

Slavery and Abolition

Sarah Richardson

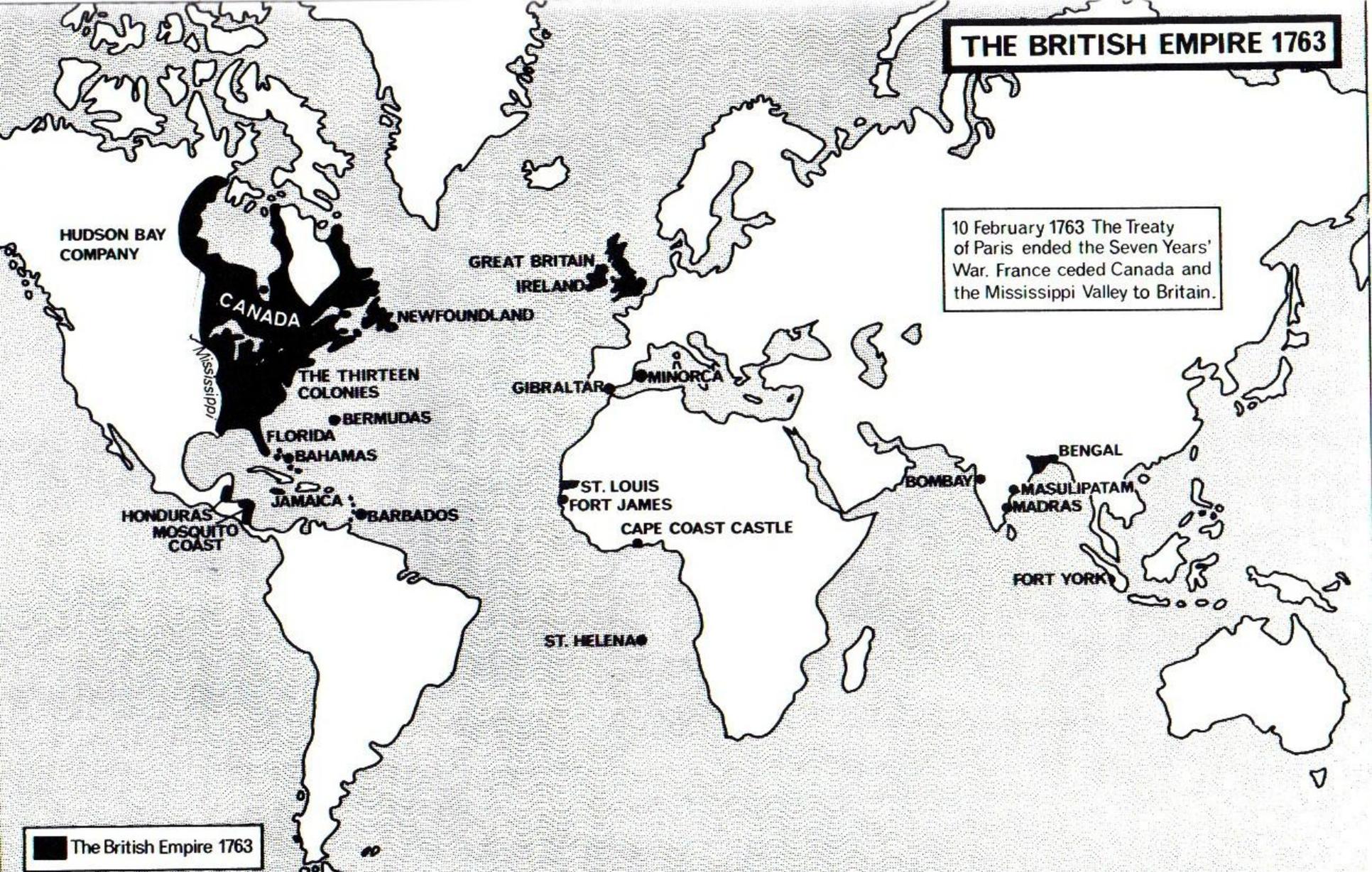
Slavery

- Slave trade defined as the enforced migration of people across national boundaries over long distances to bondage in a different setting
- Ancient empires of Egypt, Greece and Rome all utilised slave labour
- Within Europe Portugal and Spain had a slave trade by the sixteenth century.
- English began to exploit the possibilities of slave labour after 1580

British Empire

- England settled colonies in West Indies and North America from the seventeenth century onwards.
- Initially scattered along the eastern seaboard of North America and throughout the Caribbean
- Later acquired Jamaica and American territories in Carolina, East and West Jersey and Pennsylvania.
- Colonies = markets for manufactured goods and providers of raw materials
- Large agricultural plantations were the most cost-effective way of maximising output.
- Transatlantic slave trade offered answer to need for labour

