
Britain and Transatlantic Slavery

Glossary

Key Stage 3 and 4
Teachers' Resources



Glossary

General

Abolition: The act of ending an institution, system, or practice; in this context it refers to the legal end of transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

Abolitionists: People who campaigned, wrote, and gave talks in an attempt to convince those in power, as well as the general public, that the slave trade and slavery should be ended.

Absconding: Escaping; many enslaved people ran away from their 'owners'. Sometimes they did this permanently, but at other times they left temporarily.

Absentee: A slave-owner who did not live on their Caribbean estate. Many owners who could afford to moved back to the United Kingdom, leaving their estates to be run by others. Additionally, there were other owners who never visited their estates, often having inherited them from family members.

Agrarian: Relating to farms and farming.

Alderman: A person who is elected to serve on a borough council. In this instance the term refers to the Court of Aldermen which is an elected body forming part of the City of London Corporation. The Court of Aldermen is made up of the twenty five aldermen of the City of London presided over by the Lord Mayor (who is one of the aldermen).

Amelioration: Amelioration Acts were passed in all British Caribbean islands after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in order to improve the condition of the enslaved, as part of a plan of gradual emancipation. The acts were not successful as the life of the enslaved remained harsh.

Annuities: A yearly allowance of money granted to a person usually by a family member.

Anti-saccharist / saccharite movement: A movement which occurred in Britain in the late eighteenth century in which people who believed that slavery should be abolished chose not to eat sugar produced by enslaved people in the West Indies.

Anti-Slavery Activists: People who petitioned the British government in an attempt to end the slave trade and slavery.

Apprenticeship: A period of time when formerly enslaved people were legally required to carry on working for the slave owners. In many ways the working conditions were the same as they had been under slavery.

Aristocracy: People who make up the most privileged class in any society; they are also known as nobles, and have historically had more land, money and power than other people in society. Their rank and titles are often but not always hereditary.

Asiento: Spanish for contract. The asiento de negros (negro contract) was an agreement between the Spanish state and an individual or another state granting a monopoly to sell Africans into slavery in Spanish colonies.

Atonement: The way by which one makes up for a wrong that has been committed.

Auction: Usually a sale of goods to the highest bidder. During slavery, human beings were sold as if they were things to the person who offered the most money.

Autobiography: The story of a person's life which they write themselves.

Barracoons: An enclosure located on the western coast of Africa where enslaved people were temporarily held before being transported across the Atlantic Ocean.

Beneficiary: A person who receives something such as land or money, especially if it is through a trust or will.

Boycott: To refuse to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval.

Canboulay: The name of a harvest festival, which is one of the precursors to modern day carnival. The word comes from the French *cannes brulées* which means burnt cane.

Carnival: A time when people come together and celebrate. Traditionally this occurred before Lent in Roman Catholic countries. It is still held at this time in Trinidad, but in many other Caribbean islands, carnival is now held at other times during the year.

Charter: A written grant from the King or Parliament which gives certain rights to a person, company, or institution.

Chattel: Moveable personal property. This includes things like chairs, beds, tables, and animals. During transatlantic slavery, it was also used to refer to enslaved people.

Cohesive: Closely united.

Collateral: Something that is used to secure a loan. If someone is unable to pay back a loan the collateral is taken by the lender. For instance during slavery, slave-owners borrowed money against both land and enslaved people, both of which they would have to give to the lender if they could not repay the loan.

Colonialism: The system by which one country controls the land, produce, and people of another place.

Compensation: An action made or money given because you have hurt someone or damaged or taken something that they own.

Coned sugar loaves: Until the late nineteenth century, refined sugar was shaped into tall round cones. These were either sold whole or lumps were clipped off and sold by weight.

Creole: Within the British colonies this word initially referred only to a person of European descent who was born in the Americas, but the meaning within was later extended to also include those of African descent who were born in the region. It also came to be used for the new forms of eating, worshiping and living that came about in the Caribbean which combined African, European, and indigenous cultural forms.

Deacon: A person who works to assist the minister of a church.

Degradation: The act of reducing something in quality or causing it to be seen as less valuable.

Destitute: Being extremely poor; lacking both resources and support.

Doxology: An expression of praise to God, especially used in reference to a short hymn sung during a Christian service.

Emancipation: The process of giving people social or political freedom and rights.

Enslaved: Reduced to the condition of slavery.

Free people of colour: A term used to describe individuals who were of mixed African and European descent who were either born free or were manumitted. On some islands the term came to include all free people of African descent, even those who did not have any European ancestry.

