



From Chains to Freedom

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS: THE EUROPEAN TRADE IN AFRICAN CAPTIVES

By Dr. Afua Cooper

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The trade in Black Africans by Europeans began in 1444 and ended in 1888. It started with Portugal and ended with Brazil. During these centuries, however, it was Britain that emerged as the greatest slave-trading power and gained world supremacy as a result.

By conservative estimates,¹ Africa lost upward of 25 million of its people in the slave trade. This figure accounts only for those who made it alive to the New World. Further millions died on the march to the West African coast, in the forts built there to house the captives until they boarded the ships, and during the long voyage to the Americas. This African holocaust has not been fully acknowledged by European and other Western powers, including Canada.

Britain's foray into the slave trade began under the auspices of Queen Elizabeth I. Incensed that Portugal and Spain had grown fabulously rich on the slave trade and their

colonial enterprises, England decided to follow suit. John Hawkins, who became known as Queen Elizabeth's slave trader, sailed to Sierra Leone in the years 1562 to 1569.

Hawkins terrorized local communities and took 1,200 Africans into slavery. In 1564, he wrote of his slaving voyages: "I assaulted the town, both by land and sea, and very hardly with fire (their houses being covered with dry palm leaves) obtaining the town, put the inhabitants to flight, where we took two hundred and fifty persons, men, women, and children."

One of the ships Hawkins used was named *Jesus of Lubeck*, loaned to him by his Queen. He sailed to Hispaniola where he sold his slave captives to Spanish colonists and returned to England laden with ivory, hides, and sugar which he sold for a large profit. Elizabeth, seeing the fortune to be made from the slave trade, invested in Hawkins', and other slave-trading ventures.

The trade evolved and grew. Between 1672 and 1698, King Charles II and his brother James, the Duke of York, granted a charter to the Royal African Company (RAC) giving it a monopoly on the African slave trade. It became the primary means by which captives from Africa were enslaved. In time, agitation from important merchants who wanted a piece of the African action forced the RAC to relinquish its monopoly and open up the enterprise to merchants and companies of all stripes.

The trade in African human beings had now become the principal means by which Europeans enriched themselves. The Netherlands, France and Scandinavia entered the trade. By 1712, however, after the War of Spanish Succession, Britain emerged as the principal slave-trading power. By the time Britain abolished the slave trade in the early part of the 19th century,

its ships had taken more than three million Africans into misery in New world slavery.

The *raison d'être* of the slave trade was the appropriation and colonization of territories in the New World by European countries. Beginning with the so-called Columbian discoveries of the New World territories, Spain, followed by a host of other western European powers, subjugated the aboriginal populations of these lands and reduced many of them to slavery. Many native groups were exterminated when they would not submit.

After the demise of various Native Peoples in different parts of the Americas, labour was needed to develop the lands. African slaves became the dominant form of labour in the New World for four centuries with the result that Africa would be robbed of its most able-bodied people. Thus the genocidal treatment visited upon the native populations of the Americas was also meted out to Africans.

African slave captives were transported from the West African coast to the New World colonies in the bottom of ships. Men were shackled at the ankles and wrists and forced to lie in a space three feet high by three feet wide by three feet long. Captain John Newton, author of the song *Amazing Grace*, observed that African captives on board the ship were packed together like books on a shelf. In this position, men had to answer to call of nature. Women and children were generally left unchained on the deck but women were often the victims of sexual attacks by sailors.

Here is a description of this voyage (known as the "Middle Passage") on one of John Hawkin's slave ships: "In the cargo there were over seven hundred men, women, boys and young girls. Not even a waist cloth can be permitted among slaves aboard ship, since clothing even so light would breed disease. To ward off death, I ordered that at daylight the Negroes should be taken in squads of twenty and given a salt-

bath by the hose pipe ... And when they were carried below, trained slaves received them one by one, and laying each creature on his side, packed the next against him, and so on, till, like so many spoons packed away, they fitted onto one another, a living mass."

Captives were starved, beaten, raped and terrorized; many died of the various diseases that plagued slave ships; some committed suicide; and many died of broken hearts. The Middle Passage was an experience of sorrow, despair, and death.

Upon arrival in the colonies, the half-dead captives were sold to slaveholders who completed the process of making them into slaves on plantations and farms. The wealth of the West Indies and mainland North America, which Britain controlled, lay not in minerals but in the production of staples. Enslaved Africans cultivated sugar, coffee, cocoa, indigo, cotton (Jamaica, the Leewards, and Barbados); rice, indigo, cotton, tobacco (mainland United States); and fish, timber, and fur (Canada). Sugar, which produced the most wealth for its investors, would become 'king' and ensure British dominance in the Atlantic trade.

Plantations, farms and businesses were established solely for the production of these staples and became an integral part of the 'Triangular trade.' Focused on three geographical points of commerce, this was transatlantic trade par excellence. It operated as follows: plantation staple crops (sugar, molasses, rum, tobacco, etc.) left the colonies in British ships. Upon arrival in Britain (and other points in Europe), the produce would be unloaded and manufactured goods would be taken on. The ships would then sail to the West African coast where the goods were traded for human beings. Next they would sail to the West Indies and other points in the New World to sell their human cargo to plantation owners and others. The ships once again would be

loaded with plantation staples and the process repeated once more.

Britain grew immensely wealthy as a result of the slave trade. The 18th century writer, Malachy Postlethwayt rightly claimed that, “the African slave trade ‘was the great pillar and support’ of the British trade with America” and that the British Empire and “was a magnificent superstructure of American commerce and [British] naval power on an African foundation.”