THE BRITISH EMPIRE 1763

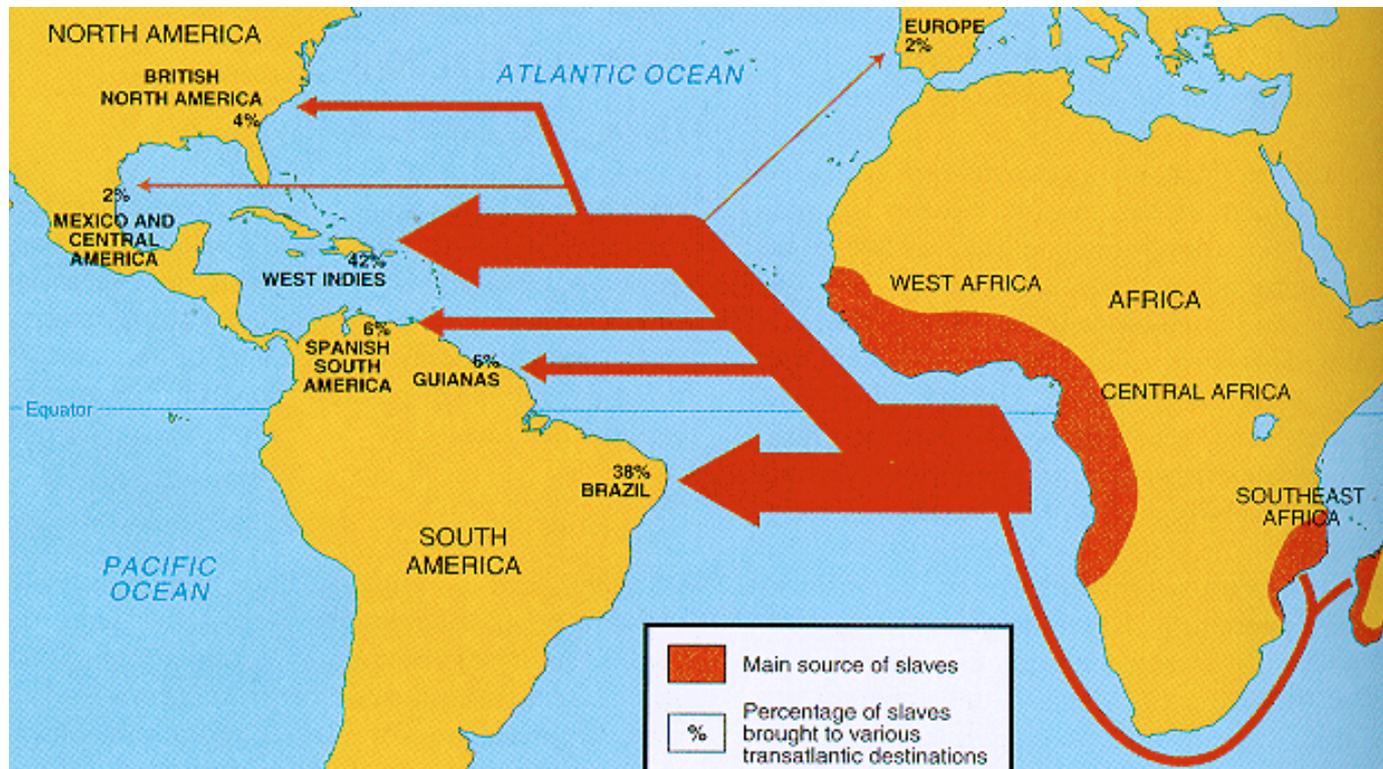


10 February 1763 The Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War. France ceded Canada and the Mississippi Valley to Britain.