Free trade: International buying and selling of goods, without limits on the amount of goods that one country can sell to another, and without special taxes on the goods bought from a foreign country.

Gaol: A place where people accused or convicted of a crime are held. It is also known as a jail or a prison.

Haitian Revolution: When the enslaved people in the French colony of Saint Domingue rose up against those who had enslaved them and created the first 'Black Republic' called Haiti.

Hypocrisy: Behaviour that does not appear to agree with what a person says they believe in.

Incapacitated: Being unable to move or work due to injury or a disability.

Incursion: A sudden invasion or attack.

Indentured servant: Someone who sold their labour to another person for a set period of time. Most were poor people with few options, but others were convicts or political prisoners and some were kidnapped by ships' captains. After their term of service was completed they were considered free.

Indigenous: Originating from or belonging to a specific place.

Industrial Revolution: From the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century major changes occurred in the development of machinery which impacted manufacturing, transportation and thus the way in which people lived. It began in the United Kingdom and spread to other parts of the world.

Intellectuals: People who participate in academic study or critical evaluation of ideas and issues.

Interloper: Someone who or something which enters a place or activity without permission.

Kaiso: A kind of music found in some Caribbean islands that came from West Africa.

Legacy: When something from the past impacts upon what happens today.

Lenten fasting: During Lent, which lasts from Ash Wednesday until the day before Easter, some Christians refrain from eating meat on Fridays. Lent also includes some days when little or no food is eaten in remembrance of the 40 days Jesus fasted in the desert. Many people also voluntarily give up eating something that they like, such as chocolate, to show their commitment.

Manumit: Manumission was the act by which a slave-owner freed an enslaved person. The methods and reasons for doing this were complex and varied between individual owners and islands. Sometimes it was in recognition of a lifetime of service or because the enslaved person was a family member, or even sometimes because the slave-owner did not want to feed, clothe and house an enslaved person who was too old or sick to work.

Mardi Gras: French for Fat Tuesday, this festival is celebrated the day before Ash Wednesday, which is when Lent starts. It is also known as Shrove Tuesday, which is commonly called Pancake Day in the United Kingdom.

Maroons: Initially this referred to enslaved people who ran away and set up their own communities in mountainous regions. It now also refers to their descendants, many of whom still live in distinct communities.

Masquerade: Masked carnival.

Mass consumption: Very widely used or eaten.

Mercantile: Relating to merchants and their trade.

Minor: A person who has not reached an age where they are old enough to make decisions, especially legal ones, for themselves.

Misrepresentation: When someone or something is described falsely in an attempt to deceive someone.

Missionaries: People, often but not only ministers, who were sent to convert people to Christianity. Missionaries in the Caribbean most often focused on converting indigenous and enslaved Africans. This was not always welcomed by slave-owners who feared the enslaved people would use what they were learning about the equality of man before God to push for their freedom.

Molasses: A thick brown syrup which is created when sugar is being refined; also known as treacle.

Monoculture: When only one crop is grown; as a result other crops, which people need to grow in order to feed themselves, are not grown at all or are grown in small quantities.

Monopoly: An organization or group that has complete control of something, especially an area of business, so that others have no share.

Mutiny: To resist authority. It is most commonly used to refer to uprisings which occur on ships.

Myths: Stories or ideas that are believed by many people, but are not true.

Philanthropy: The attempt to make the lives of others better by donating time or money.

Plantation: Colonial farms where agricultural goods such as sugar and cotton were grown. During slavery, many enslaved people lived and worked on such farms.

Political economy: A branch of social science concerned with the relationships between individuals and society and between markets and the state.

Primitive: A person or society which is not literate or industrial. The word is often used to portray a person or society as backwards and unsophisticated.

Proslavery lobby: People who lobbied the British government in an attempt to maintain slavery and the slave trade.

Protest: To show or express disagreement in a public way.

Radical: Ideas or beliefs that are different from what is considered normal, which often leads to an attempt to make huge social or political changes.

Rebellion: To violently oppose those in power.

Reparations: To make amends for the wrong that one has done, by saying sorry, paying money, and helping to fix problems which have occurred as a result.

Resistance: The act of opposing the actions or wishes of someone in power.

Restitution: To reclaim, to put back in the position one would have been in if enslavement and colonisation not occurred (as defined by Esther Stanford Xosei in relation to the reparations movement).

Revolt: A conflict between a group of people and those in power.

Revolution: An event that causes a dramatic or complete change in the political or social order.

