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# AFRICA

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Peoples from the continent of Africa have been dispersed and scattered across the globe against their will because of enslavement. All these people took their traditions and accomplishments with them and many managed to retain them and reform their identities in a new world.

From all over the world, from the Caribbean to the Americas to Europe, Africans have made immense contributions to world heritage and culture. We can only mention a few here:



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# ABOLITION07

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**2007 is the bicentenary of the passing of the Parliamentary Act to abolish the transatlantic slave trade. This made the practice of transporting enslaved Africans to the colonies in British ships illegal and ultimately paved the way for the abolition of slavery itself in Britain and its colonies.**

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Slavery has been a part of human societies in most places at some point in their histories. As recently as two hundred years ago it was normal for most people.

*'At the end of the eighteenth century, well over three quarters of all people alive were in bondage of one kind or another, not the captivity of striped prison uniforms, but of various systems of slavery or serfdom.'*  
Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 2005

The transatlantic slave trade, 1500 to the 1850s, is famous for its shocking brutality and the huge numbers of Africans and others involved: it is estimated that Europeans, Africans and Americans worked together to transport over twelve million Africans across the Atlantic to North and South America and the Caribbean islands. Portuguese and Spanish traders started the process of kidnapping and enslaving African people soon to be joined by French, Dutch, Scandinavian and British slave traders.

#### Beginnings

Enslaved Africans were first brought to work in new European settlements in the Americas and as these settlements grew, so did the demand for labour. Captain John Hawkins started the British slave trade in 1562 when he seized more than 300 Africans in Sierra Leone to sell as slaves in the West Indies. The trip was profitable and others soon followed. By 1680 the practice was institutionalised in Britain with the founding of the Royal Adventurers into Africa (later the Royal African Company) to trade in gold and enslaved Africans, with the King's brother, the Duke of York, as its President. By the 1760s British traders were dominant in the buying and selling of enslaved Africans.

#### The Eighteenth century

Britain under King George III (1760–1820) was very wealthy, and the source of its wealth was trade. The growing agricultural and industrial revolutions played a part in the healthy economy, but international trade was most important. Britain's largest import, primarily from forced African labour in the West Indies was sugar. The transatlantic slave trade generated an enormous income and was seen as essential to Britain's prosperity. It was such an important part of the economy that institutions such as the Royal Family, the Church of England and Cambridge and Oxford colleges were investors.

This was an age of empire-building and revolution for many European nations. Britain lost its American colonies in the War of Independence of 1776–83 and France lost its monarchy during the French Revolution of 1789–92. Both these great powers were defeated by armies of enslaved Africans in the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804. It was an era of great political and social change.

#### The Abolition campaign

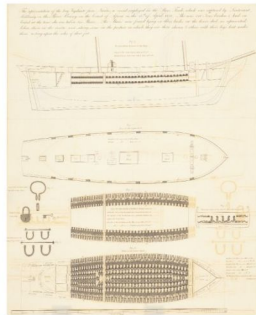
This was the backdrop for the campaign in Britain to abolish the slave trade and slavery. From the 1760s, African and European anti-slavery campaigners began to raise public awareness about the horrors of slavery and to lobby the government to end the transatlantic slave trade. The abolitionists' campaign in Britain, combined with rebellions by enslaved Africans at sea and in the colonies, created an extraordinarily powerful popular movement, one that challenged, and ultimately defeated, an institution that was accepted throughout the world. The abolition movement and the tools the campaigners pioneered became the model for human rights campaigns in democracies worldwide.

#### Hackney Museum

This exhibition will look at the framework of British involvement in the slave trade, the tragedies of the practice, resistance to it and the battle of those who strove to abolish that 'evil of the first magnitude'. Slavery itself was gradually abolished by Britain starting in 1833. But tragically slavery does still exist around the world today.

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Representation of the brig *Vigilante* from Nantes, a vessel employed in the Slave Trade which was captured by Lieutenant Midway in the River Bonny on the Coast of Africa on the 15th of April 1722.

This image of an enslaved African fighting for his freedom is from a *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796) by John Gabriel Stedman.



Negroes bought	White	Black	Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Brown	Orange	Pink	Grey	White	Black	Red	Yellow	Green	Blue	Brown	Orange	Pink	Grey	Total	
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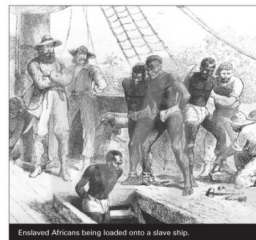
# TRIANGULAR TRADE

The transatlantic slave trade is often called the triangular trade, which describes the three parts of the voyage. Slave ships would leave the ports of Bristol, Liverpool, London and Glasgow laden with British-made goods, such as guns, metal goods, textiles, alcohol and glassware. From there they would sail to West Africa where these goods were traded for enslaved Africans, who were then transported across the Atlantic Ocean to work on European-owned plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean. The sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton and rum produced on plantations by forced labour were then shipped back to Britain.