■ The British Empire 1763

Atlantic Slave Trade

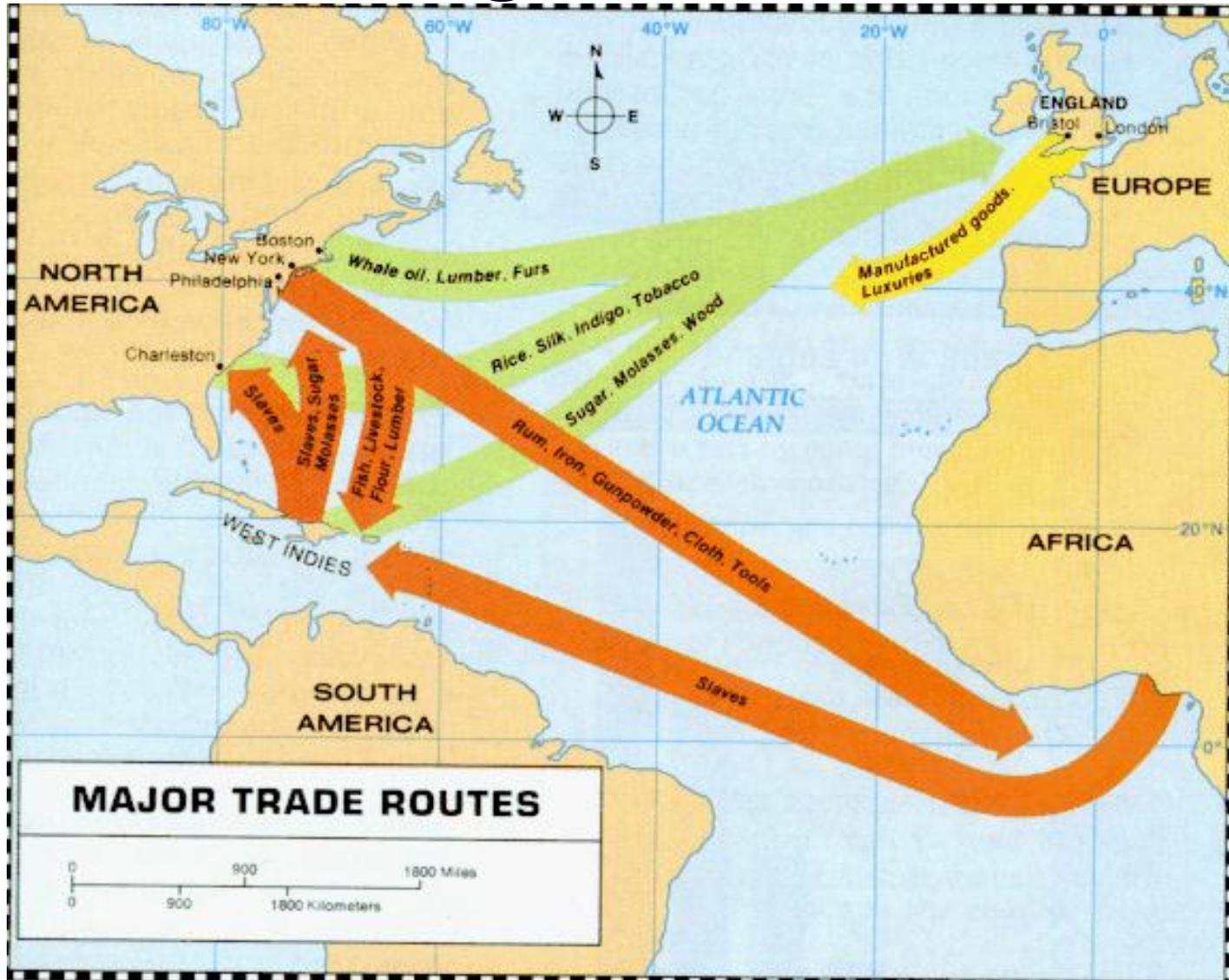
- Economic and Racial factors
- c.12m Africans transported, 1500-1900
- Only 5% to North America
- Up to 25% mortality during voyage



Justifications

- Economic: need for labour on plantations
- Plantations in America produced rice and tobacco. In British Caribbean mainly produced sugar although some produced coffee
- Cultural: based on blatant racial prejudice against black Africans
- Justified because of its presence in the ancient world and in the scriptures.
- Hobbes and Locke both accepted slavery
- But helped that slaves generally resided overseas. Thus values of freedom and liberty could be upheld on English soil

Triangular Trade



Trading Companies

- Royal African Company established by royal charter in 1672 which gave it the monopoly right to trade with Africa for a thousand years
- Prominent investors included John Locke, Sir George Carteret the Lord Proprietor of South Carolina, Sir Edmund Andros, the former governor of New York and the Bristol philanthropist Edward Colston
- Company struggled to make profits, by 1712 was bankrupt finally disbanded in 1821
- South Sea Company created in 1710 to deliver contracts for slaves in British vessels to the colonies of Spanish America
- Company continued until 1739 but found it difficult to make profits
- Credibility challenged by the South Sea Bubble crisis

Numbers of Slave Ships Leaving British Ports

Port	1725	1730	1772	1800
London	87	25	39	20
Bristol	63	39	24	5
Liverpool	-	21	92	106

Bristol

- Links with slave trade established because of its westward outlook
- Bristol merchants showed great enterprise in exploiting opportunities for marketing slaves
- Concentrated on supplying slaves to Jamaica
- Bristol lost ground to Liverpool in 1740s when they converted many of their slave ships to privateers



John Pinney's house, Great George St, Bristol. Pinney earned his fortune from his sugar plantations on the Caribbean island of Nevis from where he returned in 1783.

Liverpool

- Liverpool merchants did not switch to privateering
- Northern port and were safe from sea lanes patrolled by the French and Spanish.
- Merchants more flexible switching between tobacco, sugar and slaves
- Thriving shipbuilding industry supporting the slave trade
- Liverpool ships completed triangular voyage two days faster than Bristol
- Sophisticated credit and financial network