Riot: When a crowd acts in a violent and unrestrained way.

Savage: People who are accused of being wild and uncivilized.

Slave forts: Commercial forts built along the Gold Coast of Africa (present day Ghana) by European slave-traders. For example, Cape Coast Fort was originally built by Swedes to trade in gold and timber. It was later converted for use to sell kidnapped Africans.

Staple: A main or essential product, such as food.

Strike: When people refuse to work until demands are met.

Suburban villas: A large house on the outskirts of a city that usually has a garden.

Subversion: Undermining the established way of doing things.

Sugar factor: A person who was based in Britain and made sure that the planters in the Caribbean, and elsewhere, got a good price for the goods which had been produced by enslaved people.

Tea service: A set of dishes, most often made of china or silver, used for serving tea.

Treaty of Utrecht: A number of treaties that were signed by a variety of European states to end the War of Spanish Succession in 1713.

Tropes: When a word, phrase, or image is used in a way that is different from its usual meaning in order to make a point. One example of this is using a figure of speech such as silver moon.

Uprising: A fight by a group of people against those in authority.

War: When two or more countries or groups of people fight against each other.

West India merchants: People in Britain who were involved with trading in goods produced in the West Indian colonies.

Belief Systems

Anglican: A member of the Church of England.

Baptist: A type of Protestant Christian who believes in baptism by immersion for those who believe. Members of this church were both 'slave-owners' and abolitionists. Many Baptist missionaries went to the Caribbean to convert enslaved people to Christianity.

Catholic: A member of the Roman Catholic Church, who acknowledges the Pope in Rome as the head of the Christian church.

Congregationalist: Evangelical Protestants who believe that individual churches should run their own affairs.

Dissenter: A Protestant who has separated himself or herself from the Church of England or Church of Scotland.

Evangelical: A kind of Protestant Christian who focuses on the importance of 'the Gospel' and gaining salvation through Christ rather than doing good things or taking the sacraments. It was a movement that grew in influence during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain and North America.

Islam: A faith that teaches the belief in one God (Allah) and that Muhammad is his prophet.

Myalism: A movement whose followers attempted to harness benevolent (kind) forces against malevolent (unkind) forces. It was both a religious and secular movement as it was concerned with both the spiritual and political realms.

Obeah: In its generic sense it encapsulates a range of supernatural beliefs that were held among the enslaved (and later their descendants), including Myalism, in which attempts were made to harness supernatural forces to bring good luck, seek revenge, or protect against harm. It also concerned healing and health.

Orthodox Christianity: Christianity has been practiced in Ethiopia for thousands of years. The majority of Christians follow Oriental Orthodoxy, which states that Jesus is God and that he is one being who is divine as well as human.

Non-conformist: A member of a Christian group that is Protestant, but does not belong to the Church of England.

Quakers: Members of The Society of Friends who believe that individuals have a direct relationship with the divine. They are known for their pacifism and charity. Many Quakers were opposed to slavery, but some others were slave-owners.

Sephardic Jews: Jewish people of Spanish or Portuguese descent.

Unitarian: A person who believes that God is one being and rejects the idea of the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Places

Abney Park: A cemetery in Stoke Newington, burial site of many non-conformists and abolitionists.

Africa: A large continent which is home to a variety of people groups, cultures, religions, and ways of living. It has a rich history which stretches back for thousands of years. Over more than five centuries, millions of people from this continent were sold into slavery, along routes which crossed both the Atlantic Ocean and the Saharan Desert.

Antigua: A Leeward Caribbean Island which was settled by successive groups of indigenous peoples. The Islands were settled by the English who brought in enslaved Africans to grow a variety of crops. Eventually sugar became the main crop. Antigua gained its independence in 1981.

The Bahamas: The Commonwealth of the Bahamas is a collection of several islands located in the Atlantic between Cuba and Florida. The Bahamas was home to the Lucayan people before the arrival of Europeans. In the seventeenth century, the islands were settled by English Puritans who had been expelled from the English colony of Bermuda. Enslaved Africans worked as fishermen, domestics, and labourers on cotton and food farms.

Belize: A former British colony in Central America which was known as British Honduras until 1973, and became independent in 1981. A great Mayan civilization existed in the area for centuries before European colonisation. Enslaved people were brought to the region to mainly work as loggers.

Bevis Marks: A synagogue in Aldgate which is the oldest synagogue in London.

British Empire: At the beginning of the seventeenth century the English began establishing trading posts and settlements in North America and the Caribbean. By the mid twentieth century, the empire stretched across the globe.

