



Centre for the Study of the

Legacies of British Slave-ownership

www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs

Newsletter August 2020

Emancipation Day

August 1st is recognized as Emancipation Day (previously called Freedom Day) in the English-speaking islands of the Caribbean. Since 1838 that date has been an important one on the national calendar--a time for reflection and assessment on the long history of enslavement and its aftermath. Freedom from slavery did not mean rights, equality, justice or fair treatment of the black majority of the Caribbean. The contradictions inherent in the transition from slavery to freedom have become part of the reflections on August 1st.

At the same time, August 1 has always been a moment of joyful celebration. This year that celebration has taken place amid the restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, across the Caribbean and its diaspora people gathered to honour the ancestors through online discussions, outdoor activities, and the usual public holiday excitement.

We mark the importance of that "August morning" with a dig through the archives. This anonymous poem written by someone in Jamaica, was published in the Kingston paper *The Morning Journal* in May, just a few months before emancipation. It evokes some of the optimism of 1838 and uses language on the inhumanity of slavery that was current at the time. More significantly its closing lines on unhealed wounds anticipates the difficult legacies of slavery that have extended since 1838 to our age.



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Negro Emancipation

Again Humanity her standard waves
Inscribed with—Freedom to the land of slaves;
And Britons roused with sacred ardour, join
With hand and heart to aid her cause divine,
Who at his post can slumber or can sleep
While suffering thousands unprotected weep,
Crushed by tyrannic power's imperious sway
In anguish weep their sum of life away?
Haste from the oppressor wrest the bloody lash,
And to the earth his impious fetters dash!
Teach him that Britain with a frown disdains
Detested whips and ignominious chains;
That she demands with the unrolled decree,
That all her subjects shall and must be free
But, oh! How cheering to the feeling mind,
Some kindred hearts some noble should to find,
Who join the general wish with deeds humane,
At once abandon slavery's hateful chain,
And from his bands the drooping slave release,
To pass his days in happiness and peace.
And there is ONE, who from his throne on high,
Sees all our nations with unlumbersome eye,
Who hears the wretch's supplicating prayer,
And counts the tears of anguish and despair:
He can and will a recompense bestow,
Relieve the sufferer from his weight of woe,
And all his wrongs, which man refused to heal,
His proud oppressor shall forever feel,
And weep in tears of penitence too late.
The just reward of overwhelming fate.



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Genetic consequences of the slave trade

Researchers at the genetic testing company [23andme](#) have analysed the DNA of over 50,000 people in Europe, Africa and the Americas to shed new light on the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The results align with the historical record in terms of the regions in Africa from which people were trafficked and the areas of the Americas where descendants live today. Higher than expected levels of Nigerian DNA found in US-based African Americans suggest an important intra-American trade.

Gender analysis reveals most starkly the effects of a system of violence, maltreatment, coercion and rape. Enslaved women in the Caribbean contributed 13 times more to the modern day gene pool of people of African descent than enslaved men. The disparity was even greater in northern countries of South America, 17 times more. European men contributed 25 times more to the modern day gene pool than European women. The results are published in the [American Journal of Human Genetics](#) [pdf].

Webinars and podcasts

Debates continue over the ways in which we commemorate historical figures in our streets and buildings. A statue of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville (1742-1811) has been defaced in Edinburgh and been given new signage by the local council stating that "Dundas was a contentious figure, provoking controversies that resonate to this day" and concluding: "In 2020 this was dedicated to the memory of the more than half a million Africans whose enslavement was a consequence of Henry Dundas's actions."

Dundas was counsel to Joseph Knight in the case Knight v. Wedderburn establishing that slavery was illegal within Scotland. But he also tabled the motion to add the word "gradual" to Wilberforce's 1792 motion to abolish the slave trade. An in-depth discussion of Dundas's connections to slavery has been held at the University of Edinburgh and a recording of the event is [available online](#).

Catherine Hall will be speaking about memorialisation via Zoom at 6pm on Friday 4 September. Details of how to book a place at the event will appear on the [Stuart Hall Foundation](#) website in the next few days.

Keith McClelland's [interview for CBS News](#) on 'A historical reckoning for the global slave trade' is now online.

John Lewis's [last essay](#) was published by the New York Times on the day of his funeral.