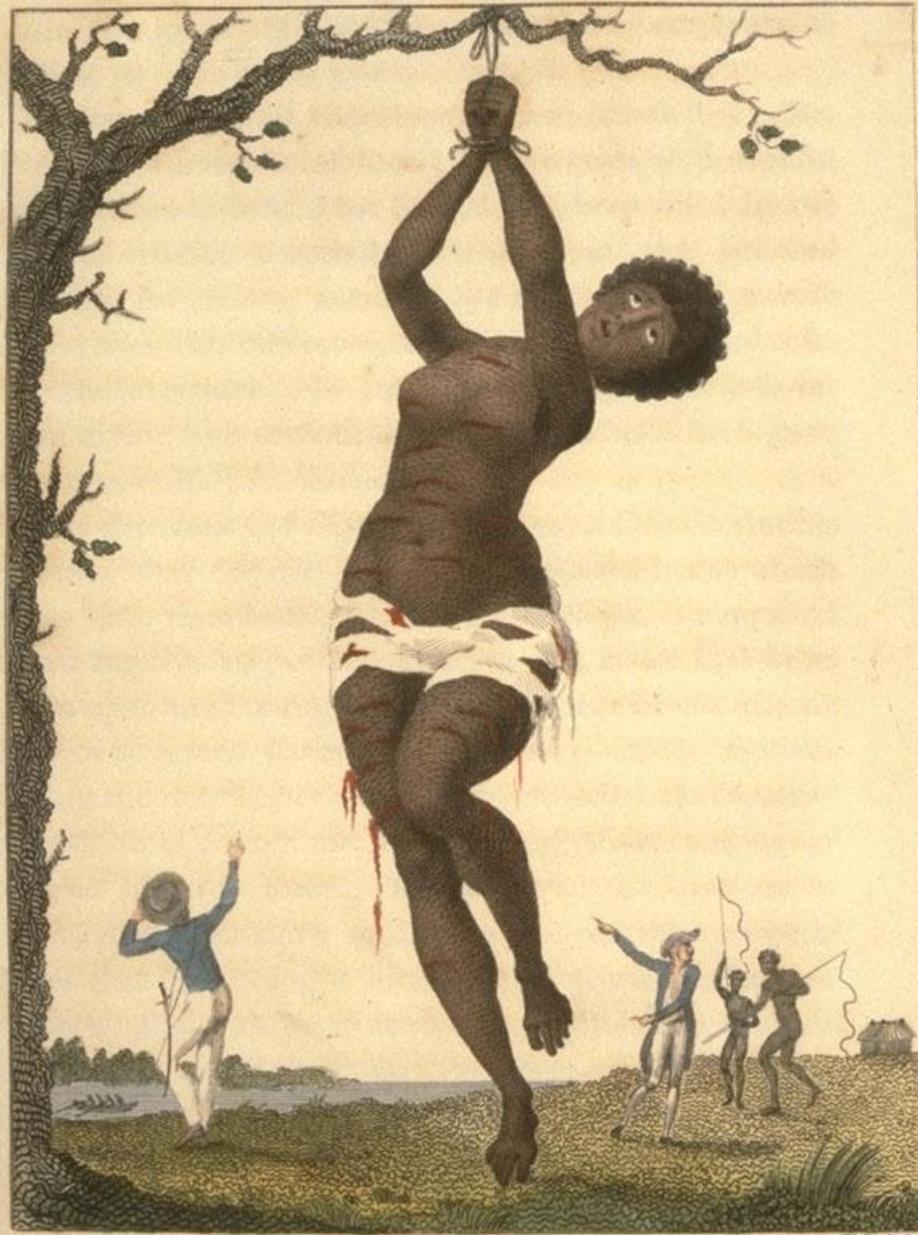
Goree Warehouses Liverpool. Named after Senegal's Goree Islands off the coast of Africa. Built 1793 to cope with demand for storing goods to be shipped to Africa on first leg of triangular voyage.