British Guiana: Located on the northern coast of South America, this country is now called Guyana. It was a British colony from 1814–1966. The British first took over the colony from the Dutch, who had settled there in the early seventeenth century, in 1796 during war with the French. The indigenous people are the Lucayan. Most enslaved Africans worked on sugar plantations.

City of London: The financial heart of London and of the United Kingdom. All major banks were based in the City and had strong links to the slave economy and the colonies. Many of these banks still trade from the City today.

Haiti: This Caribbean country was created when enslaved people living in the French colony of Saint-Domingue fought against the French colonists in the late eighteenth century, in what was known as the Haitian Revolution. They formed their own government – the first ‘Black Republic.’ Before the Revolution, Saint Domingue helped to enrich French due to the large amount of sugar being produced there by enslaved labourers. The country, which had also been colonised by Britain and Spain, shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic.

Jamaica: A Caribbean country which has been independent since 1966. The island became a British colony in 1655, before that it was a Spanish colony called Santiago. When Christopher Columbus arrived in 1494 he found hundreds of villages inhabited by the indigenous Taino people. Under the British, enslaved workers were mostly employed on large sugar plantation and pens, which were farms where animals were raised.

Kingston: The present day capital of Jamaica which is located on the south-eastern coast of the island. It is Jamaica’s largest city.

New College, Hackney: A dissenting academy which was founded in the late eighteenth century. It emphasised tolerance, with Anglicans, Catholics and dissenters studying together.

North Carolina: This state is found on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Several groups of indigenous people lived in the area for thousands of years before the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century. The Spanish attempts to settle the area failed, as did the first attempts made by the English. In the mid-seventeenth century colonist from Virginia moved into and settled the area. Common crops grown by enslaved people included corn, cotton and tobacco. Rice was also grown in certain regions of the state.

St. Leonard's Church, Shoreditch: The Anglican Church in Shoreditch. The present building was built in 1740 and is one of the oldest structures in Shoreditch.

Saint Vincent: A Caribbean island that is part of the country Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which is located in the Windward Islands. The indigenous people, the Kalina / Carina, kept Europeans from settling on the island until 1719. The first Europeans to settle were the French, who fought over the island with the British who officially took it over in 1783. Enslaved people in St Vincent were mostly employed in growing and processing sugar cane. The islands became an independent nation in 1979.

St Kitts and Nevis: An island nation made up of two distinct islands, which are located in the Leeward Islands. The Kalinago lived on the islands for centuries before European colonisation. The first European settlers in St Kitts, also known as Saint Christopher, were the French. They were followed by the English, and the island was for a time divided between the two powers. Enslaved people mainly worked on sugar plantations. The islands became an independent nation in 1983.

Spanish Town: A town in Jamaica. During the British Empire it was the capital of Jamaica.

Virginia: Located on the south eastern coast of the United States, this state was the where the first English colony was located. It was settled continuously by Europeans from 1607, though an earlier settlement had been attempted. There were many groups of indigenous people living in the region who together were known as the Powhatan. Many enslaved people in this state worked on tobacco plantations.

West Africa: A region in North-Western Africa which borders the Atlantic Ocean. It was from here that many African were shipped across the Atlantic.

Organisations

Anti-Slavery International: A non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in the United Kingdom which works to end slavery throughout the world. It was established as the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1839. It was preceded by the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions (SMEG) which was established in 1823 and disbanded in 1838 when apprenticeship, and thus formal slavery, ended in the British Caribbean, the Cape Colony, and Mauritius.

Baptist Missionary Society (BMS): This organisation formed in 1792, which is now also known as BMS World Mission, with the purpose of preaching about Jesus.

Jamaican Assembly: The House of Assembly was the colonial legislature, or lower house, of the Jamaican Parliament.

Royal African Company Court of Assistants: The governing body of the Royal Africa Company (RAC). The RAC was granted a Royal Charter by King Charles II in 1672 that stated that the Company 'had the whole, entire and only trade for buying and selling bartering and exchanging of for or with any Negroes, slaves, goods, wares, merchandise whatsoever'. Between 1672 and 1689 the RAC transported around 90,000–100,000 enslaved Africans to the Americas.

Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade: An organization formed in 1787 by people in Britain who were campaigning to bring the transatlantic slave trade to an end.

Society of West India Planters and Merchants: An organisation formed in 1780 by people in Britain which brought together Caribbean planters, absentee owners, and merchants with an interest in continuing to make a profit from the system of slavery.