For well over two centuries, British economic prosperity and its commercial supremacy rested on the slave trade and on slavery itself. Britain owed its military and naval strength to its successes in the slave trade. Its first financial institutions, such as Barclays Bank, were established because of the wealth gained from the slave trade. Insurance companies were founded in order to insure slave ships and their human cargo.

Every important British family, including the royal family, accrued part of its riches from the slave trade. Cities such as London, Bristol, and Plymouth emerged as important centres because of the trade in African human beings. By 1730, Liverpool emerged as the preeminent slaving port. As one commentator noted, “The city’s era of prosperity rested on the profits of the transatlantic slave trade.” Another commentator noted that it was “the exploitation of African labour that led to the expansion of industry across Britain, the United States, and the world.”

Historian Eric Williams’ definitive text, *Capitalism and Slavery*, details these facts. Because of the wealth accrued from this nefarious traffic, Britain was able to spread its wings and conquer the rest of the world commercially and militarily. The conquest of Canada by Britain in 1760 can directly be attributed to the slave trade which had enabled Britain to establish the strongest navy and army

in the world. It was the strength of these two institutions that enabled the British to defeat the French in Canada.

On March 25, 1807, Britain made its slave trading business illegal. The decision to end the loathsome trade was a result of agitation from antislavery forces in Britain, and from the enslaved Africans themselves who were mainly located in the West Indies. For example, Haitians by launching the world’s most important Revolution signaled to slave-trading nations that the enslaved would resist and rebel against the horror that was slavery.

The *Kitty Amelia* was the last slave ship to leave Liverpool in 1807. It sailed to the Gold Coast, took on a cargo on slave captives and sailed to the West Indies where it deposited its human cargo to slavery’s misery. Though Britain had legally ended the slave trade, and the United States would follow a year later, slavery itself would continue in the New World until 1888.

The slave trade and slavery was an international and ancestral crime and no one has yet been punished for this horror visited upon Africa and her children. Europe reaped the most reward. Because of the wealth accrued from the slave trade, Europe entered the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ and became modern but, as Princeton scholar Cornell West notes, slavery was the night side of the Enlightenment. Europe’s progress and modernity was predicated on Africa’s misery.

Today, we still feel the effects of the slave trade and slavery. Among other things, slavery was a racist system predicated upon Black inferiority and White supremacy. Those who profited from this system justified it by arguing that Blacks deserved enslavement because they were inferior people. Thus a racist ideology was articulated and today we still feel the impact of such thinking. Institutional racist practices, the colour line, colonialism, duplicity of

Western governments, economic disadvantage, racialization of Black peoples, and psychic distance between Black and Whites have all been identified as legacies of the slave trade and slavery.

Yet Africansthemselveshavebuiltcommunities of resistance and today are calling for reparations. Stephen Small notes that, "During the 1990s black people began demanding reparations from the nations of the West for the atrocities, injustice and exploitation perpetrated against Africa and Africans during slavery and colonialism. ... The Reparations movement believes that its case is morally right, economically sound, politically inevitable, and legally inescapable."

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Information on John Hawkins and his slaving voyages ("the Praying Pirate") is available at www.cowart.info.

Endnotes

1 In July 2000, at a conference in Nairobi, Kenya, launching an International Citizens Campaign and Petition for Compensation for Africans and at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in a paper titled "A Global Demand for Apology and Reparation," James Dennis Akumu, Executive Director of Pan-African Research and Consulting Associates cites the United Nations Demographic Year Book to the effect that between the 15th and 19th century, Africa lost nearly 400 million of its people, many of them the "most virile and productive sons" (quoting Dr. Walter Rodney), the cream of many populations.

Ecumenical caucus statement at the UN World Conference Against Racism (2001)

The following excerpts are taken from the text delivered to the media by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

As a faith community we pledge to struggle against racism and all its manifestations in the hope that God's people fulfill today the Gospel mandate that we "may all be one" (John 17:21). ...

We commit ourselves to put the following priorities before the World Conference Against Racism as well as to our churches and related ecumenical bodies and institutions:

... For our churches and governments to acknowledge that they have benefited from the exploitation of Africans and African descendants and Asians and Asian descendants, and Indigenous Peoples through slavery and colonialism. We further call upon our churches to address the issue of reparations as a way of redressing the wrongs done, and to be clear that the trans-Saharan and transoceanic-Atlantic, Pacific and Indian-slave trade and all forms of slavery constitute crimes against humanity. ...

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS, REPAIRING DAMAGE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Rosemary Sadlier

Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, President of the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS), has made the life, history, culture and legacy of the African-Canadian community an integral part of mainstream Canada. Her latest book, The Kids Book of Black Canadian History, has received international awards. She has been honoured, among others, by the Association for the Study of African Life and History and the International Black Women and is the recipient of numerous awards.

Africans have been in Canada since the 1500s but it was not until the early 1600s that the first *named* African arrived. Multilingual Mathieu Da Costa was a free African man who acted as a translator for the French explorer Samuel de Champlain with the Aboriginal peoples on Canada's east coast.

However the largest early group of Africans to enter Canada did so as enslaved people—involuntarily forfeiting much of their history, heritage, culture and power. The first recorded slave purchased in Canada was a child of eight years of age, Olivier Le Jeune. He arrived in 1628.

By the mid-1700s, French ownership of enslaved Africans increased. When the British took control of Canada, they did nothing to end slavery. More Blacks arrived, following the American War of Independence, some as the slaves of Loyalists, others promised land and freedom for their role in defending the British Crown. African people continued to come into Canada, primarily through the United States or via the Caribbean, from 1793 until the end of the American Civil War in the 1860s.

That Canada was a haven for escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad obscures the agency that African peoples had in making

themselves free and suggests that there was national support for them. However, their treatment and the stereotypes connected to slavery encouraged discrimination against them, perpetuated negative stereotypes and held them responsible for many of Canada's problems.

