

The history of slavery

A Today we find it difficult to imagine that two or three hundred years ago people in Europe and America bought, sold and 'owned' other human beings as slaves. They saw nothing wrong in it. The 'owners' knew that the men, women and children that they bought and sold had often been transported thousands of miles from their homes. They made them work hard and obey their rules and gave them only food and basic clothing. Many people in those days thought that this was a normal and proper way of earning money – some thought that black people were not fully human. How else, traders and slave-owners said, could the owners of plantations find workers for the hot, damp, unhealthy regions of the Caribbean and the American colonies? If they wanted to get money from the plantations, then they had to find people to work there. The owners of these plantations were often rich merchants who lived in Britain.

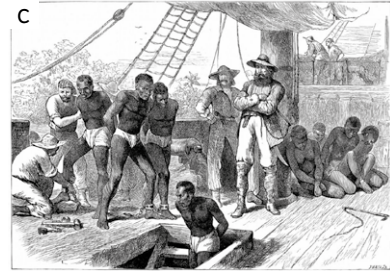
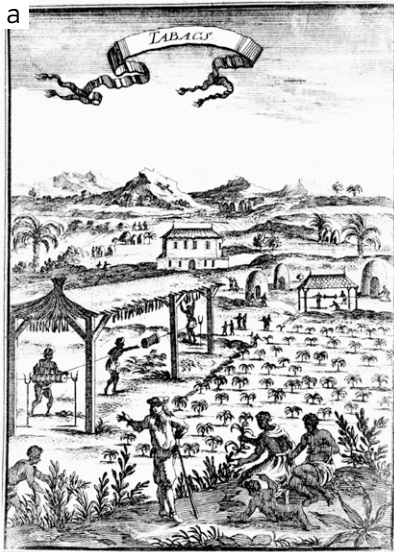
B In the 17th and 18th centuries merchants in the great trading cities like London, Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool discovered that the 'triangular trade' could bring them in a lot of money. Ships left Britain loaded with manufactured goods like cloth, nails, pots and pans – and guns. These were traded on the west coast of Africa for men, women and children. Frightened, chained together, not knowing what was going to happen to them, the Africans were packed into the holds of the ships. They were treated like any other goods, as if they had no need of food, fresh air or space to move in. Many of them died during this 'Middle Passage' across the Atlantic. When the ships arrived, the slaves were sold. It is hard for us today to imagine what these people must have gone through. The ships completed the triangle, crossing back over the Atlantic to Britain with the sugar, rum, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and cotton from the plantations.

C Slavery was not a new thing. Thousands of years before, the Greeks and Romans had slaves, so did the Vikings, who often raided Britain for slaves in the 9th and 10th centuries. In the 13th century Bristol merchants sent children as slaves to Ireland. Cervantes, the Spanish author of *Don Quixote*, spent five years from 1575 to 1580 as a slave in Algiers. In the 16th and 17th centuries pirates from North Africa raided the coast of south-west Britain for slaves to row their galleys. Slaves were shipped from Africa to Portuguese territories along with gold and ivory. From 1503 onwards the Spanish and Portuguese transported African slaves to Central America and the Caribbean to work in the mines and on the land. Soon the Dutch joined in, transporting African slaves to the new American colonies. By the 18th century the triangular trade, Europe – Africa – America, had developed into a systematic form of slavery on a huge scale. From the port of Bristol alone, in a period of about 110 years, over 2,000 ships sailed to transport nearly half a million Africans to the Americas. Ships from Liverpool carried even more, London nearly as many.

D After many years of protest and hard work in Europe and rebellions of slaves in the colonies the trade in human beings was stopped, at least for British ships, by Parliament. The 'Abolition of the Slave Trade Act' was passed in 1807. But slavery was not abolished in all British-owned territories until 1833. In the United States, which was still a young country, the slave trade was abolished in 1808, but the slaves who were already there had to wait another two generations before they were freed in 1865. During this time the Americans fought a Civil War, North against South. One of the main questions was about slaves: Did not every man, slave or citizen, have the right to be free? Many ex-slaves who had been given an education wrote about their experiences at this time.

1 Before you read

Look at the four pictures and say who they show and what is happening.



Read the text and mark a sentence which goes with each picture.

2 A closer look

In your group look more closely at one part of the text: A, B, C or D and choose a title for it. Make a mind map for your title.

3 More information

Use your mind map to make something based on your part of the text. You may want to add other information from books or the Internet.

A: Make an anti-slavery poster. B: Make a sketch map of the 'triangular trade'. C: Make a sketch map of the world about slavery throughout history. D: Make a timeline about the end of slavery.

Present what you have made to the class.

4 A discussion about slavery

If people in Britain had seen the slave ships or the plantations, they would have stopped slavery.



What does your group think? Collect ideas and tell the class about them.

5 Saying sorry for history

Talk about this question in class:

In the last few years some black people have asked the people of cities like Bristol and Liverpool to say sorry for the slave trade.

What do you think of this idea? How could they best do it?