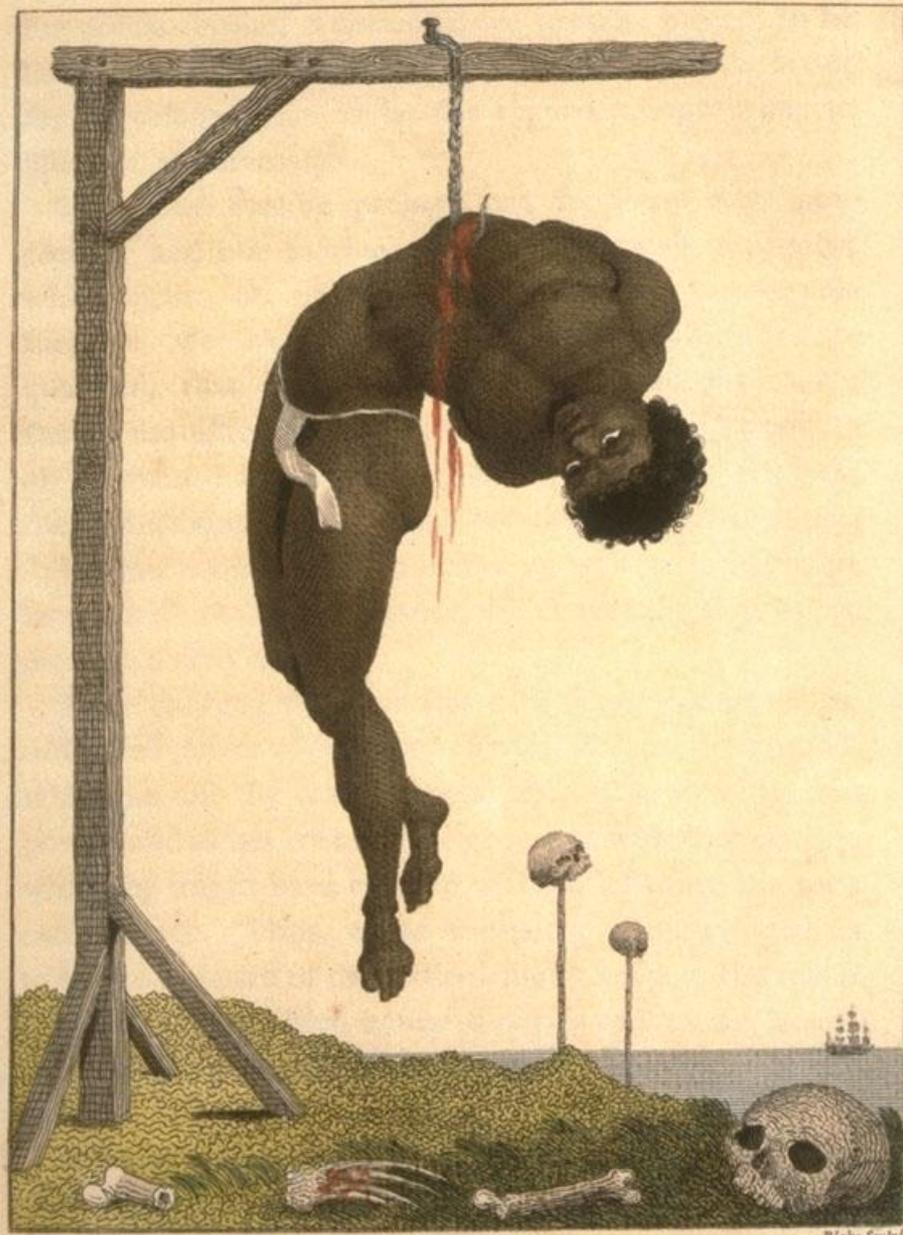
Slave Life

Apart from uncertainty about his early years, everything Olaudah Equiano describes in his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* can be verified. In 1786 he became involved in the movement to abolish slavery as a prominent member of the 'Sons of Africa', a group of 12 black men who campaigned for abolition. In 1792 he married an Englishwoman, Susanna Cullen, and they had two daughters. Equiano died on 31 March 1797.





Flagellation of a Female Samboc Slave.



A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows.

A brutally beaten slave with heavy scarring on his back, (Photograph taken in 1863. From the US National Archives)



Printed April 29. 1792. by H. Humphreys No. 18. Old Broad Street



BARBARIETIES in the WEST INDIAS

Among numberless other acts of Cruelty, daily practis'd, an English Negro Prisoner, because a young Negro then sickly was unable to work, threw him into a Copper of Boiling Sugar Juice, & after bathing him steep'd over head & ears for above Three Quarters of an Hour in the boiling liquor, whipt him with such severity, that it was near Six Months before he recover'd of his Wounds & Scalding.

Vide M^r Francis's speech, corrected by M^r Fox. M^r Webster's, &c.

Did the slave traders make a profit?

- It has been argued that British merchants made a return of 30% on the capital they invested
- More recent analysis has revised this figure
- 1770 -92 profits per venture of the Bristol slave trade came to 7.6%.
- Evidence from Liverpool suggests returns of around 8-10% on annual investment in the slave trade.

What was the contribution of slave trading profit to the economic development of Britain?

- Eric Williams *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944)
- Argued gains were substantial and linked to the origins of industrial capitalism
- Slave trade 'provided one of the main streams of accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution.'
- Barbara Solow estimated it could have comprised as much as 39% of commercial and industrial investment in the 18th century

Demand versus supply

- Demand created by slavery-sugar nexus was a stimulus to British economic performance
- From 1748-75 sugar imports from Caribbean doubled from 900,000 to 1.8 million cwt; sugar consumption doubled reaching an annual consumption of 25lbs per person and revenues from sugar also doubled to £3.2 million.
- Caribbean based demand may have accounted for 35% of the growth in total British exports and for 12% in British industrial output.

Abolition

- Enlightenment concern for rational solutions to human problems combined with the birth of a humanitarian conscience began to alter intellectual and religious views of slavery.
- First organised society to be established was the Quaker-dominated Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade which was formed in 1787.
- First major landmark in the intellectual attack on slavery came from Montesquieu in *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748): 'The state of slavery is in its own nature bad. It is neither useful to the master nor to the slave; not to the slave because he can do nothing through a motive of virtue; nor to the master, because by having an unlimited authority over his slaves he insensibly accustoms himself to the want of all moral virtues.' Montesquieu argued that where slavery existed laws should be introduced to guard against its nature.

