

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Slavery

How did the Abolition Acts of 1807
and 1833 affect the slave trade?

Key Stages 3-4 | Empire and Industry 1750-1850
Lesson pack

Introduction

As soon as Europeans began to settle in America, in the early 16th century, they imported enslaved Africans to work for them. As European settlement grew, so did the demand for enslaved people. Over the next 300 years more than 11 million enslaved people were transported across the Atlantic from Africa to America and the West Indies, and Britain led this trade from the mid-17th century onwards. Ports such as Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow sent out many slaving ships each year, bringing great prosperity to their owners. Many other cities also grew rich on the profits of industries which depended on slave-produced materials such as cotton, sugar and tobacco.

The campaign in Britain to abolish slavery began in the 1760s, supported by both black and white abolitionists. The battle was long and hard-fought, with pro-slavery campaigners arguing that the slave trade was important for the British economy and claiming that enslaved Africans were happy and well-treated. However the frequent rebellions by enslaved Africans and evidence of the appalling conditions endured by them during and after transportation led to growing support for the demands to abolish the slave trade. Eventually, in 1807, Parliament passed an Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which abolished the trade by Britain in enslaved peoples between Africa, the West Indies and America.

The pro-slavery campaigners had argued that with no new enslaved Africans being traded slave-owners would treat their existing slaves better. However, it was clear that enslaved people were still harshly treated and many continued to resist and rebel against their enslavement. In 1833 Parliament passed

Suitable for:

KS 3 - 4

Time period:

Empire and Industry
1750-1850

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 3:

Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901
Britain's transatlantic slave trade: its effects and its eventual abolition

Key stage 4:

AQA GCSE History:
Britain: Migration, empires and the people: c790 to the present day
OCR GCSE History:
Political and social impact of empire on Britain 1688–c.1730

Introduction

a further act to abolish slavery in the British West Indies, Canada and the Cape of Good Hope (southern Africa), meaning that it was now illegal to buy or own a person. However, slavery continued in other areas of the British Empire including the territories run by the East India Company, Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka) and St Helena. Between 1808 and 1869 the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron seized over 1,600 slave ships and freed about 150,000 Africans but, despite this, it is estimated that a further 1 million people were enslaved and transported throughout the 19th century. Use this lesson to explore original court records from Dominica, a British colony and photographs from HMS Daphne, a British naval ship later used to prevent the transportation of enslaved people.

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Teacher's notes

This lesson has a video starter activity based on one of our documents to 'hook' students into the lesson tasks that follow.

This lesson offers graphic evidence of the cruelty on which enslavement was based. The Court Records from Dominica reveal all kinds of details about the way enslaved African society worked. Most of all, however, it shows the punishments meted out to enslaved people, in all its brutality. From this point the whole story of enslavement – why the enslaved were there, who ran the plantations, why they ran away – can be explored. It is also an important piece of evidence of the reasons why the abolition campaign proceeded beyond 1807 to full abolition of the institution of enslavement in 1833.

The story of enslavement often ends in 1833. But that was not the end of enslavement, even in the Americas. It was not abolished in the USA until 1863, after a bloody Civil War had been fought over the issue. It was not abolished in Brazil until 1888. Britain's high moral line about enslavement after 1833 is not often dealt with. Sources 2a, b and c reveal just how much effort Britain put into its anti-enslavement activities in several parts of the world right through the 19th century.

Sources

Illustration ZPER 34/29 – an illustration from the Illustrated London News showing a slave sale in South Carolina around 1856

Source 1 CO 71/51 – these are extracts from the court records for Dominica showing punishments for enslaved Africans

Sources 2 a, b, c FO 84/1310 – these photographs are a set showing East African enslaved people rescued by the British naval ship, HMS Daphne. HMS Daphne was often used to rescue enslaved people from slave runners after the 1833 abolition of slavery by Great Britain. Enslaved people who were rescued were often taken to a nearby island where they would then set up new colonies.

Background

Racism

Enslavement is both a result and a cause of racism. A belief that certain people were racially inferior allowed Europeans to set up the trade in African enslaved people in the 1520s. It encouraged whites to believe that the cruelty of the capture of enslaved people, the inhuman conditions on the slave-ships and the incredibly harsh treatment the enslaved received in the Americas were somehow justified. Source 2 is just another example of this. Enslavement has also caused racism by setting up a stereotype of black people as victims in the past.

