

KS3 History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

The Abolition Movement

Enquiry: How successful were efforts to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century?

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Slavery in the British Empire

By the 1800s, Britain had come to control the **Transatlantic Slave Trade**.

Britain transported enslaved people from the West Coast of Africa to America and the West Indies. They helped transport and sell enslaved people from British colonies to other European held colonies. This made Britain a huge fortune. A lot of this money was invested in new technology, so fueling the **Industrial Revolution**.

However, the loss of the American colonies did see a slight change in position by the British. Those enslaved people, who fought for Britain against the American Colonists, were rewarded with their freedom. Many were provided with transport to Sierra Leone in West Africa. They settled in Freetown. But, this did not mean that the British were turning their backs on using enslaved people.



Slave resistance

Slave resistance in British **colonies** was certainly a problem as we saw in Jamaica. However, it was a revolution in the nearby island of Saint Domingue that strengthened the abolitionist cause. There was a successful slave rebellion in Saint Domingue against the French. This gave the British a perfect opportunity to try to capture this valuable island in the Caribbean. However, the invasion was defeated by the formerly enslaved people living in Saint Domingue.

The British realised that it was not a certainty that force alone could defeat an organised campaign of resistance. Some abolitionists argued that the only way to end the chance of such a revolt happening in a British colony was to end the cause of it - abolish the slave trade.



French Revolutionary and Napoleonic War

By 1793, Britain and France were once again at war. The British and French were fighting for national survival. Both had colonies in the Caribbean. Initially, the French had made slavery illegal (1794) but this was overturned in 1804 by Napoleon Bonaparte. The British, who traded enslaved people with French colonies, saw a chance to harm France. The abolitionists pushed for an act which would stop the British slave trade with foreign colonies. This was passed in 1806. This reduced the potential trade British **merchants** now had when selling enslaved people. Therefore, it helped to reduce the amount of money to be made in the trade for the British.



Religion

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, new Protestant groups began to question the **morality** of the slave trade. Some Church groups pointed out that the Bible said all men are born equal and so questioned how can slavery exist? Slowly, religious campaigns began to show the British people the conditions of the slaves in the colonies. Missionaries, men trying to spread the word of Christianity, told the British people what life was like for an enslaved person in the colonies. Many British people were horrified by what they heard. This religious questioning of slavery helped some become the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society such as William Wilberforce.



Anti-Slavery Society

The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was created in 1787. Many of the members were deeply religious and saw slavery as being morally wrong.

Olaudah Equiano, a former enslaved person, gave public talks about his experiences as an enslaved man and published his story so that people could read about it. Other men, such as Thomas Clarkson and John Newton, collected personal accounts from those directly involved in the slave trade to use as evidence of the horrors.

Out of the anti-slavery societies came **petitions** from the ordinary people to abolish the Slave Trade. In 1788, almost 20 percent of Manchester's population signed a petition calling for an end to the trade. There was even a **boycott** on sugar. This caused the price of sugar to collapse making it less profitable.



Financial reasons

One of the main reasons for Britain's involvement in the slave trade was because it made lots of money. Unfortunately, for plantation owners and traders, the morality of the trade mattered little due to the amount of money that could be made. But the sugar boycott, the 1806 ban on trading enslave people with a foreign country's colonies and the Industrial Revolution in Britain, all contributed to making it less profitable to use slave labour. Some slave owners began to realise that it was cheaper to pay their enslaved people wages rather than force them to work. The loss of money certainly helped persuade some important people in Britain to stop supporting the slave trade rather than out of moral conscience.



Glossary

Transatlantic Slave Trade - The trade of enslaved people from West Africa to the Americas. The enslaved people were sold and goods such as tobacco and sugar were transported back to Europe.

Industrial Revolution - The start of using machines and factories to help improve manufacturing.

Colony - The name given to a country which is owned by another country.

Merchants - People who buy and sell products.

Morality - Questioning whether something is right or wrong.

Petition - A list of signatures asking for a change.

Boycott - When you stop buying something for a certain reason.



Comprehension Questions

1. Which island did the British fail to capture after a slave revolt?
2. What restriction was put on the slave trade in 1806?
3. Why did some Christian people oppose the slave trade?
4. How did the anti-slavery societies try to end the slave trade?
5. Why was the slave trade becoming less profitable at the start of the nineteenth century?

Extension Question

Why did ordinary people in Britain start wanting to abolish the slave trade?