Those who followed after the World Wars, via the Domestic Servants scheme, and various changes to Canadian immigration laws were similarly regarded. The record of Black presence in Canada has been diminished, overlooked and sanitized. It is as if Black people in Canada were invisible and their contributions unimportant.

Since the 1970s, however, publication of accessible and progressive historical materials is making better known the diverse backgrounds of Canada's population. The Ontario Black History Society (the first Black historical organization in Canada) has taken on the challenge of historical repair, bringing some of the contributions and achievements of the African population to a broader audience.

The Ontario Black History Society (OBHS) has collected oral histories, created posters and exhibits, preserved photographs and texts, and provided presentations to schools. OBHS has worked to commemorate Black heritage by initiating a process that resulted in the national declaration of February as Black History Month—a reflective time that it had nurtured and supported since 1979. It has also joined the international effort to name August 1 as Emancipation Day.

The possibility for broad community appreciation of the contributions and achievements of African Canadians is a relatively new phenomenon despite the 400-year experience of this group in Canada. Why is it that Black people—peoples of African origin who have contributed to the development of

Canada—have not been included in the national script? Were they not founding peoples as were the French and the British? Why is it that African-Canadians are portrayed as exotic newcomers or as crime mongers? Why is our presence marginalized?

According to the 1996 census, there are approximately 662,280 Canadians of African descent, the third largest racial group in Canada after the Asian and Southeast Asian communities. However African-Canadians are unique due to their colour and their historical connection to the experience and legacy of slavery. The impact of racism on Blacks is distinctive, affecting immigration, education, employment, the justice system and Canadian mass media and culture.

The notion that Canada is a racist country is not widely accepted. Canada does not have significant incidences of lynchings, race riots, or mass destruction of communities. It does, however, have ongoing episodes of violent racial discrimination which has resulted in the deaths of Black people. The continuous nature of the discrimination, combined with their marginalized experience educationally, economically and culturally, creates a distinct experience for African-Canadians.

Further, the definition of “racist” is not only a measure of the frequency, intensity and duration of racist acts, nor is it connected only to acts of violence. Rather, it is a definition that is related to race-based differential treatment involving notions of superiority and inferiority of one race over others, enforced by power. That being the case, Canada is a racist country according to the UN definition, and the work of countless researchers.

This is not to say that there are not people of conscience of many racial backgrounds. That is not to say that racism is solely evidenced by name-calling or other interpersonal issues. This is not to say that the Black Canadian

community is without success stories—among the educated, sports and entertainment figures, politicians, lawyers, teachers, social workers, artists, or affluent individuals. But on balance in terms of other ‘racial’ groups, the Black community does not fare as well as others. Why is that? What role does our past experience of enslavement, colonialism and the ongoing incidences of racist acts have on the African-Canadian community?

We can now view both slavery and colonialism as being morally wrong. Yet at the time they were justified by notions of (white) racial/cultural superiority. Slavery and colonialism created deep scars in the bodies and minds of African peoples. The injuries to the African population continued in various means through the social structures that were created at the time and perpetuated.

These structures need to be examined as we consider how to achieve social justice. How can a country that wishes to have a credible role on the world stage do so with much unfinished business in relation to Indigenous land rights, for example, or the descendants of enslaved Africans? How can aid or trade matters be honestly broached with African nations when the situation of Africans within the country are in need of repair?

How can the Canadian government apologize for the “grave injustice” and provide subsequent reparation to the descendants of the Japanese, the Chinese and others, yet not include apologies to African-Canadians? “We offer a full apology to Chinese Canadians for the head tax and express our deepest sorrow for the subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants.” (Prime Minister Steven Harper, June 22, 2006)

What ‘counts’ as a grave injustice: the loss of one’s Canadian home during wartime? The past payment of a racially specific tax to enter Canada? Enslavement because one is

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dark-skinned and the loss of one's land, ways of knowing, marital/family relationships, language, spirituality—all part of the Black experience? A damaging legacy is a damaging legacy and a tangible act is needed to repair it. When we sin as a nation, our national leaders have a responsibility to address it. When a crime has been committed, justice is required to right a wrong.

In September 2006, the Southern Christian Leadership Convention announced that it was in support of national class action lawsuits aimed at obtaining reparations for African-Americans. This is the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in Britain. This is an opportune time to give purposeful thought and action to those levels of repair that can build our community.



credit: Bushra Junaid

PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE AT ANY COST: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN RACISM

By Hazel Campayne

Dr. Hazel Campayne is a member of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network representing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. She is also Chair of the Justice and Peace Committee at the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada and worships at Our Lady of Lourdes in Toronto.

Originally from Guyana of African heritage, she is an educator by profession. Hazel attended the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa in 2001 as a delegate of the Canadian churches.

The Declaration by the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in 2001 condemned slavery and the slave trade as a “crime against humanity,” being “among the major sources ... of racism, racial discrimination” (Article 13). “At the outset of the third millennium,” it stated, “a global fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and all their abhorrent forms and manifestations is a matter of priority for the international community” (Art 2). This challenge is addressed as well to the Churches and church related organizations.

In a well-researched book, *The Ideology of Racism* (used in this article as a primary source of information), Samuel Kenneth Yeboah traces the history and development of Western racism, the ideology which underpins it, and the ways in which modern day racism is rooted in the slave trade and slavery.

