



## Europe and Slavery



Given that the transatlantic slave trade was a global phenomenon, in which a large number of European states took part, it is worth looking at their respective roles within it and how these different countries have dealt with the memory and commemoration of slavery. Despite the resonances of slavery and its importance historically to Europe there are still remarkably few memorials. Although there have been recent developments in France and a series of memorials and exhibitions in The Netherlands and Denmark, countries such as Spain and Portugal, that have been so active in both territorial expansion to the Caribbean and Latin America and transatlantic slavery, seem to have done little to promote the collective memory of these tragic episodes in their history.

### International recognition

Internationally, however, one institution has initiated a major project to commemorate slavery. Following a suggestion in 1993 by the African states and Haiti, and in the context of a growing awareness that better knowledge of the slave trade and its legacy would contribute to global peace, UNESCO embarked on a new initiative called the **Slave Route project**, which is a critical examination of the impact of the slave trade between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and North and Latin America in its historical and socio-economic context. The objective of the Slave Route project is to raise awareness of the slave trade and its consequences for modern societies. Under the banner of the project, UNESCO organised a series of seminars, festivals and exhibitions; it also published studies and research on the slave trade and its consequences. UNESCO also chose to set 23 August as the **International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition**. This date was chosen because it marks



the anniversary of the uprising of enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue, led by Toussaint Louverture, which ultimately led to creation of the independent Republic of Haiti.

Although many European countries were heavily involved in the slave trade, their roles in it differed depending on their status at the time. Some, such as England, France and Portugal used slave labour in their colonies while others, such as the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, were mainly active in the commercial trade and shipping, thus contributing to the trade by carrying slaves from Africa to the Caribbean and Latin America.

### France

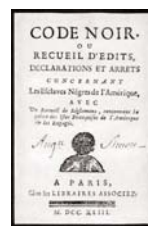
France was a major player in the slave trade and many of its cities on the West Coast (such as Nantes, Lorient, La Rochelle, and Bordeaux) have built their wealth



through the triangular trade. Slaves on French vessels were mainly taken to the French Caribbean colonies such as Saint-Domingue and Martinique.

In addition, France is also notorious for introducing the **Code Noir** ('black code'), a decree written in 1685 providing formal regulations for the treatment of slaves, governing their lives, deaths, freedoms, religion and how they were to be bought and sold. This gruesome document served to de-humanise the enslaved Africans even more by institutionalising the trade in humans even further. France eventually outlawed the slave trade in 1830 and slavery itself in 1848.

In France, as in most European countries, two antagonistic collective memories around the slave trade have emerged: a memory of the slave trade on the one hand, mainly commemorated and recognised in the French Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe) and a memory of the abolition on the other, marked mainly in Metropolitan France. The sculpture of Josephine at Fort de France in Martinique is a good example of the different collective memories of slavery and its legacy: Josephine





de Beauharnais, Napoleon's wife, came from a slave trader's family in the French Antilles and was thought to be behind the decision by Napoleon to re-introduce slavery in 1802 (it had been abolished during the French Revolution in 1794). Her statue has been consistently 'beheaded'

by the inhabitants of Fort de France.

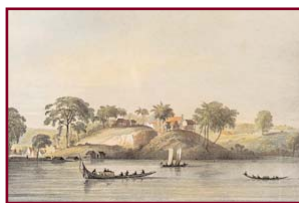
France is the only European country to have passed (in 2001) law that recognises slavery and the slave trade as a crime against humanity. This was followed by the decision of French President Chirac in 2006 to establish a national day of remembrance of slavery on 10 May (the date of the adoption of the 2001 Law) to reflect on the legacy of the slave trade and France's role in it.



There are a number of interesting initiatives emerging in France to remind its population of the legacy of slavery. **Paroles d'esclavages** ('words of slavery') is a website, put together by two Frenchmen who travelled in the island of Martinique to gather the testimonies of people who had known their grandparents, or great-grandparents who lived in slavery and remembered their stories and anecdotes. It offers an invaluable and vivid testimony of slavery in the French Antilles, as told by their descendants.

Another example is a project in Nantes (one of the main slave trade ports in France) entitled **Le Bateau Pédagogique**, which aims to raise awareness about the slave trade and its legacy and to use this memory to tackle present-day discrimination and racism.

### The Netherlands



Despite the fact that there were not many slaves in Dutch colonies, The Netherlands nevertheless played an important role in the slave trade, in particular

by transporting slaves to various territories. In the 17th century, the Dutch were pioneers in navigation and global trade, which naturally led to them being at the forefront of the shipping and trading of enslaved Africans. 540,000 African slaves are estimated to have been taken to the Americas by the Dutch. In addition, through their colony in

Surinam, they were responsible for setting up another slave traffic route east between the Cape of Good Hope and their colony in the Indonesian archipelago. Slavery was formally abolished in 1863, although the involvement of the Dutch in the trade had already started to diminish by the end of the 18th century (partly as a result of commercial decline).



The movement for an official remembrance and commemoration of slavery in the Netherlands was primarily initiated by grassroots organisations of Afro-Dutch communities. In 1993, these organisations set 1 July as the date for a commemoration and unveiled a plaque on the Surinameplein in Amsterdam in memory of the slave trade in 1999. In addition, they called on the government to



establish a memorial to help the Dutch deal with this bleak aspect of their history. The Government eventually picked up this issue and commissioned a sculpture that was unveiled in July 2002 in the Oostpark, Amsterdam.

### Denmark and Norway

The slave trade was formally prohibited in 1830 and slavery itself was only abolished in 1888.