Scottish philosophers

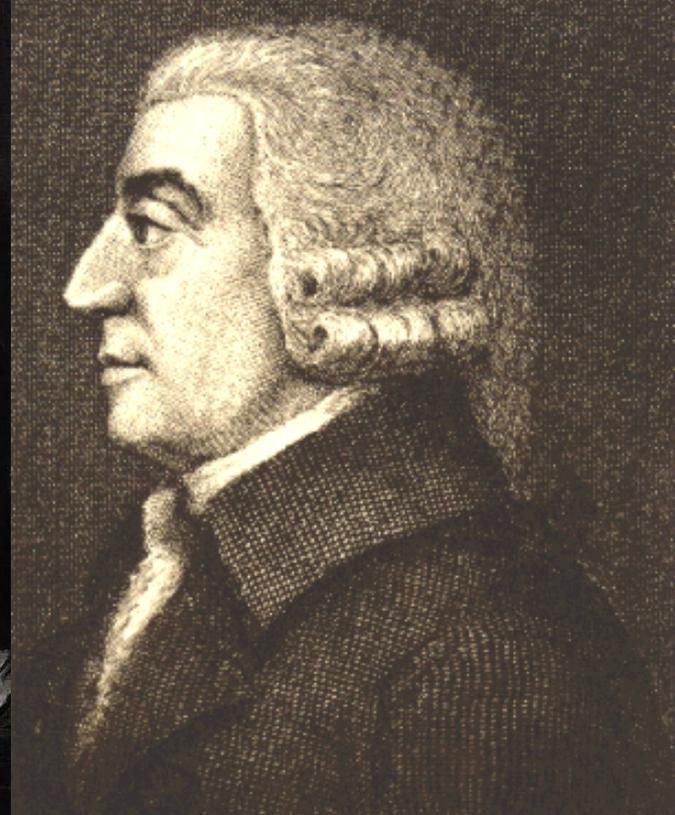
- Francis Hutcheson, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith all viewed slavery as an unsatisfactory condition that denied political rights and civil liberty to a particular category of people.
- Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* argued that 'no one is born a slave; because everyone is born with all his original rights... the supposed property of the master in the slave is therefore a matter of usurpation not of right.'
- Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* asserted 'there is not a Negro from the coast of Africa who does not ... possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of receiving.'



Francis Hutcheson,
1694-1746



Adam Ferguson, 1723-
1816



Adam Smith, 1723-
1790

Religious opposition to slavery

- Wesley attacked slavery as a morally evil institution.
- Wesley had travelled to Georgia in the 1730s and saw slaves on plantations
- Published *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1774)
- Quakers played the largest role in the abolition movement.
- Evangelical Anglicans were also firmly committed to abolition.
- Clapham Sect spearheaded the movement in the country.



HEROES OF THE SLAVE TRADE ABOLITION.



Mansfield judgment

- Legal decision made in 1772 by Lord Chief Justice Mansfield with regard to slavery on English soil.
- African born slave James Somerset had been brought to London by his owner Charles Stewart from Boston.
- 1771 Somerset ran away from his master, was caught and placed in irons on a ship bound for Jamaica.
- Mansfield ruled that English law did not support the keeping of a slave on English soil

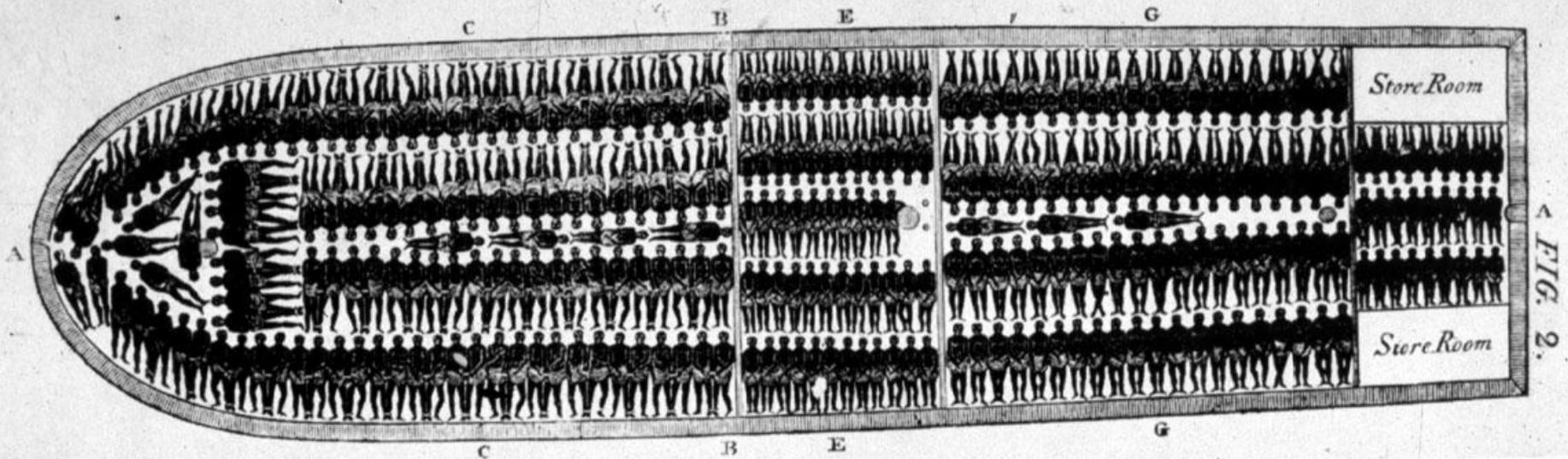
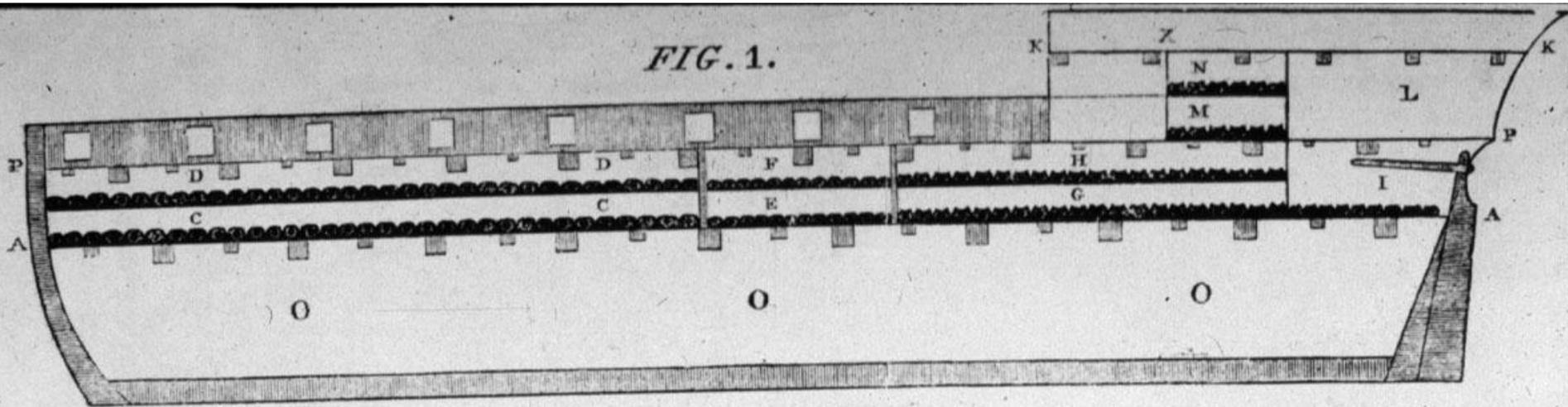
Abolitionist tactics