The institution of slavery, the pattern of dominance and subordination between ruling and ruled groups, Yeboah contends, has been in existence from time immemorial – in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, for example. It existed long before the advent of capitalism as an economic system, according

to historians – but it was different. It tended to be confined to certain categories of persons. Racial differentiation was neither central nor even necessary. Slaves might be captives in war, criminals sentenced to be sold into slavery, or persons sold to recover debts. Though not an enviable state to be in, that condition was often economically better than that of many free people. In some cases, owning a slave could be a sign of social prestige, but there was no large-scale use for slaves. Enslavement in this context might have been brutal did not systematically dehumanize its victims.

The sale and purchase of slaves were as widespread in Africa as in other parts of the world. Practices elsewhere were not dissimilar to those in Africa, including West Africa. Ex-slave and campaigner for abolition, Ottobah Cugoamo, in his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* acknowledged that he had been kidnapped and betrayed by his own African people. Yet, “So far as I can remember, some of the Africans in my country kept slaves, which they take in war, or for debt. But those which they keep are well, and good care taken of them, and treated then well.” (Yeboah, p.35)

The economic system of these times was mercantile capitalism based on the trade among equals. The transition to the capitalist system resulting from European expansionism created a massive need for labour. Gordon Lewis in his *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought* noted that for the Caribbean settler and planter their major problem was a labour shortage. It was essential to have at their immediate disposal “a large, regular, plentiful and obedient supply.” (Lewis, p. 96) It became a question of an escalating demand and an immediately available supply.

The mainly fair-skinned Indigenous peoples in the Americas and the white indentured

servant labourers proved to be unsatisfactory solutions. The enslaved Indigenous peoples seemed physically weak for the labour required. Furthermore, on account of brutal, inhuman treatment, they were more prone to the new diseases that had been introduced. As a consequence, they were dying out. Indentured servants had become too expensive. The supply had constantly to be replenished since many migrated to the New England colonies at the end of their indenture.

How to stimulate a more abundant and constant supply? The African continent, opened up earlier by the Portuguese, seemed to provide the answer. It had an apparently unlimited supply of hardy people who could be obtained more cheaply. The impetus for the trade in human flesh which would develop did not originally have a race bias. It was not based on a preference for black labour, for black flesh. It could be said that in the beginning it was, in many ways, colour blind.

The determining factors were the maximization of profits which demanded a ready source of optimum labour. Cheap labour could be obtained through devious ways such as kidnapping, or more aggressively by attacking fishing vessels, or small coastal villages, assaulting communities and capturing people. Later more unscrupulous means were used such as provoking wars between Black kingdoms and tribes, providing them with arms to build powerful armies in exchange for receiving captives from them.

Once purchased, the captives embarked on a journey of utmost physical and psychological agony and brutality. The journey was marked by humiliating body searches, frightful hardship, incredible suffering, suicides and resistance, accompanied by maximum coercion, because the Africans were not prepared to consent passively to being transported. This resulted in the brutal killings of resisters, the sick, the

weak, the crying babies.

Chained, collared, joined together with heavy poles, separated from kith and kin, they marched for long distances, sometimes as long as 200 miles, with very little sustenance, often in brutal weather, to slave houses on the coast – called “castles” because there were some rooms providing adequate accommodation for slavers.

There the captives experienced even more degrading humiliation to determine their “commercial acceptability”. In unsanitary dungeons with high, vaulted rooms and very little air and light, they waited for weeks, even months, for their embarkation on the boats which would transport them to unknown lands. Prior to their shipment, branded like sheep and cattle with their owners brand, the process of their dehumanization and commodification had begun.

All this earlier suffering “pales into insignificance to the utter hell” of the journey on the Middle Passage across the Atlantic where captains tried to carry the optimum number, filling every available space on the ships. Graphic were the stories by European travelers and slave traders, some of whom published what they saw. The descriptions of ships’ surgeons and sailors detailed the awful conditions, the “abhorrent barbarism”, the physical agony, the unending unsanitary misery, and the psychological trauma which led many to take every means to end “the nightmare of the unspeakable and psychological hell” they were in by committing suicide in the waters of the ocean or throwing their children overboard to save them from slavery in the strange lands to which they were being transported.

This transatlantic trade, this most ignominious epoch in the entire history of humankind, “is an eloquent testimony of man at his most bestial. The evidence is overwhelming – never in the history of human cruelty have so

many suffered so much savagery from so few for so long." (Yeboah, p.43) This was but the beginning of further suffering, further savagery in their enslavement on the plantations to which they would be taken.

The critical, challenging, obviously deeper questioning surfaced: "How could human beings so deliberately and callously inflict so much suffering on other human beings? Was the European so bestial by nature, so vicious by temperament, so sadistic by character, so bereft of every modicum of morality by culture, that he could inflict such physical and psychological pain without the slightest sign of remorse?" (Yeboah, p. 43)

A rational justification had to be found, an ideology developed, for those who still considered themselves human yet with the capacity to inflict such savage and barbarous acts of inhumanity on innocent human beings. Thinking along those lines had begun to be current and shared by most countries involved in expansionism. It was the general sense of Europeans as a superior civilization with a manifest destiny to develop the "New World," which they had "discovered". The enslaver being white, the enslaved black, there now began to emerge the racist component.

The justification was what later became known as "*the doctrine of black inferiority.*" (Yeboah, p. 44) "The black man, it was claimed, was inherently inferior, and could not, therefore be accorded equality of treatment with the white man. The white slave traders could consequently not be bound by the same ethical and moral codes when dealing with black people."

