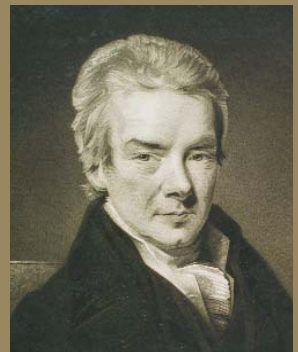
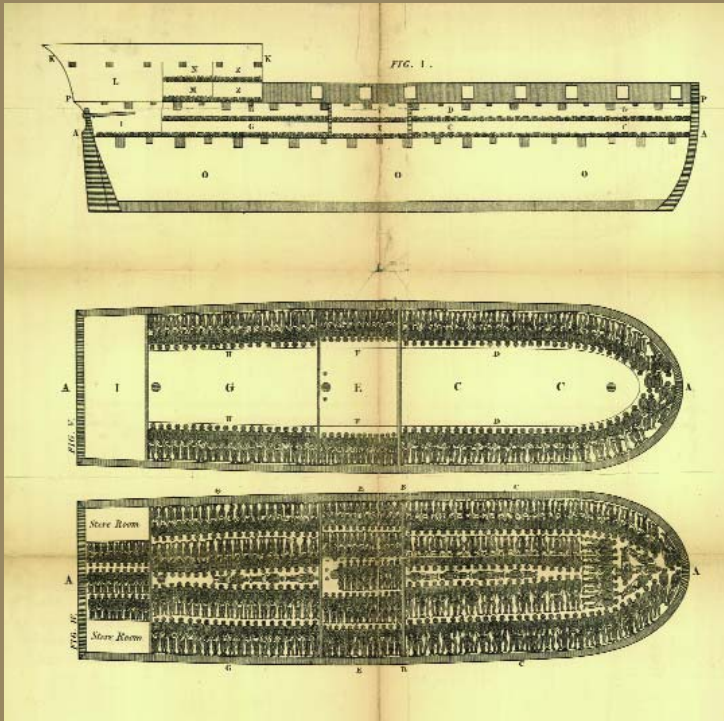


Reflecting on the past and looking to the future

*The 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition
of the Slave Trade in the British Empire*



Front cover images:

Left – Illustration of a slave ship from Regulated Slave Trade by Robert Stokes, 1850 (Connecting Histories, Birmingham Central Library).

Top right – *this painting is believed to be of Olaudah Equiano. The official title is Portrait of a Negro Man, Olaudah Equiano, 1780s, (previously attributed to Joshua Reynolds) by English School, (18th century). Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, Devon, UK/ The Bridgeman Art Library*
Nationality / copyright status: English / out of copyright.

Bottom right – William Wilberforce by William Say
After Joseph Slater, published 18 April 1820
(National Portrait Gallery).

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Introduction

"I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly: and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind...when the ship we were in had got all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome...now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential...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 scene of horror almost inconceivable."

Oludah Equiano, a former slave, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oludah Equiano, 1789*

1. In 2007 we will commemorate the 200th anniversary of the passage of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. This Act outlawed the slave trade throughout the British Empire and made it illegal for British ships to be involved in the trade. This marked the beginning of the end for the transatlantic traffic in human beings.

2. Whilst it would be another 30 years before slavery itself was finally abolished throughout the British Empire, the Bicentenary in 2007 gives us the opportunity to remember the millions who suffered; to pay tribute to the courage and moral conviction of all those – black and white – who campaigned for abolition; and to demand to know why today, in some parts of the world, forms of slavery still persist two centuries after the argument for abolition in this country was won.

Slavery and abolition – key events

- 1562** First English slaving expedition by Sir John Hawkins.
- 1619** First record of Africans landed in Virginia.
- 1625** First English settlement on Barbados.
- 1626** First boatload of African slaves to St. Kitts.
- 1631** Charles I granted monopoly on Guinea trade to a group of London merchants.
- 1655** British capture of Jamaica as part of Cromwell's 'Grand Design'.
- 1672** Royal Africa Company granted charter to carry Africans to the Americas.
- 1772** The Somerset case held that no slave could be forcibly removed from Britain. The case led to the widespread belief that slavery itself was illegal in England, Wales and Ireland.
- 1778** Slavery declared illegal in Scotland.
- 1781** 133 African slaves thrown overboard from the slave ship *Zong*.