As with the Netherlands the kingdom of Denmark/Norway did not have many colonies and was involved mainly in the trade of slaves through its forts on the Gold Coast of Ghana (the most famous one being **Fort Fredensborg** in Fetu). It was



also actively shipping slaves across to the Caribbean. It is estimated that around 85,000 enslaved Africans were shipped on Danish boats between 1669 and 1806. Although Denmark/Norway was the first European country to abolish the exports of slaves (1803), it wasn't until 3 July 1848 that slavery was abolished in the Danish West Indian colonies (now the US Virgin Islands).



Commemorations and memorials of the slave trade have concentrated partly on the site where the slave ship **Fredensborg** sank, whilst returning from the Isle of St Croix in 1768,

Tromøy, an island off the coast of Southern Norway. Its remains were found in 1975 and have since been exhibited in various museums as a testimony to the notorious Danish contribution to the slave trade.

## Portugal and Spain



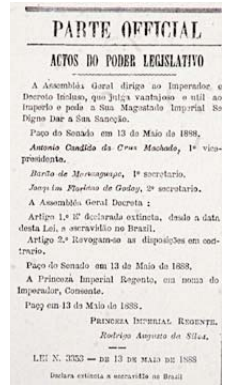
Portugal was the first European country to trade in slaves from Africa, initially mainly to bring them back to Portugal (there were 32,000 African slaves in Portugal in the 16th century, working mainly in the fields and sugar plantations). Soon, however, the demand for slaves in Brazil was such that the majority of the slaves were taken there.

Spain had North African slaves as early as the 15th century and with its expansion into the Caribbean and Central/Latin America, it soon start-

ed importing slaves from Africa. However, unlike Portugal, Spain did not have forts in Africa and therefore relied on the other European slave trading countries to provide their colonies with slaves. The slave trade ended in 1867 with a last ship arriving in Cuba and slavery was abolished in 1886.

There do not seem to be any major memorials and commemorations linked to slavery in either Spain or Portugal, which is all the more remarkable, given that these two countries were the first in Europe to practice slave trading and amongst the last to abolish it.

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## Resources

More details of UNESCO's **Slave Route** project can be found at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001465/146546e.pdf>

You can see the 'beheaded' sculpture of Josephine at [www.martinique-photos.com/martinique-fort-de-france-11.htm](http://www.martinique-photos.com/martinique-fort-de-france-11.htm)

The **Paroles d'esclavages** ('words of slavery') website is at [www.parolesdesclavage.com/index-esclavage.html](http://www.parolesdesclavage.com/index-esclavage.html) and **Le Bateau Pedagogique** is at [www.bateau-pedagogique.com/](http://www.bateau-pedagogique.com/).

The sculpture commissioned by the Dutch government can be seen at [www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/class/cfe/ceth/abolition/amsterdam.htm](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/facs/class/cfe/ceth/abolition/amsterdam.htm).

More information on **Fort Fredensborg** can be found at [www.unesco.no/fredensborg/monuments\\_and\\_sites\\_in\\_ghana/](http://www.unesco.no/fredensborg/monuments_and_sites_in_ghana/) and details of the slave ship **Fredensborg** at [www.unesco.no/fredensborg/](http://www.unesco.no/fredensborg/).

The **Real Histories Directory** ([www.realhistories.org.uk](http://www.realhistories.org.uk)) has a number of resources that look at slavery and its legacy in Europe as well as the contributions of people of African descent to the wealth and culture of Europe.

The **Breaking the Silence** website, [www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/slave\\_routes/slave\\_routes\\_Europe.shtml](http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/slave_routes/slave_routes_Europe.shtml), set up to help teachers and educators to break the silence surrounding the Transatlantic Slave Trade, considers European countries' involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade including the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, British and Danes.

The **slave-studies.net** site at [www.slave-studies.net/](http://www.slave-studies.net/) offers a subject catalog and a search engine providing access to internet resources for the study of slavery and abolition across all geographical areas and historical periods (with the exception of forced labour and sexual slavery under totalitarian regimes in the 20th century).

The **Caribbean GenWeb** project ([www.rootsweb.com/~caribgw/islands.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~caribgw/islands.html)) is an online data repository for queries, family histories and source records as well as being a resource centre to identify other online databases and resources to help researchers. Its Island Links page at [www.rootsweb.com/~caribgw/islands.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~caribgw/islands.html) has a clickable map of the Caribbean ([www.rootsweb.com/~caribgw/map.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~caribgw/map.html)) that allows you to explore further information, both historical

and contemporary, about each island. For example, the **Netherlands Antilles GenWeb** page ([www.rootsweb.com/~antwggw/](http://www.rootsweb.com/~antwggw/)) explores the six islands that are the overseas territory of The Netherlands.

The **Global Dimension** website ([www.globaldimension.org.uk/](http://www.globaldimension.org.uk/)) has a guide to books, films, posters and websites with a global dimension. You can find resources for all age groups and subjects. **Global Perspectives in the National Curriculum: Guidance for Key Stage 3 History** (see [www.dea.org.uk/](http://www.dea.org.uk/)) is a booklet that provides an introduction to developing global awareness through the History curriculum in England, and examples of activities and resources showing how these approaches can enrich this subject, as well as information on recommended resources and sources of further advice and support.

The British Library has an online Gallery called **Black Europeans**, ([www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/blackeuro/homepage.html](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/blackeuro/homepage.html)) a feature curated by Mike Phillips, that looks at the contributions of people of African descent to the mainstream of European culture and society – contributions that are often airbrushed out of history. It features figures such as the writers Alexander Pushkin and Alexandre Dumas, violinist George Polgreen Bridgetower, composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and politician John Archer.

23 August is **International Slavery Remembrance Day** and on that day Liverpool's **International Slavery Museum** ([www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/)) opens its doors.

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## The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** ([www.realhistories.org.uk](http://www.realhistories.org.uk)) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: [realhistories@runnymedetrust.org](mailto:realhistories@runnymedetrust.org).