At the height of the trade Britain was the largest slave trading nation in the world. Between 1783 and 1793 ships from Liverpool, one of the largest slave ports in the world, transported more than 300,000 enslaved Africans. Slave trading was a very profitable business for the British people involved as investors and owners. It was an incredibly harsh, cruel and brutalising business for the African people treated as cargo and the ship's crews.



British made goods were traded for enslaved Africans who were then transported to work on Caribbean plantations, producing cotton, rum, coffee and sugar.



Enslaved Africans being loaded onto a slave ship.

Replica leg irons, used during the 'middle passage' to restrain slaves.



## The Slave's journey

An African's transition from free individual to personal property began when he or she was kidnapped in Africa, often by fellow Africans, as **Ottobah Cugoana** (born 1750), an ex-slave recorded later: *I must own, to the shame of my countrymen, that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by some of my own complexion*. The men, women and children were then yoked and chained together and forcibly marched to the coast, where they were imprisoned in brutal conditions in slave forts until sold to shipping companies.

*'Next day we travelled on, and in the evening came to a town, where I saw several white people, which made me afraid that they would eat me, according to our notion as children in the inland parts of the country' ... After I was ordered out, the horrors I soon saw and felt, cannot be well described; I saw many of my miserable countrymen chained two and two, some hand-cuffed, and some with their hands tied behind ... when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner'.* Ottobah Cugoana, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 1787

It is estimated that half of the prisoners died during the seizure, march and detention. Those who survived were then chained together and herded onto ships for the 'middle passage' across the Atlantic.

## Middle Passage

The captives were treated as cargo rather than human beings and as many slaves as possible were crammed into the ships (some ships carried up to 1000 slaves). Slaves were often branded to identify them with the ship's owner as they were forced on board. Men, women and children were separated and kept below deck, often with less floor space than a coffin and not enough height to sit or stand. The men were often shackled in pairs with handcuffs and leg irons. The journey could take up to two months and many died during it.

*'The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died ... The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable'.*

Otaudah Equiano *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Otaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, 1789.

Equiano also describes African prisoners being whipped hourly for not eating and the 'nettings' on the ships that were used to catch those who jumped overboard in an attempt to escape or commit suicide.

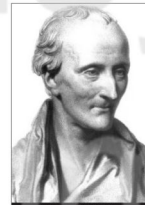
## Zong case

The dehumanising and horrendous conditions of the 'middle passage' first came to the public's attention with the Zong court case in 1783. In 1781 Liverpool slave ship Zong, mastered by Captain Luke Collingwood, was sailing from Africa to Jamaica with 442 slaves. Collingwood got lost and as the journey was lengthened the slaves were beginning to die, a cost that would have to be borne by the owners of the ship. Claiming that he was concerned that his water supply would run out, Collingwood had his crew throw 133 enslaved Africans overboard, a loss of 'cargo' that he claimed on insurance. The insurance company suspected fraud and took the owners to court. The judge found for the shipping company and the insurance company appealed. The second trial overturned the original decision and found that the slaves were people, not goods, as claimed.

Equiano, who was at this time a free man living in London, brought the Zong massacre to the attention of leading abolitionist **Granville Sharp** (1735-1813), who sought to have the shipping company charged with murder. This was unsuccessful but his actions helped bring the horrors of forced transportation and slavery to the public's attention. This in turn led people to start the abolition movement.

## Campaigns

As Sharp and the fledgling abolitionist movement began to challenge the morality of the slave trade, pro-slavery forces argued that it was essential to the British economy and that if the trade was stopped, Britain's competitors, especially France, would benefit. Abolitionists countered that the slave trade was uneconomic, inhumane, un-Christian and dehumanising to both crew and captives.



Granville Sharp (1735-1813) Sharp, the tallest figure of the abolition movement, was one of the founding members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (formed in 1787) and its first president.

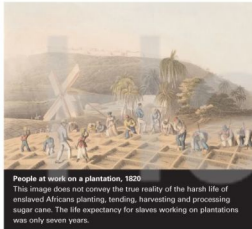


# OPPRESSION

For those prisoners who survived the horrendous 'middle passage', more abuse and degradation was to come. After some forty or fifty days at sea, the slaves were prepared for arrival in the West Indies or the east coast of America. Most were destined for the sugar and coffee plantations of Barbados and Jamaica or the tobacco and cotton plantations in Virginia and South Carolina.



**Sale of enslaved Africans, 1787**  
Slave traders often dyed grey hair black to make enslaved people look younger and rubbed in palm oil to create a false healthy glow.



**People at work on a plantation, 1820**  
This image does not convey the true reality of the harsh life of enslaved Africans planting, tending, harvesting and processing sugar cane. The life expectancy for slaves working on plantations was only seven years.