- 1783** Committee on the Slave Trade established by Quakers' Meeting for Sufferings.
- 1787** Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded: Granville Sharp as president of a mostly Quaker committee.
- 1791** 23 August – St Domingue (Haiti) slave revolt.
- 1792** Resolution for gradual abolition of the slave trade defeated in House of Lords.
- 1805** Bill for Abolition passed in Commons, rejected in House of Lords.
- 1807** 25 March – Slave Trade Abolition Bill passed in the British Parliament.
- 1808** British West Africa Squadron (Royal Navy) established to suppress slave trading. By 1865, nearly 150,000 people freed by anti-slavery operations.
- 1815** End of Napoleonic Wars. At the Congress of Vienna, Britain puts pressure on France, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain to abolish slave trade.
- 1838** 1 August – enslaved men, women and children in British Empire finally became free after a period of forced apprenticeship following the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.
- 1842** Britain & US signed Webster-Ashburton Treaty, banning slave trade on high seas.
- 1848** Emancipation by the French of their slaves.
- 1865** Slavery finally abolished in United States territories.
- 1888** Slavery abolished in Brazil.

3. The Government wants people from every community to be able to commemorate the Bicentenary, both at the local level and in larger and more public settings. A wide range of activities by cultural, faith and community organisations are already being planned. Local authorities and cultural bodies in Liverpool, Bristol, Hull, Birmingham and London and across the whole of the United Kingdom will all be playing an important role. The Heritage Lottery Fund has already awarded over £16 million to individual projects closely connected to the Bicentenary, with more awards to be made in the months ahead.
4. We have brought together an Advisory Group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, with members from a range of influential community, faith and cultural organisations and from key cities, to maximise their organisations' contributions to the Bicentenary. We are looking at how best to publicise the very wide range of activities that are being planned for 2007 and beyond.

Reflecting on the past

5. Until the 19th century, slavery was considered an acceptable part of the economic system, enabling many countries in Europe and beyond to profit and prosper from the trade of goods produced by a vast pool of enslaved labour. Exact figures are impossible to establish, but it is thought that 12 million Africans were loaded onto slave ships. Although today everybody recognises that it was morally reprehensible, politicians, businessmen, scientists and even churches justified the legitimacy of slavery at the time. British subjects were involved with the trade as

shipping owners, makers of chains and other instruments of control, goods manufacturers and as plantation and slave owners.

6. Our country was not alone in benefiting financially from the transatlantic slave trade. Yet as one of the strongest powers of the age slavery played a particularly significant role in this country's history. As 2007 approaches, it is right that we begin to feel the weight of that role more keenly.
7. There are different and very strongly held views as to the historical facts of slavery, the moral and legal responsibilities of those involved, and the lasting effects of slavery in this country and abroad.
8. Nevertheless, there is a strong view held by many people that the repercussions of the slave trade and slavery resonate down through the centuries – in Africa, the United States, the Caribbean and South America and here in the United Kingdom. It is argued that some of those after-effects include racism, poverty and conflict in Africa and the Caribbean, inequality, and complex cultural legacies. It is felt that these legacies continue to echo today in streets, workplaces and homes in this country.
9. Whilst we regret and strongly condemn the evils of the transatlantic slave trade, the 1807 Act marked an important point in this country's development towards the nation it is today – a critical step into the modern world, and into a new and more just moral universe. Its bicentenary offers a unique opportunity for the people of Britain to reflect on the wider story of transatlantic slavery and its abolition, and to the roles of ordinary people and politicians, alongside other Britons, Africans and West Indians, in helping to bring an end to slavery.

10. Many will already know a little about those great heroes of the abolition movement such as William Wilberforce or Thomas Clarkson. But it is clear that the abolition of the slave trade was not only the work of a few parliamentarians and members of the church. It was a grass-roots movement, similar in its day to the tens of thousands that joined the campaign to abolish apartheid in South Africa or who supported the Make Poverty History movement last year. 2007 is our chance to celebrate all those other men and women, both black and white, who campaigned before, alongside and behind the figureheads of the abolitionist movement. People of courage and principle who chose to make their voices heard when it might have been unpopular to do so.

