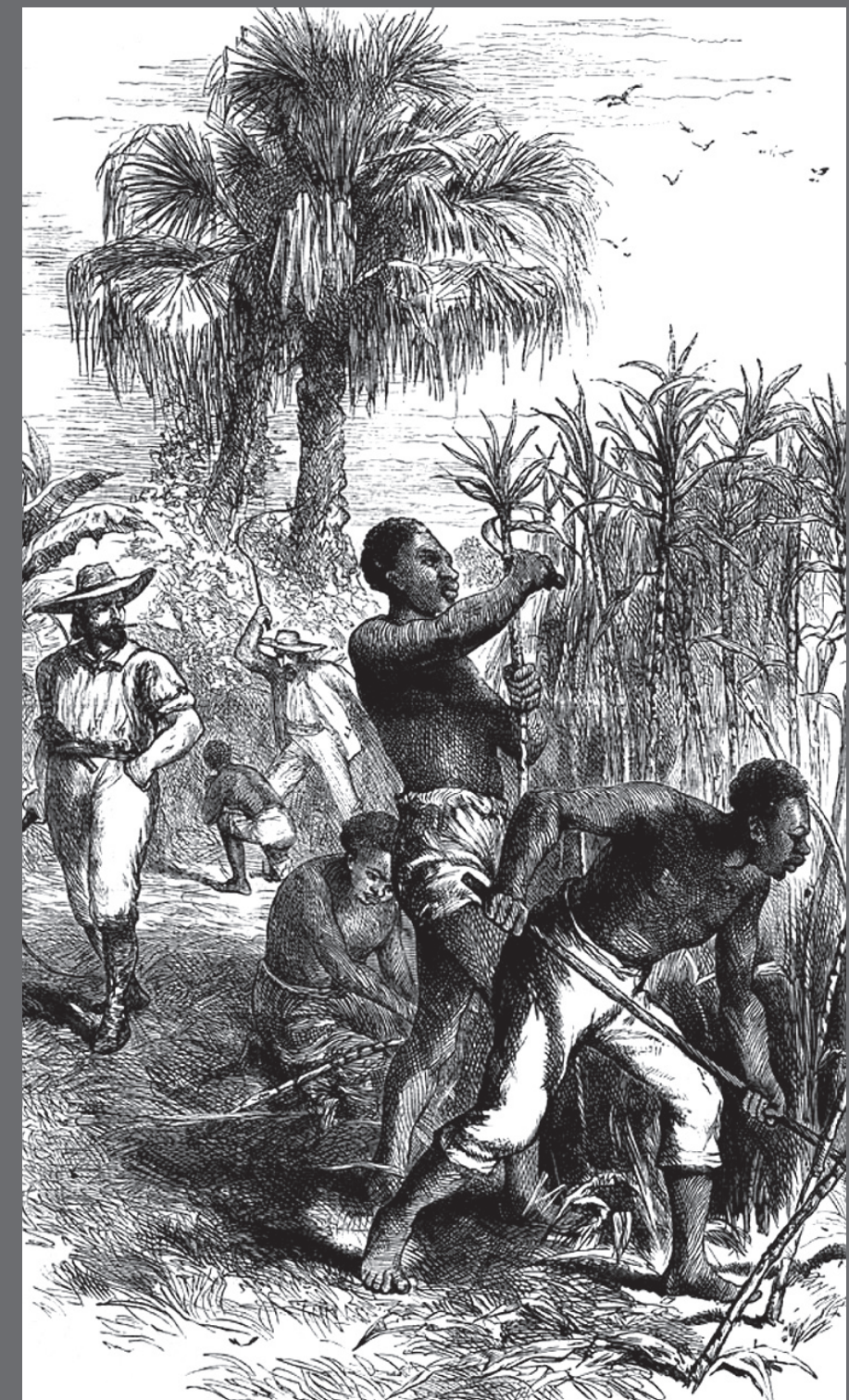
Map of the West Indies by Emanuel Bowen dated 1752.

In the 17th century Britain acquired the Caribbean Islands of Bermuda, Barbados and Jamaica from the Spanish. The Caribbean offered the potential for high profits through its plantation system which had been introduced by the Spanish and developed by the Dutch and French. The British gradually extended their influence in the region and introduced the large scale production of tobacco, coffee, cotton and sugar cane. Previously modest smallholdings were amalgamated into bigger plantations and wealthy Leicestershire and Rutland landowning families were swift to seize the opportunity to acquire plantations like the Palmers (Surinam and Jamaica), Shirleys (Jamaica), Halfords (Grenada) and Hotchkins (Jamaica).

For a brief period in the plantations' history, the number of Africans imported to work on these plantations was small. However, as the demand for sugar from Britain increased so did the demand for slave labour on the plantations and by the mid 18th century the British sugar industry had reached its peak, particularly in Jamaica. In 1753 plantations that had produced 50,000 hogsheads of sugar in 1700 were now producing 100,000.

Between 1702 and 1808, about 840,000 Africans were shipped to Jamaica. The price of slaves was high, ranging from £5 to £80 depending on age, gender, state of health, skills and the period in question. Since they were treated as commodities, their value went up and down with the market.

Many of the illustrations in this exhibition are from the valuable web resource, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record* by Jerome S. Handler and Michael L. Tuite Jr. <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/slavery>



Working in sugar cane fields in the 19th century in either the British or French West Indies.