#### For sale

The slave traders cleaned up and prepared their slaves for sale. Next, the Africans were poked and prodded like animals by potential buyers and their agents to assess their state of health. Young healthy-looking men were sold for the highest prices.

'Refuse slaves' was the name given to those who were old, sick or injured – and difficult to sell. Auctions were held to sell them or they were sold in 'scrambles'. **Olaudah Equiano** was sold in a 'scramble' in Barbados and his account of the experience is harrowing:

*'On a signal given, (as the beat of a drum), the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified African... In this manner, without scruple, are relations and Friends separated, most of them never to see each other again.'*

To further strip away the captured Africans' identity and sense of independence they were often renamed when they were sold. Equiano, for instance, during his enslavement, was originally called Michael, then Jacob, and then Gustavus Vassa, after a medieval nobleman who became the King of Sweden. Slaves were often given grand names as ironic gestures by their masters, or at the other end of the spectrum, completely nondescript or objectifying ones, such as 'Gift' or 'Nobody'.

#### Conditions on the plantations

Life for enslaved Africans on plantations was brutal, whether working in the fields or as domestic slaves. Communities and families were constantly torn apart as slaves were sold on.

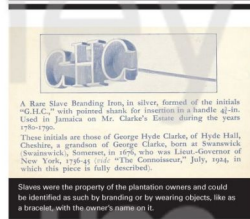
Slave gangs were made up of men and women, driven by an overseer with a whip. It was brutal, back-breaking work with cruel, severe punishment for even minor mistakes. Equiano describes seeing a slave *'beaten till some of his bones were broken, for only letting a pot boil over'*. Poor diet and living conditions, tropical diseases and long, hard labour (ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week) took its toll. One in three enslaved Africans died within the first three years of plantation life. On sugar plantations, they were literally worked to death, so the plantation owners constantly needed new slaves.

#### Campaigns

Back in Britain, slave trade supporters argued that the slaves were happy, well-treated and better off than in Africa. The abolitionists gathered evidence to prove that the plantation owners' claims were false. Doctors, sailors, missionaries, ex-slaves and lawyers were amongst those who had come into contact with slavery and were willing to share their first-hand knowledge of its atrocities. In Liverpool, **Thomas Clarkson** (1766–1846) was disgusted and horrified to find handcuffs, leg shackles, thumbscrews and a speculum oris (for force feeding enslaved people trying to commit suicide by starvation) openly for sale in a chandler's shop. He promptly bought them to show others and wrote to *The Times* about them.



Implements used by slave traders



A Brass Slave Branding Iron, in silver, formed of the initials "G.H.C.," with pointed shank for insertion in a handle 42-in. Long in Jamaica on Mr. Clarke's Estate during the years 1786-1797.

These initials are those of George Hyde Clarke, of Hyde Hall, Cheshire, a grandson of George Clarke, born at Swanwick, Devonshire, Somerset, in 1718, who was Lieut-Governor of New York, 1746-45 (1746: "The Gentleman," July, 1934, in which this piece is fully described).

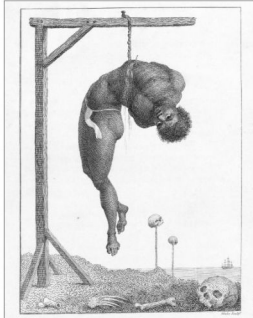
Slaves were the property of the plantation owners and could be identified as such by branding or by wearing objects, like as a bracelet, with the owner's name on it.

## SEPARATION OF FAMILIES.



# RESISTANCE

Captured Africans resisted their fate from the moment of their capture and continued during detention in slave forts, while at sea and on the plantations. People's bids for freedom ranged from committing suicide and running away to taking part in organised rebellions. From the 1750s awareness of the atrocities of the slave trade was also growing amongst the British public.



This shocking image is of an enslaved African being executed for taking part in a rebellion in the Dutch colony of Surinam, on the north-east coast of South America. It is from a Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam (1796) by John Gabriel Stedman. This book exposed the immorality of the slave owners and overseers and is a vivid account of the evils of slavery.

## Slave revolts at sea

Revolts by desperate slaves on British slave ships were estimated at one for every eight to ten journeys, which added to the high death rates for slaves and crew. Most of these revolts were brutally suppressed by the ship's crew. John Newton (1725-1807), a one-time slave ship captain turned Anglican priest, abolitionist and author of 'Amazing Grace', wrote of the punishment meted out to rebel slaves:

*'I have seen them sentenced to unmerciful whippings, continued till the poor creatures have not had power to groan under their misery, and hardly a sign of life has remained. I have seen the torture of the thumb-screws; a dreadful engine, which, if the screw be turned by an unrelenting hand, can give intolerable anguish.'*

A successful revolt was on the ship the *Thomas* going to Barbados in 1797 when the unchained female slaves seized guns, overpowered the crew, and freed the men. Sadly the enslaved Africans were unable to sail the ship back to West Africa and were eventually recaptured by a British warship.

