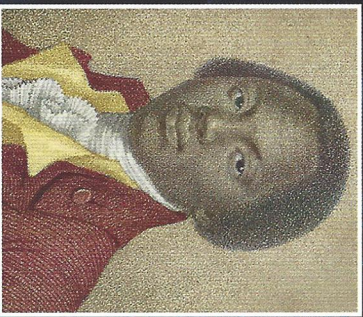


“EQUIANO TRAVELLED THE WORLD INCLUDING THE NORTH POLE, BECAME A HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER, AND USED HIS BEST-SELLING AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO LOBBY PARLIAMENT FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE”



The Equiano Exhibition is a celebration of the life of Olaudah Equiano (c.1745–1797) who lived in England. It tells his story from the time he was kidnapped at aged 11 and enslaved in what is now south-eastern Nigeria. He was forcibly taken on a slave ship to Barbados (West Indies), and later to Virginia (North America), where he was resold to Michael Henry Pascal, an officer in the Royal Navy. Equiano was then renamed Gustavus Vassa by Pascal, who took him to England. They both served in the Seven Years’ War (1756 – 1762) with France, but after the war ended, Equiano was resold to Robert King, a Quaker merchant in Montserrat (West Indies). In the colonies, Equiano witnessed slave resistance, and serious cruelty to enslaved Africans as they worked on sugar plantations and in slaveholders’ homes, and he was determined to obtain his freedom.

While working for Robert King, Equiano was allowed to do petty trading, and it earned him enough money to buy his freedom for £40 on July 11, 1766. He said, “... I who had been a slave in the morning, trembling at the will of another, now became my own master, and completely free. I thought this was the happiest day I had ever experienced...”

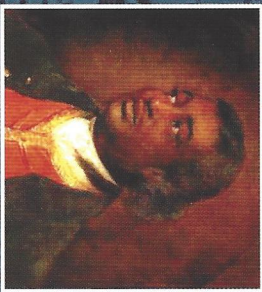


LEONARD PARKINSON, Captain of the Mermaids, Courtesy of Bristol City Council Museum

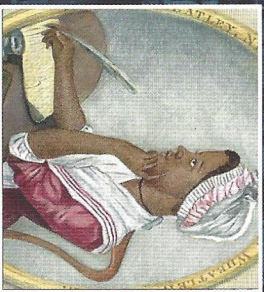
He later returned to England, became a businessman, and an adventurer. Living in the country at the time were thousands of other Africans, including Ignatius Sancho and Ottobah Cugoana, who were both authors. Phillis Wheatley, an enslaved African from the British colony of Boston visited London in 1773 and published her book of poems.

In 1783, Equiano reported to Granville Sharp, a human rights campaigner, the tragedy of 133 enslaved Africans who had been thrown from the ship Zong into the sea. The ship owners afterwards claimed insurance for the loss of their cargo of slaves. Sharp and Equiano made an attempt to obtain justice in the courts for the murdered Africans, but they were unsuccessful. Judge Lord Mansfield had already ruled in favour of the ship-owners because English law regarded slaves as cargo or goods.

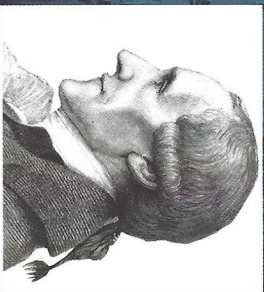
Lord Mansfield was the great uncle of Dido Elizabeth Belle, the daughter of his nephew Sir John Lindsay, a Royal Navy Captain. Dido’s mother, Maria, was an enslaved African.



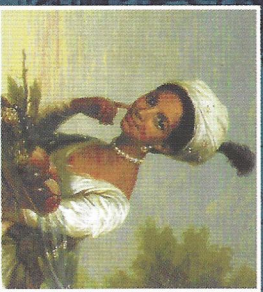
IGNATIUS SANCHO (c.1729–1780) (Courtesy of National Gallery of Canada)



Phillis Wheatley (c.1753–1784) Courtesy of Library of Congress



GRANVILLE SHARP Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery



DIDO ELIZABETH BELLE Courtesy of the Earl of Mansfield, Scotland

The Zong case brought to the attention of the British public the brutality of the slave trade, and the tragedy fuelled the campaign for its abolition. Equiano played an important role, and his book ‘The Interesting Narrative’, published in 1789, was a major contribution to the campaign. There were nine editions by 1794. Abolition was not legislated until 1807, ten years after he died in London.



“Zong: The Slave Ship” by William Turner Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Equiano Society and Birmingham City Council are pleased to present an Exhibition that will tell the story of Olaudah’s life and times, and will feature objects from the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery’s own collection as well as prestigious national loans. The Exhibition will also feature artwork and interpretations created by the following schools and community groups: Hockley Youth Project and the Techno Elders in Birmingham, Deansfield Secondary School in Wolverhampton, and King George V Primary School in Sandwell.

The Exhibition is a major part of The Equiano Project which also includes a touring exhibition, an education pack, a website, lectures, guided tours, and conferences.