- Petitioning movement. Between 1787 and 1792 petitions were signed by 1.5 million people in Britain (almost 1/6 of the total population)
- Abolitionists established a free black colony in Sierra Leone
- Outpouring of anti-slavery tracts, hymns, novels, poems and pamphlets.
- Two leading members of the black community in London: Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana also publicised the movement.
- Equiano wrote a best-selling autobiography and Cugoana authored *Thoughts and Sentiments* which described the afflictions of the black people.
- Art forms propagated the message including tokens, medals, engravings and paintings.



Josiah Wedgwood's
famous medallion: 'Am I
not a man and a brother?'

Plan of the Liverpool slave ship, the *Brookes*





Wilberforce had a model of the *Brookes* made as evidence to the Commons

Pro-slavery lobby

- West India interest comprising mainly of planters and merchants was a powerful presence bringing influence to bear on the Privy Council, lobbying Mps and presenting favourable witnesses to committees.
- Organised print campaign to counter abolitionist propaganda.
- Simon Taylor, the Jamaican sugar tycoon compared abolition to Pharaoh decreeing the Israelites should make bricks without straw: 'they want us to make Sugar without Negroes, and Negroes are as necessary to make sugar as the straw was to burn the bricks.'
- 50 MPs were tied to the pro-slavery lobby and supporters included George III.