The Black people were was biologically inferior, sub-human. This "doctrine" of black inferiority:

- 1) provided moral justification for the bestial acts, preventing any possible moral outrage, indignation and op-

probrium that might be expressed at home;

- 2) soothed consciences enabling them to reconcile their cultural values with their brutal activities; and

- 3) contributed to the prevention of uprisings of the enslaved and colonized. "By undermining the self-esteem of the black man, by seeking to convince him of the white man's superiority and (almost) divine right to rule, it was hoped the former would legitimize the rule, domination and exploitation of the latter indefinitely." (Yeboah, p. 45)

Thus the ideology of modern day racism was born. As Basil Davidson observed, "Racism was born out of the need to justify the enslavement of blacks, after the enslavement of whites had long become a crime. From the first, in other words, racism became a weapon of exploitation." (Yeboah, p.40)

This doctrine constituted a gross moral affront to all the fundamental principles on which Christianity was founded. As Ronald Segal puts it: "The doctrine of inherent Negro inferiority was developed to excuse conduct which the teachings of Christianity and the twinges of traditional conscience alike disparaged, and a civilization which had barely emerged from the sick bed pronounced itself the only one sound and capable of uplifting humanity." (Yeboah, p. 44)

Thus emerged the implicit correlation of **white superiority and white supremacy.** Henceforth, in the history of the contact of Blacks and Whites, these theories have been the characteristic feature of their relationship. As the well-known Caribbean writer, Dr. Eric Williams, notes in his *Capitalism and Slavery*: "Slavery was not born of racism. Racism was the consequence of slavery" and the end result of an economic revolution. (Lewis, p.96) The

African supply met the demand for labour. The racist component as the main property of the planter's ideology emerged as a consequence.

The justification fused three different dimensions of earlier prejudices amongst peoples, prejudices around social class and religious belief. Concerning the status of the Black persons these were:

- 1) On the level of social class, the Black person was identified with menial labour.
- 2) On the level of religious belief, Blacks were seen as heathen and pagan needing to be saved from the slavery of sin or even beyond the reach of Christian compassion.
- 3) On the level of physiognomy, blackness was identified with evil and even biblical anthropology, "the curse of Ham", was used to support this, distinguishing the children of light and the children of darkness.

Emerging from this development, the European ethno-centric tendency to place all non-European peoples on a colour gradation, with those most approximating white appearance being regarded as more pleasing, continues to this day. These gradations were evident even with regard to the captives. Here is an innocent description made by one who fought against enslavement: "Those who were reasonably white, handsome and elegant, others less white, who seem to be *pardos* (gray and dusky), others as black as (a dark skinned group) – so malformed in their faces and bodies that they appeared to those who looked at them to be the image of another and lower hemisphere."

To make the maximization of the commercial enterprise truly profitable, Yeboah contends: "A new breed of slaves had to be created – a slave dehumanized, depersonalized, deculturized,

debased and deprived of every human right. The black people were stripped of their humanity, made 'commodities' of items of trade, personal properties to be used and disposed of as the owner chose." He believes it is crucial, "to take a closer look at the brutality and savagery of the slave trade and slavery itself because an adequate understanding of contemporary racism depends on the appreciation of the nature of the Atlantic slave system." (Yeboah, p.37)

The Churches were certainly not innocent in this. Official spokesmen condoned the slave trade but, as Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of the Church of England, acknowledged in his 2006 apology, church people, even bishops, owned and branded slaves. Eric Williams has documented the widespread involvement of the churches, categorically stating that churches supported the slave trade.

The churches supported not only the slave trade, but also the entire system contributing to the process of enslavement. The falsehood of the basic assumption of this ideology was unimportant as long as profits continued to flow to Britain and Europe and the consciences of the slavers and the commercial interests were appeased.

The West Indian Islands became the hub of the British Empire in terms of the prosperity of England based on the plantation system. A look at missionary documents and hymns in the Caribbean reveals the kind of support provided for the concepts of domination, subordination, and that sense of what Rudyard Kipling describes as "the white man's burden." Planters were assured by Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London in the mid-1700s, that "Christianity and the embracing of the gospel does not make the least difference in civil property" – including slaves. (Yeboah, p.45)

One writer notes: "Even in the most

favourable conditions, Black slavery in the New World was a deliberate system of cultural and psychological genocide. Every connection with the past was to be obliterated and the slaves were to be so thoroughly dehumanized and brainwashed that they would forget that he or she had been *anything other than Nigger John or Nigger Mandy created by God, as the early slave catechisms taught, 'to make a crop'*". (Erskine, p.20)

The religious argument that God made Black people slaves in order to "make a crop" was one method of justifying a system which robbed them of their identity and freedom to become more fully human. (Erskine, p.20) Support for the notions of superiority, domination, and contempt for the dignity of the Africans and also the brainwashing process is found in this statement by Count Zinzendorf, the Moravian leader who counseled the slaves in St. Thomas in 1739: "God punished the first negroes by making them slaves, and your conversion will make you free, not from the control of your masters, but simply from your wicked habits and thoughts, and all that makes you dissatisfied with your lot." (Hamid, p.63)

The initial formulation of the doctrine of black inferiority was based on anecdotal publications of slave traders and European travelers. Few Europeans had actual contact with Africans. However, soon pseudo-scientific theories began to emerge, and scientific racists began to provide "scientific evidence" enshrining the doctrine in "science" and making science the authoritative voice.

As Yeboah states: "These theories were to have a profound influence on the formation of social attitudes in Africa, America, Britain and elsewhere. In future the Blackman was to be stereotyped and categorized into a pigeonhole of 'inferiority' not on the basis of the individual's personality, intellectual capability, or inherent talent, but on the basis of membership of a class

defined by an immutable natural characteristic of skin colour." (Yeboah, p.69)

Even some of the white abolitionists shared the ideas of their time with regard to Blacks as "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Many saw the Africans fighting for abolition in paternalistic terms. This was reflected in the designs on emblems used in the Abolition Campaign: "Am I Not A Man And A Brother"; "Am I Not A Woman And A Sister". For the many abolitionists, these men and women were but younger brothers and sisters, kneeling and rebellious.