The triangular trade

The British trade in enslaved people was a three-legged voyage: from British ports to West Africa, where enslaved people were bought with guns and other British-manufactured articles. Then came the dreaded 'middle passage' to the Americas, with as many enslaved people as possible were crammed below decks. The enslaved were then sold in the southern USA, the Caribbean Islands and South America, where they were used to work the plantations. Plantations were farms growing only crops that Europe wanted: tobacco, sugar, cotton. The merchant ships would load up with these products and take them back to Britain on the last leg of their journey. Profits from this trade made merchants rich as well as providing the capital (money) for many of the enterprises of the early Industrial Revolution.

Plantation life

The enslaved people were worked in gangs, made up of both men and women, driven on by the whip of the overseer. They worked for ten to 12 hours a day in the tropical sun, for six days a week. Other enslaved people worked as craftspeople, or servants. The fact that they could be bought or sold away from the plantation at any time made it very difficult to maintain normal family life. Some of the 'runaways' listed in Source 1 may well have just been trying to visit friends or relations who had been sold to another plantation.

Background

African songs, games, stories and religion helped to maintain the enslaveds' belief in themselves. From the 17th century, gangs of runaways – called 'Maroons' in Jamaica – set up independent, permanent communities which resisted all efforts of the white owners and soldiers to crush them. Sometimes this broke out into open conflict, such as the Maroon Wars of 1730-1740 and 1795-6. There were also slave revolts, in Antigua in 1735, Tacky's revolt in Jamaica in 1760, Kofi's revolt in Guyana in 1763, in Granada in 1795-7, and so on.

Abolition

The case against enslavement had several arguments:

- The moral argument: enslavement is wicked, un-Christian
- The economic argument: enslavement is expensive and inefficient
- The legal argument: enslavement is illegal under British law
- Problems in the plantations: enslaved people continued to resist enslavement and would not be suppressed

The campaign to abolish enslavement was the first popular peaceful mass protest movement of modern times. Leading white abolitionists were Granville Sharpe, who helped black people fight test cases in the courts; Thomas Clarkson, who collected evidence of the cruelty of the enslavement trade from all over Britain; and William Wilberforce, who fought for legislation in Parliament. They worked with black abolitionist campaigners, such as Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cuguano. Mary Prince, who had been enslaved for part of her life, wrote an important book about her experiences which helped to influence the eventual abolition of enslavement in 1833.

Clearly, the campaign to abolish enslavement did not end in 1833. Plantation owners still used forced labour in the form of indentured workers (a worker who works for a fixed term for their transportation, board and lodgings) particularly on tobacco plantations. Being an indentured worker meant, in theory, that you should be treated fairly and that although you weren't paid for your labour, you would be given proper food and somewhere to stay. In actual fact, indentured workers were often treated no better than enslaved workers, with beatings, and even death, a common factor.

External links

[Son of the South](#)¹

A useful site with lots of enslavement related images and resources.

[International Slavery Museum](#)²

International slavery museum collections at Liverpool Museum

[Olaudah Equiano](#)³

The life of the 18th century writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano, with the Equiano Society and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

[What is modern slavery?](#)⁴

What is modern slavery today?

¹ <https://www.sonofthesouth.net/slavery/index.html>

² <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum>

³ <https://equiano.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

Tasks

History Hook – Starter Activity

[Watch History Hook: Slavery here.](#)¹

1. Read Source 1. Look at the names on the document.

- These enslaved people originated in Africa. Are these African names? Who named them?
- How many names do the enslaved Africans have? Why weren't they given surnames?
- Which enslaved people are male and which are female? Does their gender make any difference to how they were treated by the court?
- Dominica had been a French possession until 1763. Which of the slaves have French names?

2. Now look at the charges against the enslaved Africans in Source 1.

- What have most of these enslaved people been charged with?
- Dominica is quite a small island. When the first census was carried out there in 1834 the population (whites and blacks) was only 14,000. What does this document tell you about the scale of resistance by runaways?

3. There are 13 enslaved Africans listed in the document.

- How many were hanged? How many whipped? How many discharged?
- What happened to Pierre (28 January)?
- Why do you think the sentences handed out were so ferocious?
- What would you say about this document if you were a British abolitionist working for the total abolition of slavery?
- What would you say about it if you were a defender of slavery?

4. Look at Source 2a, b and c.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzZb5rMvy4Q>

Tasks

Having been the largest slaving nation, Britain became a determined abolitionist power after 1833, using the Royal Navy to stop ships suspected of being slavers. These photographs were taken about 1868, off the east coast of Africa. They form part of a Report from John Armstrong Challice, a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, working to abolish slavery in Zanzibar. Zanzibar did not abolish slavery until 1897.