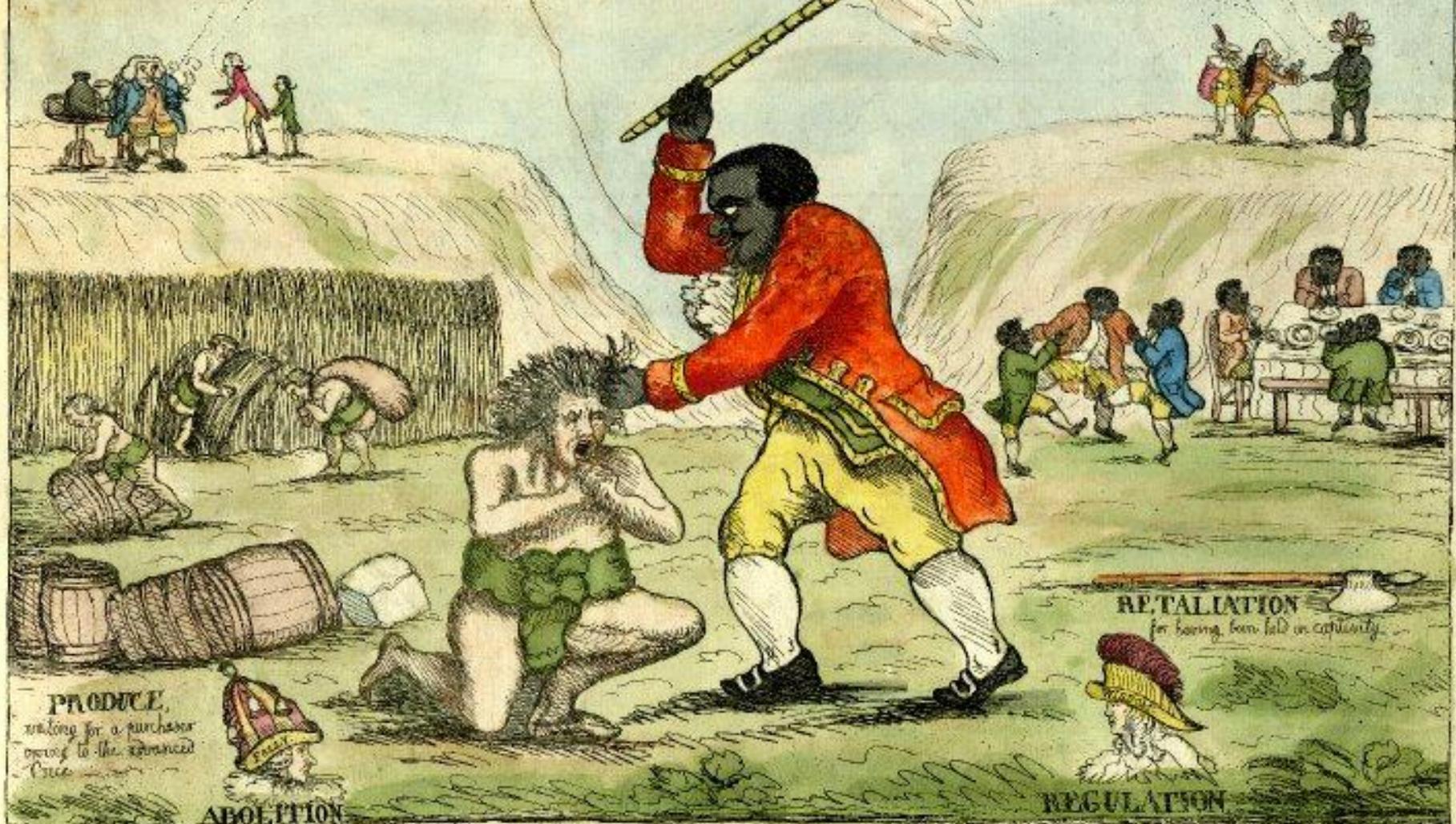
Why if I have my Rum & Sugar and my Tobacco at the old price - I must run off the Slave Trade is abolished

You may depend upon it there will be no demand for us, for we say the Trade will go and we will bring the King's shillings over and we will be no more to the Parliament

Wem, Mapha, me lick a you, and make you work, while me be Gentleman - curse a heart

By your den we will have all be Market to ourselves, and by ordering the old and Schony Cells Capital and Revenue to be Double

You shall have the Slaves at your own price



RETALIATION for having been held in captivity

PRODUCE, waiting for a purchaser owing to the advanced price

ABOLITION

REGULATION

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE, OR THE MAN THE MASTER.



George III was opposed to abolition. Gillray's cartoon hints the king was more interested in saving money than promoting the abolition of the slave trade: '... you'll save the poor Blackamoors by leaving off the use of it! and above all, remember how much expence it will save your poor Papa!'

Was slavery abolished for economic reasons?

- Eric Williams argued many Caribbean sugar estates suffered from soil exhaustion, indebtedness and over-production; that agriculture was severely affected by the American War of Independence and the French wars; and thus the slave trade was no longer viable. Also the transition from a mercantilist to a capitalist economy and from protectionism to free trade and slavery did not fit into this ideology.
- Attack on Williams' thesis came from Seymour Drescher in *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (1977).
- West Indian share of total British trade increased during the period that Williams had argued for decline.

Why was slavery abolished in 1807?

- Changed parliamentary and international context.
- Ministry of All the Talents responded positively to Wilberforce's bill which argued for abolition in the 'national interest.'
- Foreign Slave Trade Bill stopped 1/3 of the existing British slave trade overnight.
- Followed by general motion to abolish the slave trade on the grounds of humanity, justice and sound policy.
- 283 MPs voted in favour

After 1807

- Slavery was still legal in the British Colonies.
- 1823 of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions (known as the Anti-Slavery society) was founded.
- 1833 Emancipation Act was passed
- Full freedom was granted in 1838
- Women, played a far more extensive and active role in these later campaigns forming anti-slavery ladies' associations, taking part in widespread national petitioning, and in writing and campaigning.
- Cultural movement against slavery, consisting of poetry, short stories and powerful campaigning tracts

Wedgwood's cameo of 1828: 'Am I not a woman and a sister?'



Summary

- The slave trade was a key part of Britain's economy for over two centuries
- Trade was primarily a private enterprise
- Supported for economic, cultural & intellectual reasons
- Abolition response to changed intellectual climate
- Movement for abolition developed strategies for pressure group politics. Women were key part of later anti-slavery campaign
- Reasons for abolition: economic? Changed intellectual/cultural climate? International context? Humanitarianism?