These excerpts from Articles in the United Nations Declaration, which in article 13 acknowledges the abhorrent barbarism... the magnitude... the organized nature and especially the negation of the essence of its victims, provide us with actions that we as Church could undertake:

We recognize that all human beings are born free, equal in dignity and rights and have the potential to contribute constructively to the development and well-being of their societies. Any doctrine of racial superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and must be rejected along with theories which attempt determine the existence of separate human races. Article 7

The dissemination of all ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred shall be declared an offence punishable by law with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 86

Obligation (is placed) upon States to be vigilant and to proceed against organizations that disseminate ideas based on racial superiority. ... These organizations shall be condemned and discouraged. Article 87

Religion, spirituality and belief may and can contribute to the promotion of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person and to the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Article 8

The call and challenge to the churches today is to examine all notions of racial inferiority, any sense of superiority among members and in our relationships with the wider community. Our call and challenge is to face the truth of attitudes and behaviors in our systems and institutions that reflect the deeply entrenched sin of racism and which hinder us from being reconciled in Christ. Beyond the UN Declaration, we have our fundamental belief system that all human beings are children of God made in God's image. Let us celebrate our common humanity and honour the image of God in all humankind as God intended for creation and work to transform our relationships.

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The United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

Sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance:

13. We acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims, and further acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences.

29. We strongly condemn the fact that slavery and slavery-like practices still exist today in parts of the world and urge States to take immediate measures as a matter of priority to end such practices, which constitute flagrant violations of human rights.

ABOLISHING THE BRITISH SLAVE TRADE: A SHORT SUMMARY

By Robert Moore

Guyanese by birth and up-bringing, Canadian by adoption, for the past 50 years Robert Moore has been a high school teacher, an adult educator, an academic historian, a radio broadcaster, an ambassador, and a Canadian civil servant. A graduate of the Universities of the West Indies, Cambridge and Sussex, he now writes for the series "Audacious Anglicans" published in Anglican Episcopal World. A member of the Anglican Primate's Theological Commission, he also gives public lectures as well as essaying his memoirs.

The abolition of the British slave trade constitutes one of the great sea-changes (no pun intended) in modern British history. During the first half of the of the 18th century, the slave trade was regarded by the majority of Britons as a fact of life, virtually a law of nature. Those who opposed that trade were judged to be against, not only their country's prosperity, but its very being.

Yet by the first decade of the 19th century—1807 to be exact—the slave trade had been abolished. This constituted a profound revolution in perception and attitude. Central to that revolution were people of faith led by Anglicans and Quakers and supported by Methodists and other Protestant churches.

From the late 1780s, the campaign to end the slave trade was led by two figures: William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson. Both were men of robust hope, capable of facing and absorbing many disappointments, unswerving in their commitment even at the worst of times. Those qualities were fostered by the Evangelical Revival which restored passion, fervent piety, and hefty determination to the life of the Church of England.

As Evangelicals, Wilberforce and Clarkson regarded the slave trade as abominable.

Believing it to be contrary to the will of God, they felt obliged to set about ending it. They worked in tandem—Wilberforce in Parliament where laws were made and changed, and Clarkson in the country at large where public opinion could be harnessed to the cause. The partnership between these two men remains one of the most remarkable in modern history.

The odds against them were formidable. Both Houses of Parliament were composed of property owners. A sizeable number of them owned, in whole or in part, plantations in the West Indies. The West India lobby was the most powerful of its kind in Britain. To oppose its interests was to butt heads against a granite wall.

In 1787 Clarkson went on horseback to visit Bristol and Liverpool, slaving ports both. His aim was to collect evidence proving that the slave trade functioned on callous inhumanity to the captured Africans and cold brutality to the sailors. He was helped by Quakers, long opponents of slavery and all that went with it. Together they created a society for the abolition of the slave trade. It grew rapidly and functioned efficiently, as befitted a Quaker-run organization, with enviable publicity and brilliant marketing strategies, backed by Quaker money. It had its own printing presses and its own publications.

The journey by the slave ships had three stages to it: in Europe ships were packed with goods to bring to Africa to be exchanged for slaves who were shipped to the Americas (this stage was commonly called the Middle Passage because it was the middle leg of this three-part journey). In the Caribbean or the Americas, the slaves were exchanged for sugar, tobacco and other products that in turn were shipped back to Europe.

Africans who survived the Middle Passage and somehow got to Britain witnessed to the

miseries they had endured. Here was what we now call “civil society” in action, with a daring agenda and local committees dotted all over the country. Josiah Wedgwood’s engraving of a shackled slave on his knees asking “Am I not a man and a brother?” appeared everywhere, even on teacups—a logo long before its time. Suddenly the slave trade was a hot topic debated in numerous societies and discussed in several newspapers.

In mid-1789, Wilberforce introduced his first Bill to abolish the slave trade. This little hump-backed man rose to a level of oratory that stunned the House of Commons. Stunned, but not convinced, the Members shelved the Bill. A second attempt was made in 1791 and again it was defeated. By then, the French Revolution had reached its bloodiest stage and the ruling class in England retreated into a ferocious conservatism. This worked against all the efforts of the abolitionists.

Wilberforce went on presenting bills nearly every year until 1806 only to have them routinely defeated. The Haitian revolution made the British sugar interests fear that abolishing the slave trade would touch off Haitian-type revolts in the British islands, already showing signs of restlessness. The effect that Haiti had on the supporters of abolition, on the other hand, was to convince them that bringing Africans across the Atlantic would make the British slave-holding territories even more insecure. Their thinking was that the Haitian revolution was made up largely of fresh arrivals from Africa, accustomed to warfare in their homeland.