## Rebellions

The most dramatic and violent resistance was during the many rebellions and uprisings against the plantation owners. Slave revolts occurred all throughout the Caribbean during the 1600s and 1700s. Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Granada, St. Kitts and St. Vincent were all home to bloody insurrections. In 1655 gangs of runaway enslaved Africans set up independent communities in the rugged interior of Jamaica. They were called 'Maroons' and signed a treaty with the British in 1739 which guaranteed their freedom. Conflicts did continue to break out, but the Maroons defeated all efforts of oppression by white planters and soldiers.

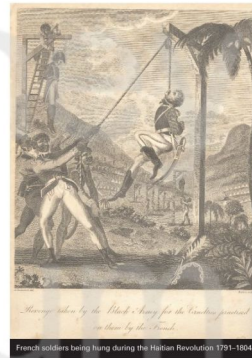
The most successful revolution was the Haitian (then called Saint-Domingue) Revolution (1791-1804). It was led by Toussaint L'Ouverture (about 1743-1803) a freed slave, who was an excellent military leader and who created an effective disciplined army. This revolutionary army defeated the French army first and then the British troops attempting to take over the island.

**Toussaint L'Ouverture (about 1743-1803).** Toussaint L'Ouverture, was leader of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), which led to the establishment of the first free black republic on 1 January 1804.

## The British Campaign

Back in Britain, crusading abolitionist Granville Sharp was promoting test cases in court which questioned the legality of slavery in Britain. Sharp was determined to prove that slavery was illegal in Britain and although not a lawyer, immersed himself in British legal history. In 1772 he brought the case of James Somerset to court. Somerset was a slave from Virginia who was brought to England by his owner. While in London he escaped. A few months later Somerset was kidnapped, clapped in irons and placed on a ship bound for Jamaica. The high-profile controversial case was followed by ever-increasing crowds of interested people and the media. After several months Lord Chief Justice William Mansfield reluctantly ruled that enslaved people in Britain could not be forced by their masters to return to the colonies. This was a very significant ruling, as most people believed that slavery had been outlawed in Britain.

The enslaved Africans who took part in plantation revolts were encouraged by developments like the Somerset Case in London. News of the revolts and rebellions, in turn, added fuel to the debate on the morality of the slave trade in Britain. All these factors and developments led the growing anti-slavery movement in Britain.



French soldiers being hanged during the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804.