11. The people who fought against slavery came from all walks of life, including slaves and former slaves, church leaders, and the countless ordinary British citizens who signed petitions, marched, lobbied and prayed for change. The Bicentenary will allow us to commemorate the lives and contributions of abolitionists and fierce critics of the slave trade such as Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) and Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780), Africans who were sold or born into slavery; and Robert Wedderburn (1762-1835) born in the Caribbean, the son of a Scottish plantation owner and whose mother was a slave. These men rose to be important figures in this country as writers, composers, businessmen and radical campaigners, pushing the agenda for change by their own example.

Looking to the future

"I feel so bad about the things that I did. It disturbs me so much that I inflicted death on other people. ...I still dream about the boy from my village whom I killed. I see him in my dreams, and he is talking to me, saying I killed him for nothing, and I am crying."

Mary, a 16 year old child soldier forced to join an armed rebel group in Central Africa, *US State Department 2005 Trafficking in Persons Report*

12. The link between this story and that related at the beginning of this pamphlet is one of human suffering. Suffering that is separated by two centuries, but united by a practice of unspeakable cruelty: slavery.
13. So in addition to reflecting on this country's diverse past, 2007 is also a chance to make a collective commitment that in another two centuries' time, no-one should feel the need to express regret on our behalf for our actions today. There are clear links between the concerns for justice that were present 200 years ago, and our current concerns to tackle present-day forms of slavery, such as people trafficking. Also related are the inequalities still in existence in Britain today, such as social exclusion, lack of opportunity, racism and discrimination, as well as how we support people to take responsibility for their actions, and work together to build strong and supportive communities. There is a strong connection to building respect running through these themes:

our ability to respect each other as Britons stems largely from the respect we have for ourselves and our own related histories.

14. The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to introduce legislation against race discrimination. The first Race Relations Act was passed in 1965. The Race Relations Act 1976 strengthened our legislation. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 took the law in a new direction by requiring public bodies to promote race equality, rather than simply to react to discrimination once it had happened.
15. Together with legislation against discrimination on the grounds of gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief, we now have one of the most progressive systems in the world. We are currently reviewing all our discrimination legislation with a view to bringing it together in a single coherent legal framework.
16. Legislation should not be, and has not been, the only way in which to seek to tackle continuing injustice and discrimination. Where groups are at a disadvantage, where access to opportunity has been too hard to find, governments have intervened to help. Last year we published *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion*. This strategy brings together practical measures across Government to improve opportunities for all in Britain – helping to ensure that a person's ethnicity or race is not a barrier to their success. It signals the Government's intention to give greater emphasis to the importance of strengthening society, by helping people from different backgrounds come together, supporting people who contribute to society and taking

a stand against racists and extremists. Many members of black and minority ethnic communities are already thriving in Britain today, but the picture is not uniform: certain communities still suffer poorer outcomes in education, health and employment. Tailored initiatives will meet the specific needs of disadvantaged communities, rather than treating all black and minority ethnic communities in the same way. The aim is to help Britain move towards an inclusive society based on mutual respect, an outcome that benefits the whole of society.

17. Broadening access to university education is an important part of tackling inequality of opportunity. Between 1997-98 and 2003-04 the total number of first year students resident in the United Kingdom increased by over 200,000. There has been a particular increase in the number of students from African and Caribbean backgrounds, with numbers increasing by nearly 70 per cent since 1997, compared to an increase amongst white students of 40 per cent.
18. Tackling employment inequality is key to reducing wider forms of disadvantage. People from ethnic minorities face a variety of barriers to employment, so the Government has set itself a target to reduce the nearly 16 percentage point gap between the ethnic minority employment rate and the overall rate. Although latest figures suggest that the gap is closing, there is still much more to do.
19. That is why key Departments have come together with business and unions to create the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force, led by Margaret Hodge, the Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform. The Task Force is in a unique position to oversee the development of a

co-ordinated strategy across Government. The objective is that in seven years' time no-one should be disadvantaged in their employment prospects because of their ethnicity.

20. People from minority ethnic communities are more likely than other ethnic groups to suffer from social exclusion and live in deprived areas. Through a wide range of programmes such as the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy and action plan we are taking steps to build secure and sustainable communities by investing in the areas where people want to live and raise their families. We are working alongside residents and those who provide services to support people in creating inclusive communities that are bound together by values of decency and mutual respect. Work done by the Social Exclusion Unit has recently highlighted how improvements in service delivery can help disadvantaged groups. It takes time to turn around problems that have been decades or longer in the making, but no one should underestimate the importance of this task – giving everyone, no matter what his or her race or background, the best possible start in life.
21. It is not only at home that this Government seeks to challenge the wrongs of today. We are also taking action on a broad range of areas related to contemporary forms of unfree labour and wider injustice.
22. The United Nations is the single most important body for promoting human rights worldwide. The United Kingdom works through the Commission on Human Rights, the General Assembly and specialist agencies such as the International Labour Organisation in our efforts to abolish contemporary forms of slavery.