By 1805, the British navy had cleared the seas of French and Spanish ships whether bearing slaves or not. Yet, as one of Wilberforce’s great supporters, James Stephen, observed, the sugar colonies of France and Spain were flourishing despite their inability to secure fresh slaves from across the Atlantic. He concluded, correctly, that they were being supplied with Africans by

British ships sailing under the American flag.

Wilberforce and company were waiting for a revelation like this to bring before the House of Commons a new bill to abolish the slave trade. This time, even some of the dyed-in-the-wool supporters of the slave trade voted for the bill in order to prevent the French and Spanish sugar trade from out-competing their own. On March 20, 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed.

The abolition of the British slave trade did not mean the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. That had to wait for nearly three decades, but the genie was out of the bottle. The year 1807 ushered in a period of tension and expectation among the slaves that made the continued existence of slavery improbable.

The example of the Haitian revolution did indeed inspire a number of revolts in the British Caribbean in the early 19th century and slavery held its own only precariously and with a great deal of repression. In addition, missionaries, either legally or illegally, had been teaching some of the slaves to read and British newspapers kept arriving in the Caribbean with news of what the abolitionists were doing in England.

After a widespread rebellion in Jamaica at the end of 1831, Members of Parliament decided that they had to anticipate the devil they saw coming by abolishing slavery. However, with a very British compromise, the Act that ended slavery insisted on a period called “apprenticeship” thereby making the slaves both legally free and procedurally bound to give the planters unpaid labour. Nevertheless, the Slavery Abolition Act of August 23, 1833, outlawed slavery in the British Colonies. The apprenticeship system was abolished in 1838 and all slaves in the British Empire were emancipated, with £20 million paid in compensation to plantation owners in the Caribbean.

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Church of England apologizes for slave trade
BBC News February 8, 2006

LONDON: An amendment “recognizing the damage done” to those enslaved was backed overwhelmingly by the General Synod.

“The body of Christ is not just a body that exists at any one time, it exists across history and we therefore share the shame and the sinfulness of our predecessors and part of what we can do, with them and for them in the body of Christ, is prayer for acknowledgement of the failure that is part of us not just of some distant ‘them’.”

During an emotional meeting of the Church’s governing body in London, Rev. Blessant explained the involvement of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in the slave trade.

The organization owned the Codrington Plantation in Barbados, where slaves had the word “society” branded on their backs with a red-hot iron, he said.

He added that when the emancipation of slaves took place in 1833, compensation was paid not to the slaves but to their owners.

In one case, he said the Bishop of Exeter and three colleagues were paid nearly £13,000 in compensation for 665 slaves.

He said: “We were directly responsible for what happened. In the sense of inheriting our history, we can say we owned slaves, we branded slaves, that is why I believe we must actually recognize our history and offer an apology.”

The synod passed a motion acknowledging the “dehumanizing and shameful” consequences of slavery.

PROFILES OF ABOLITIONISTS AND FREEDOM FIGHTERS OF AFRICAN HERITAGE

By Hazel Campayne

Dr. Hazel Campayne is a member of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network representing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. She is also Chair of the Justice and Peace Committee at the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada and worships at Our Lady of Lourdes in Toronto.

Originally from Guyana of African heritage, she is an educator by profession. Hazel attended the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa in 2001 as a delegate of the Canadian churches.

*Note: What follows is edited material from **The Churches Together in Britain Bicentenary 2007 Set All Free Church Resources on Abolitionists and Freedom Fighters** (<http://www.setallfree.net/people.html>). Used with permission.*

The fierce, unrelenting struggle of the thousands and tens of thousands of African slaves, freed slaves, and individuals of African heritage who resisted the slave trade and slavery, who fought for their freedom through revolts and rebellions even at the cost of their lives must not be diminished. These unnamed freedom fighters and their leaders do not get the recognition they so rightly deserve. Yet theirs was the most significant contribution in achieving the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. They deserve due honour paid to them in their fight for justice and liberation. From among the relatively few whose names we do know, we profile four of these freedom fighters: two directly involved in the slave trade struggle and its abolition, and two directly involved in the struggle against slavery for freedom.

Olaudah Equiano, 1745-1797

As an Abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, stands

as tall as William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharpe and any other, in bringing about the March 25, 1807 Act of Parliament. Yet history books do not mention him as an Abolitionist. In his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano tells of his birth in a village in the kingdom of Benin, his kidnapping at the age of 11, along with his sister, his six months of captivity after which he was brought to the West African coast, sold to slave traders and transported to Barbados. He describes his repeated sale and resale, being moved from Virginia to London (where he learned to read and write), then sold again and taken to the island of Montserrat. He was able to purchase his freedom in 1766 for £40—a year's pay in those days. He then returned to London.

He reported a disaster to Granville Sharpe, asking him to seek justice for 133 slaves thrown overboard by slave traders who then, successfully, claimed insurance for these slaves. Sharp lost the case but this motivated Equiano to work for the abolition of the slave laws and slavery. At the time when other well-known individuals were dedicating time and energy to abolition, despite many obstacles, Equiano formed a group called The Sons Of Africa who lobbied Members of Parliament and the House of Lords. Among the Sons of Africa was Ottobah Cugoana, the first African to publish a formal and bold attack on the slave trade and slavery.

Equiano's autobiography was published in 1789. It was regarded as the most important single literary contribution to the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade as it was the only account of the Transatlantic Trade, of Slavery in Africa, on the Middle Passage, as well as about slavery in the West Indies, North America, Holland, France Portugal and Britain.