# Slave rebellions and conspiracies

## 1789-1815

Time and Place	Revolt or Conspiracy	Details
<b>1789</b>		
1 August, Martinique	Revolt	Saint Pierre district 300-400 slaves
2 Demerara	Revolt	1 plantation. Widespread conspiracy
<b>1790</b>		
3 January, Cuba	Revolt	1 plantation
4 April, Guadeloupe	Revolt	Petit Bourg, etc. 100+ punished
5 Spring? Venezuela	Revolt	1 plantation. 1 overseer killed
6 May, Tortola	Revolt	1 plantation. 2 slaves executed
7 Oct-Dec, Martinique	Revolt	West coast. Pillage and killing
<b>1791</b>		
8 January 1, Saint Lucia	Conspiracy	Soufrière. 1 plantation
9 Early January, Dominica	Revolt	Work stoppage/desertion/confrontation
10 Mid-January, Dominica	Revolt	Free colored leader. 1 white killed
11 January, Saint Domingue	Conspiracy	Port Salut. 200 slaves
12 May, Guadeloupe	Conspiracy	Saint Anne. Led by mulatto slave
13 June-July, Saint Domingue	Revolt	Separate revolts on 3 estates
14 July, Louisiana	Conspiracy	Pointe Coupée. 17 slaves arrested
15 August, Marie-Galante	Conspiracy	Saint Domingue. Free colored hanged
16 Aug-Nov, Saint Domingue	Revolt	North Province. 100,000+
17 Nov-Dec, Jamaica	Conspiracy?	North Coast
<b>1792+</b>		
18 Saint Domingue	Revolt	Revolt spreads beyond North. 1,000s
<b>1793</b>		
19 March, Santo Domingo	C	Hincha. 19 arrested. No executions
20 April, Guadeloupe	Revolt	Trois Rivières. 200. 20 whites killed
21 April, Guadeloupe	Conspiracy	Bailif. 5 death sentences
22 April, Guadeloupe	Conspiracy	Basse-Terre region. 14 punished
23 August, Guadeloupe	Revolt	Saint Anne. 1,000? slaves and freemen
24 Saint Lucia	Revolt	No more information available
<b>1794</b>		
25 February, Martinique	Revolt	Saint Luce. During British invasion
<b>1795</b>		
26 Early, Santo Domingo	Conspiracy	Samaná. 7 blacks, 3 French whites
27 Trinidad	Conspiracy?	2 conspiracies in south and north
28 April, Louisiana	Conspiracy	Pointe Coupée. 23 slaves executed
29 May, Bahamas	Conspiracy	Nassau. Francophone slaves
30 May, Venezuela	Revolt	Cono. 300 slaves and free blacks
31 July, Cuba	Revolt?	Puerto Principe. 15 slaves
32 July? Puerto Rico	Revolt?	Aguadilla. A few slaves
33 August, Curaçao	Revolt	2,000 slaves? 29 slaves executed
34 Demerara	Revolt	Cooperation with maroon attacks
<b>1796</b>		
35 Feb-April, Louisiana	Conspiracy	Pointe Coupée. German Coast. 3 plots?
36 May, Cuba	Conspiracy	Puerto Principe. 5 'French' slaves
37 October, Santo Domingo	Revolt	Boca Nigua. 100 slaves. 7 executed
<b>1797</b>		
38 August, Bahamas	Conspiracy	Nassau. 'French' slaves. 5 executed
<b>1798</b>		
39 January, Venezuela	Conspiracy	Carúpano/Cumaná. African slaves
40 June, Cuba	Revolt	Puerto Principe. 20 slaves punished
41 July, Cuba	Conspiracy	Trinidad. 5 slaves tried. 2 hanged
42 October, Cuba	Revolt	Guines. 23 slaves on 1 estate
<b>1799</b>		
43 April, New Granada	Conspiracy	Cartagena. French slaves, freemen
44 May, Venezuela	Conspiracy	Maracabo. French and local freemen
<b>1800</b>		
45 September, Curaçao	Revolt	Large multiclass rising
<b>1801</b>		
46 December, Tobago	Conspiracy	7 or 16 estates. 7 slaves executed
<b>1803</b>		
47 June, Jamaica	Conspiracy	Kingston. 2 executed
<b>1805</b>		
48 December, Trinidad	Conspiracy	4 slaves executed
<b>1806</b>		
49 Jamaica	Conspiracy	Saint George's. 1 slave executed
50 Puerto Rico	Revolt	Humacao. Slaves attack guard-house
<b>1807</b>		
51 December, Demerara	Conspiracy	20 slaves arrested. 9 executed
<b>1809</b>		
52 March, Jamaica	Conspiracy	Kingston. 2 executed
<b>1811</b>		
53 January, Louisiana	Revolt	German coast. 400-500 slaves
54 September, Martinique	Revolt	Saint Pierre. 15 executed
55 Cuba	Conspiracy	Widespread, centered on Havana
<b>1812</b>		
56 January, Puerto Rico	Conspiracy?	Widespread. 16 punished
57 January, Cuba	Revolt	Puerto Principe. 8 hanged; 73 whipped
58 February, Cuba	Conspiracy	Bayamo. Probably part of Aponte plot
59 March, Cuba	Revolt	Guamabo. 1 estate
60 August, Louisiana	Conspiracy	New Orleans. 1 white executed
61 August, Santo Domingo	Revolt	Eastern region. 3 executed
<b>1815</b>		
62 December, Jamaica	Conspiracy	Saint Elizabeth. 250 Africans. 1 hanged

*Slavery, War and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789-1815*





**Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797)**, painted by William Dinton and engraved by Daniel Orme. Equiano is thought to have been born in Guinea in 1745 to a tribal chief. He was enslaved when he was 11 years old, but later bought his freedom and became a powerful spokesman for the British anti-slavery movement. This image was used for the frontpiece of his very popular and influential autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*.



**Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846)**. One of the key founding members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (formed in 1787). He interviewed around 20,000 people from slave ships and travelled over 35,000 miles on horseback collecting evidence and making speeches to raise awareness of his appalling trade. In this painting you can see the box of African goods he used in his talks to illustrate that Britain and Africa could have a trading relationship based on goods not human beings.



# ABOLITION IN BRITAIN

Centuries of resistance by Africans and decades of campaigning by abolitionists came together to transform Britain from the dominant slave-trading country into the one most opposed to the practice. Economic, religious, political, ideological and revolutionary factors all played a part, as did a dynamic, dedicated group of campaigners who worked together to create the first peaceful mass citizens' protest movement of modern time.

## Birth of the movement

The Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers), who believed in the equality of all human beings, began objecting to slavery in the mid-1600s and by the mid-1700s they were producing anti-slavery literature. A small, nonconformist religion, the Quakers' early efforts made very little difference, as they were primarily dismissed as eccentricities. This soon changed, however, as the inhumanity of the slave trade was brought to the attention of the public.