- We know very little about these pictures. Use the clues you can pick out from the photographs to suggest what they actually show
- Write a brief description of the enslaved people – age, numbers, clothing, other conditions
- These photographs were taken about 1869, in the Indian Ocean. How useful are they as evidence of the Atlantic slave trade before its abolition in 1807?
- The ship on which these photographs were taken was the HMS Daphne, a British naval ship used to prevent the transportation of enslaved people. Do you think Britain had the right to act as the world's police, stopping and searching ships of other nations? (Remember that Britain had been a large slave trading nation until 1807.)

Source 1: Court records from Dominica, a British colony in the Leeward Islands, January 1814. Catalogue Ref: CO 71/51

1814 Jan 15	John Burrell	vs. Mr. Grasso	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To be discharged	Strangled. Head cut off & put in a pot. Body hung on a gibbet. 16 Jan 1814.
1814 Feb 16	Peter	Hills bro Estate	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To be discharged	Strangled. Head cut off & put in a pot. Body hung on a gibbet. 18 Jan 1814.
1814 Feb 16	Hector	vs. Mr. Linnere	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To receive 100 lashes & to be imprisoned in chains 6 months.	Received 100 lashes & was imprisoned 21 April.
1814 Feb 16	Rachel	vs. Mr. Grasso	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To receive 30 lashes & to be imprisoned in chains 6 months.	Received 30 lashes & delivered to Barnes 16 April 1814.
1814 Feb 22	Richd Daniel	Hills bro Estate	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To receive 100 lashes each.	Received 100 lashes each & delivered to Barnes 22 Jan 1814.
1814 Feb 22	Sarah	vs. Mr. Linnere	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To receive 50 lashes	Received 50 lashes & delivered to Barnes 22 Jan 1814.
1814 Feb 22	Stetty, Barry & Placide	vs. Mr. Grasso	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To receive 40 lashes each.	Received 40 lashes each & delivered to Barnes 22 Jan 1814.
1814 Feb 28	Joseph	vs. Mr. Durooy	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	Not guilty	Discharged.
1814 Feb 28	Pierre	vs. Mr. Linnere	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	To receive 100 lashes & to be imprisoned in chains 6 months.	Received 100 lashes & delivered to Barnes 22 Jan 1814.
1814 Feb 28	Charles	vs. Mr. Durooy	vs. Martial, attempting to return to the Remounges, with provisions & having been running away 2 months.	Not guilty	Discharged.

Transcript: Source 1

1814 Jan[uar] y 15	John Pierre	Mr Grano	1814 Jan[uar]y 15 John Pierre Mr Grano Co[ur]t Martial	Attempting to return to the Runaways with Provisions & having been runaway 2 Months	To be hanged	Hanged : Head cut off & put on a Pole. Body hanged on a Gibbet, 16 Jan[uar]y 1814
15 & 16	Peter	Hillsbro' Estate	ditto	Exiting a Mutiny among 20 Negroes of the Estate & harvesting them with provisions & while runaway	To be hanged	Hanged. Head cut off & put on a pole. Body hanged on a Gibbet 18 Jan[uar]y 1814
16	Hector	Mr Lionne	ditto	Runaway	To receive 100 lashes & to be worked in chains 6 months	Received 100 lashes 16 Jan 1814 & sold 21st April
	Rachel	Mr Grano	ditto	ditto	To receive 30 lashes & to be worked in chains 3 months	Received 30 lashes & delivered to owner 16th April 1814
22	Dick & Daniel	Hillsbro' Estate	ditto	ditto	To receive 100 lashes	Rec[eived] 100 lashes each, & released to owners att[ention] 22nd Jan 1814
	Sarah	ditto	ditto	ditto	To receive 50 lashes	Pardoned & released 30th Jan[uar]y
	Hetty, Penny & Placide	ditto	ditto	ditto	To receive 40 lashes each	Received 40 lashes each & returned to owner's att[ention] 22nd Jan[uar]y
28	Joseph	Mr Dubocq	ditto	supplying Runaways with salt & with provisions	Not guilty	Discharged
	Pierre	Mr Polus Estate	ditto	Encouraging the Neg[ro]e[s] upon that estates who had absconded to stay away	To receive 100 lashes & to be worked in chains 6 months	Rec[eived] 100 lashes & died in Jail 6 april

Source 2a: East African enslaved people released from a dhow by HMS Daphne, 1 November 1868. Catalogue Ref: FO 84/1310



Source 2b: East African enslaved people released from a dhow by HMS Daphne, 1 November 1868. Catalogue Ref: FO 84/1310



Source 2c: East African enslaved people released from a dhow by HMS Daphne, 1 November 1868. Catalogue Ref: FO 84/1310





Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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