It became a best seller, went through nine British editions, and many others after his death in 1797. It was also published in Germany (1790), New York (1791), and Holland (1791).

Equiano traveled throughout Britain promoting his book and lobbying for abolition. He also gave several speeches in Ireland on the evils of the slave trade. Equiano's book inspired John Wesley who then urged Wilberforce as a Member of Parliament to do his best to bring about abolition. Unfortunately, despite the power and popularity of his book and the impact on the cause he so passionately espoused, Equiano died on March 31, 1797 and did not live to see the abolition of the slave trade legislated by the British Parliament 10 years later.

Equiano's life and times will be celebrated this year in a major exhibition by Birmingham Museum and Gallery and The Equiano Society.

Ottobah Cugoano, Late 1750s- ?

Ottobah Cugoano was also one of the leading African abolitionists. Born in modern-day Ghana, kidnapped while still a youth, he was transported to Grenada where he worked on a plantation. In 1772, his master took him to England and freed him. He was baptized a Christian and changed his name to John Stewart (or Stuart). He worked as a servant to Richard Cosway, court painter to the Prince of Wales.

He became friends with Equiano and Ignatius Sancho and took an interest in the growing abolitionist movement. In 1787, the year of the formation of the Anti-Slavery Committee, he published his autobiography *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* in which he advocated for immediate emancipation.

He was also associated with Granville Sharpe with whom he worked to rescue a

kidnapped African, Henry Demaine, who was to be shipped to the Caribbean. They managed to obtain a legal injunction to free him.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, 1743-1803

Born into slavery in Saint-Domingue (present day Haiti) and freed in 1776, Toussaint became the leader of the Haitian revolution, the most influential slave rebellion in the world.

The largest and wealthiest of the Caribbean islands, Saint-Domingue's economy was totally dependent on slave labour. At its height, it produced 30% of the world's sugar and more than half of its coffee. It thus provided its colonial ruler, France, with one-third of its imports. The 500,000 slaves in the colony were guarded by an army of soldiers and suppressed by an exceptionally brutal regime characterized by harsh treatment and violent punishment for those who resisted.

The 1789 French Revolution created tensions among the various populations on the island – white, black, and mulatto – which erupted in 1791 into a 13-year revolt which ultimately led to independence from France. Toussaint joined the rebellion in 1792 and with remarkable political and military skill successfully organized the slaves into a highly disciplined revolutionary army. He rapidly rose to power and played the European powers – France, Spain and Britain – off against each other with alliances and counter-alliances to achieve his goals of an end to slavery and independence.

In 1793, France's senior colonial official, Léger Félicité Sonthonax, abolished slavery on the island. The next year, the French government freed all slaves in its Empire. The effects of Toussaint's Revolution inspired uprisings throughout other slave colonies.

By 1801, even before the Bill to abolish the slave trade was passed in Great Britain, Toussaint had conquered Santo Domingo (the eastern half of the island of Hispaniola)

which Spain had ceded to France six years earlier. He freed the slaves there and thus had control over the whole island. In July, he issued a Constitution which abolished slavery and named himself Governor General for life, effectively establishing the first Black-led government in the region.

Despite professing loyalty to France, his subsequent actions, including his relations with other countries, the promulgation of the Constitution without consulting France, and his removal of French officials clearly signaled his determination to be independent. In 1802, Napoleon sent a large force to retake control and reinstitute slavery. A trap was laid for Toussaint who was captured, bound and taken to France. Eight hundred of his chief officers were also captured and imprisoned. Toussaint died in 1803 in a dungeon at the foot of the Alps.

However, the revolution which Toussaint began was not suppressed. Under the command of the former slave Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, the united Black and mulatto forces defeated Napoleon's troops. The effort by France to reinstate the slave trade and slavery and reimpose its brutal control was thwarted. On January 1, 1804, the Republic of Haiti, the original name of the former colony came into being and the country was returned to Black rule.

Samuel Sharpe, 1801-1832

Named after his owner (who it is said, treated him relatively kindly), Sam Sharpe was born in Jamaica in 1801. He followed the developments of the abolition movement in England by reading local and foreign papers and inspired many who became followers and supporters. As a well-known Baptist preacher, he traveled throughout the parish of St. James decrying the injustices of slavery and making the point (which he had learned from the Bible) that

whites had no more right to hold black people in slavery, than black people had to make white people slaves.

At the age of 31, he organized the 1831-32 rebellion. Originally intending a peaceful resistance by organizing a general strike after the three-day Christmas holiday, he was prepared to support physical fighting only if the planters did not grant their demands.

The uprising, which began on December 28, started in St. James parish and lasted eight days, spreading throughout the entire island. It is regarded as the greatest (and the last) act against slavery in Jamaica. One hundred and eighty-six Africans and 14 white planters or overseers died. The brutal reaction of the whites reflected their vengeance. Over 750 rebel slaves were convicted, 138 sentenced to death. Some were hanged, their heads cut off and placed in conspicuous parts of the plantations on which they worked. The harsh punishment meted out to others who escaped execution resulted in their deaths. Sam Sharpe was captured and executed on May 23, 1832. As he awaited execution, he is reported to have said—a sentiment held by many other enslaved Africans—"I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery."

His labours and those of his followers bore fruit. The British government became concerned about the cost of the slave resistance. There had been an increasing number of slave revolts and the Anti-Slavery movement in Britain was growing stronger. Within a week of Sam Sharpe's death, Parliament appointed a committee to consider ways of ending slavery. On August 1, 1834 the Act of Emancipation was passed with a four-year apprenticeship period and the final Emancipation in 1838.

Following Jamaica's independence from Britain in 1975, Sam Sharpe was declared a National Hero and a public square renamed in his honour.