The Somerset Case of 1772, championed by Granville Sharp, put slavery in the news. One response was Hackney resident Thomas Day's (1748-1789) poem, *The Dying Negro*, published in 1773. Day, a philanthropist, poet and political essayist, wrote the poem with his friend John Bicknell. The poem is a suicide note from an enslaved African in England for whom death is preferable to being separated once again from his home and loved ones by being taken back to a plantation. It was the first poem to directly attack slavery and was enormously popular. Another response was the scathing attack on slavery by John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, who published his *Thoughts upon Slavery* in 1774.

## Important abolitionists

Another important early voice heard was that of Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780). The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, published posthumously in 1782, was the first prose published by an African writer in England. Sancho was born on a slave ship bound for the Caribbean. Orphaned shortly afterwards, he was taken to England as a child by his owner. He eventually worked for the Duke of Montagu in Greenwich, who encouraged his educational and cultural ambitions. Sancho's life and achievements as a composer, writer and businessman helped prove his and other abolitionists point that: *An untutored African may possess abilities equal to a European.*

In 1782 the American Revolution ended and the end of hostilities led to a boom in the slave trade. It was also the year that the news of the Zong drownings of Africans horrified the public and the year that the Quakers presented a petition against the slave trade to Parliament.

1784 saw the first petition to end the slave trade presented to the House of Commons by a town, Bridgewater, and the publication of Dr James Ramsay's (1733-1789) influential *On the Treatment and Conversion of Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*. Ramsay was a naval surgeon-turned-Evangelical Anglican minister and abolitionist who had recently returned from the West Indies after fourteen years as a minister in St. Kitts. While there he denounced slavery and the slave trade to those he ministered, including slaves, leading to abuse from the sugar planters. His searing eyewitness account of the appalling conditions and abuse that enslaved Africans suffered on the plantations was the first treatise to make a real impact: Ramsay was more of an establishment figure than the nonconformists and his account started a debate in the media, as he was strongly attacked by the pro-slavery lobby.

The following year, 1785, Thomas Clarkson, a twenty-five year old divinity student, won Cambridge University's Latin contest for an essay on the topic: *'Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?'* Shortly afterwards, he had a moment of revelation where he thought that *'if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end.'* From that moment on, Clarkson dedicated himself to the cause. He began his systematic research on the cruelty of the slave trade and sought out other abolitionists, including the Quakers, Ramsay, Sharp and Olaudah Equiano.

## Consolidation of the movement

During the late 1780s these individual voices began to develop into a crusade. On 22 May 1787 in 2 George Yard, near Bank station in London, the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed by nine Quakers and three Anglicans, including Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson. While many in the group wanted complete emancipation (freedom) for slaves, they thought that a campaign to abolish the slave trade, rather than slavery itself, stood a better chance of success. They also hoped that if the supply of enslaved Africans was stopped, that conditions would have to improve for those already enslaved and that ultimately it would lead to the end of slavery.

This first meeting turned the Quaker cause into a national and international movement and heralded the start of one of the most ambitious citizens' movements of all time. The group knew they needed a high-profile establishment voice and quickly recruited MP William Wilberforce (1759-1833) as their parliamentary spokesman. Another early member of the committee was the wealthy pottery designer and manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795), who gave the movement its powerful emblem. It shows a kneeling slave with chained hands pleading to the heavens, encircled with the words *'Am I Not a Man and A Brother?'* Originally designed as a seal, it was soon reproduced on plates, boxes, books and jewellery. It was an incredibly successful symbol. Clarkson himself distributed some 500 medallions, noting that:

*'Ladies wore them in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length the taste for wearing them became general, and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice, humanity and freedom.'*

## African abolitionists

The voices of those who had been enslaved themselves were soon added to the Committee's growing publicity campaign and distribution of pamphlets that contained first-hand accounts of those who had worked in or witnessed the slave trade in action. Particularly notable were the presence and books of Ottobah Cugano and Olaudah Equiano, both ex-slaves living in London as free men.

Cugano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, published in 1787, was the first directly abolitionist book in English. The book tells of his experiences as a slave taken from West Africa to the West Indies, praises the work of Sharp, Clarkson and Ramsay and proposes that *'universal emancipation of slaves should begin'*. It was popular enough to require three printings in its first year and be translated into French.

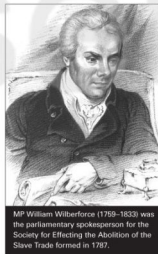
*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, which abolitionist Equiano published in 1789, was even more of a sensation. It went through numerous reprints and was translated into Dutch, German and Russian. Equiano took his story of the barbarities of the slave trade on the road, with a massive book tour throughout Britain and Ireland over the next five years. He was a powerful, eloquent spokesman for the anti-slavery movement, writing letters to the press, lobbying MPs, organising fellow black men in London and supporting his fellow abolitionists.



Dr James Ramsay (1733-1789) wrote the influential *On the Treatment and Conversion of Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies*, a searing eyewitness account of the appalling conditions and abuse that slaves suffered on the plantations.