23. Children are particularly vulnerable to abuses of their human rights. The Government promotes child rights at international level and in bilateral work with other governments. At grass-roots level the Government supports dedicated programmes such as those in West Africa to tackle descent-based slavery and forced labour; in the Sudan to support those children who have been forced to work as soldiers and slaves; and in Nepal to reduce the numbers of those coerced into prostitution.
24. The Government takes a multi-faceted approach to tackling all aspects of human trafficking. We ensure that new legislation, such as the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004, are in place to criminalise trafficking. We also provide appropriate support for victims and co-operate with international partners to prevent trafficking at source. Through the REFLEX programme we have provided training to the Pakistani authorities in techniques to combat human trafficking. The Government is committed to drawing up a national action plan to combat trafficking. The Home Office launched a consultation *Tackling Human Trafficking* earlier this year, with comments invited by 5 April 2006.
25. The Forced Marriage Unit acts as a one-stop shop to give practical assistance and advice to people being forced into marriage or at risk of being forced into marriage, in this country and abroad.
26. The United Kingdom's official development assistance has increased by 75 per cent in real terms since 1997. Combining commitments made by European Union Finance Ministers with those established at the G8 summit in July 2005 it is expected that an extra \$50 billion a year will

be provided to poor countries by 2010. \$25 billion of this will go to Africa, more than doubling assistance compared to 2004. Furthermore, 2005 saw the historic deal to cancel over \$50 billion of multilateral debts owed by poor countries.

27. The Royal Navy played an important role in the nineteenth century in enforcing the 1807 Act and subsequent anti-slavery treaties. Echoes of that role continue today in the part played by the Royal Navy in preventing piracy and terrorism and in targeting those involved in drug smuggling.

Next steps

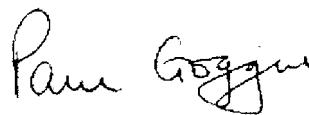
28. The Bicentenary in 2007 marks an important opportunity to reflect on the struggles of the past, the progress we have made and the challenges that remain. Ensuring that we leave the best possible legacy is the central aim. We are looking at how best to publicise the huge number of activities and events that will be happening in 2007 and beyond.
29. In the meantime, the Heritage Lottery Fund is encouraging community-based organisations and others to apply for funding for projects inspired by the Bicentenary. They have produced a straightforward guide called *Remembering Slavery in 2007* for those wanting to apply. This has advice on project ideas and how to make a successful application. They are also currently planning an event in the summer of 2006 to bring together key stakeholders. The Heritage Lottery Fund Helpline number is 020 7591 6042 and textphone 020 7591 6055 or www.hlf.org.uk

30. The Government is funding *Understanding Slavery*, a national education project developed by the National Maritime Museum, the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, National Museums Liverpool, Bristol's City Museum, Galleries and Archives, and Hull Museums and Art Gallery. The museums are working in partnership to promote and support the effective teaching of the history of the transatlantic slave trade in schools and communities across their regions.
31. *Understanding Slavery* seeks to encourage teachers and students to examine this history and its legacies through museum collections and schemes of work within the National Curriculum, particularly History and Citizenship at Key Stage 3 and 4. Further information is available on 020 8858 4422 or understandingslavery@nmm.ac.uk and www.understandingslavery.com (Summer 2006).
32. Further background on the Bicentenary, including what's on, learning resources and additional material is being gathered by a project called *Set All Free*. They can be contacted on 020 7529 8146 and are building a comprehensive website at www.setallfree.net
33. 2007 offers a vital opportunity to reflect on the past and look to the future. We look forward to the role Government will play in helping the community, faith and cultural sectors to achieve this.



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Paul Goggins

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Back cover image:

The Anti-Slavery Arch project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Local Heritage Initiative has restored, interpreted and promoted the Arch at Paganhill, Stroud, a structure that commemorates the struggle against slavery.

Slavery was a significant, if overlooked, feature of the local history of the area, and the nearby ports at Bristol and Gloucester. The project also made links with the current anti-slavery movement.



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PP 889 March 2006