Letter from Hackney resident John Aikin to his sister Anna Letitia Barbauld discussing his thoughts on the sugar boycott, which they both supported, November 1791. *'But with respect to the young people and even children, who have entirely on their own accord resigned an indulgence important to them, I triumph and admire! Nothing is to be despised if many of the rising generation are capable of such conduct.'*



MP William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was the parliamentary spokesperson for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade formed in 1787.

own family, through none so good as in it. Upon the whole I hope my time tolerably, & have no reason to complain either as to health or spirits. Anna's is still with us. I am at length become a practical antivivarian. I don't continue to be the only person in the family who used no luxury which grew less & less sweet from the confessions mingled with it. I do not in this matter look to effects. They are in the hands of Providence, & I neither expect nor despair about them. I resign the use of sugar merely on the conviction that feeling as I do, about the mode in which it is procured, I cannot justify the use of it to myself. It is a personal affair to me, & I neither feel a desire to make converts, nor trouble myself about conversions. The sacrifice I find less than I expected - it is indeed almost too little to make to principle, with the idea that I know not whether more economy might not be made in the respect to the young people, & account resigned.

# ABOLITION IN BRITAIN

**'The sense of the nation has pressed abolition upon our rulers'.**

*Edinburgh Review, 1807*

## Mobilising the masses

The well-organised abolitionists mobilised public opinion through the Quakers' network of Friends' meetings and further afield through petitions, boycotts, newsletters, direct-mail fund-raising, mass rallies, lobbying, public debates, legal injunctions and parliamentary action. Their orchestrated campaign was very successful in capturing the public's imagination, and through it, the politicians' attention. In 1792, at the height of the debate about the slave trade, Parliament received 519 petitions signed by more than 390,000, more people than were eligible to vote.

Wilberforce made his first major abolition speech in the House of Commons in 1789, declaring that, 'numbers had been carried every year from their native country, in order to satiate the avarice of ... men whose ... thoughts were bent upon tyranny and oppression'. He introduced the first Bill to abolish the slave trade in 1791 but it was rejected. The next year the House of Commons voted in favour of abolition but the House of Lords rejected the Bill.

## Sugar boycott

Parliament's rejection of the abolition bill prompted a massive nationwide sugar boycott. Led by Quakers and enacted by women (who did the shopping and food preparation), an estimated 300,000-400,000 people refused to eat slave-grown sugar. Many abstained completely, while others bought more expensive Indian sugar. Sales of plantation sugar fell dramatically. At a time when so few people could vote, this was a radical and effective way for people to make their voices heard.

In 1793, at the height of abolition fever and seemingly close to success, war broke out with France. Attention and resources turned to national security, dissenting voices were suppressed and the abolition movement stalled. The abolition committee reformed in 1804 with the older members and a new generation. In the interim there had been several slave rebellions in the colonies and most notably, the successful Haitian Revolution (1791-1804).

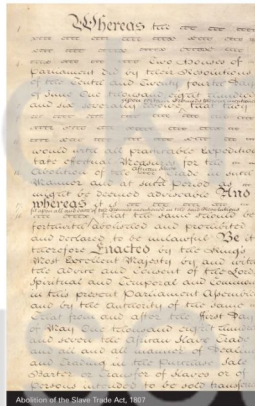
## Success

The abolitionists persevered and finally, on 23 February 1807 the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed by Parliament and received royal assent on 25 March 1807. This abolished the slave trade in British colonies. The act was an important step on the road to the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 and full emancipation (freeing of the slaves) in 1838.

The extraordinary combination of constant resistance by the slaves and the determination of individuals in Britain to expose the evils of the slave trade began the process of defeating this appalling practice. In less than one generation, Britain transformed itself from being the leading slave trading nation to the nation most opposed to it. After 1807 the Royal Navy patrolled the Atlantic looking for and capturing illegal slave traders and their cargoes. Despite their efforts, the illegal trade in people continued for another 80 years.

## A timetable for the ending of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery

- 1807 Slave trading abolished by Britain and United States
- 1813 Slave trading abolished by Sweden
- 1814 Slave trading abolished by the Netherlands
- 1817 Slave trading abolished by France (not effective until 1826)
- 1819 Slave trading abolished north of the equator by Portugal
- 1820 Slave trading abolished by Spain
- 1834 Slavery abolished in British colonies (but slaves apprenticed until 1838)
- 1842 Slaves freed in Uruguay
- 1843 Slaves freed in Argentina
- 1843 Slavery abolished in Swedish colonies
- 1848 Slavery abolished in French and Danish colonies
- 1851 Slave trading abolished by Brazil
- 1854 Slavery abolished in Peru
- 1858 Slavery abolished in Portuguese colonies (but slaves apprenticed for 20 years)
- 1861 Slavery abolished in Dutch colonies in Caribbean
- 1865 Slavery abolished in United States
- 1870 Slavery abolished in Spanish colonies
- 1886 Slavery abolished in Cuba
- 1888 Slavery abolished in Brazil



Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807

## Now

Shockingly, slavery still exists today although it is no longer state-supported. The battle to end this evil is continued by various organisations, such as Anti-Slavery International, which was founded in 1839 as a direct result of the abolitionist movement.



Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780) was an accomplished composer, writer and businessman. The letters of Ignatius Sancho, published posthumously in 1782, was the first prose published by an African writer in England.



Abolitionist sugar bowl. Sales of Indian-grown sugar went up ten times in two years.

Advertising bill for a public meeting in Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1830. The meeting was for the town's citizens to debate whether or not they should petition the King and Parliament to abolish slavery in the colonies.

**To JOSEPH GOSNAY, Esq.**  
CONSTABLE OF WAKEFIELD.

WE, the Undersigned, request that you would call an early Meeting of the Inhabitants of this Town and Neighbourhood, for the purpose of considering the propriety of addressing his Majesty, and petitioning both Houses of Parliament, for the

**ABOLITION OF COLONIAL SLAVERY.**

Wm. Leatham,  
C. Crowther,  
Thomas Kilby,  
T. Johnstone,  
Thomas Barff,  
J. Barthrop,  
Thomas Rogers, M.A.  
W. C. Ellis, M.D.

O. L. Collins,  
John Earnshaw,  
William Iveson,  
M. J. Naylor, D. D.  
Samuel Stocks,  
Isaac Shaw,

John Scholey,  
Twiss ton Haxby,  
George Holdsworth,  
C. F. Gotthardt,  
J. D. Lorraine,  
Wm. Toolal,  
Rowland Hurst.

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE ABOVE REQUISITION, I DO HEREBY APPOINT A

**MEETING**  
TO BE HELD AT THE COURT-HOUSE,  
ON WEDNESDAY next, the 10th Instant,  
AT TWELVE O'CLOCK AT NOON.  
**JOSEPH GOSNAY, Constable.**  
Wakefield, November 4, 1830.

HURST, PRINTER, JOURNAL-OFFICE, WAKEFIELD.



Clarendon House, Stoke Newington, 1894.

### Hackney residents and the fight against slavery

From around 1750–1850 Hackney was a centre of nonconformist activity. In addition to numerous chapels and meeting houses, there were several well-known theological colleges. These were hotbeds of radical thinking and included many against slavery in their numbers.

These are but a few Hackney residents who were involved in the fight to abolish the transatlantic slave trade and then slavery itself in Britain and abroad:

Quakers (and Stoke Newington residents) **Joseph Woods, Sr. (1738–1812)**, a wool merchant and **Samuel Hoare, Jr. (1751–1825)**, a banker, were founding members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

**Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743–1825)** was a poet and writer. Her brother **John Aikin (1747–1802)** was a doctor and writer. Both lived on Stoke Newington Church Street and were early supporters of the anti-slavery movement.

**James Stephen (1758–1832)** was a maritime lawyer who helped William Wilberforce put together the successful Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. He also served as a Member of Parliament and helped pave the way for the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Stephen lived in Stoke Newington with his wife Sarah, Wilberforce's sister. Buried in St. Mary's Church.

**William Allen (1770–1843)** was a prominent Quaker and abolitionist. He was elected a 'Committee Member' of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1805. He was buried in the grounds of the Yorkley Road Quaker Meeting House (now a Seventh Day Adventist chapel) in Stoke Newington.

**Joanna Vassa (1795–1857)** was the only surviving descendant of African abolitionist Oluadah Equiano and his wife, Englishwoman Susannah Cullen. Vassa was the wife of Congregationalist minister Rev. Henry Bromley and they are both buried in Abney Park Cemetery.

The **Rev. James Sherman (1796–1862)**, was a Congregationalist and abolitionist. He was one of the founding trustees of the non-denominational Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington and author of the introduction to the highly influential Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852). He is buried in Abney Park Cemetery.

The **Rev. Dr. Thomas Binney (1798–1874)** was a Congregationalist and abolitionist and an active member of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society (now Anti-Slavery International). He is buried in Abney Park Cemetery.

The **Rev. Thomas Burchell (1799–1846)** was a Baptist missionary who worked for emancipation in Jamaica. He is buried in Abney Park Cemetery.

The **Rev. Samuel Oughton (1803–1881)** was a Baptist missionary who worked for emancipation in Jamaica. He is buried in Abney Park Cemetery.

The **Rev. Joseph Kelley (1802–1875)** was a Congregational missionary who worked for the abolition of slavery in Demerara (now Guyana). He is buried in Abney Park Cemetery.

The **Rev. Dr. Christopher Newman Hall (1816–1902)** actively supported emancipation in the United States. He is buried in Abney Park Cemetery.



St. Mary's Church, late 1700s.