



Young People's Creative Slavery Project—

Video ART Postcards

This summer, two groups of teenagers (aged 14 to 19) from the London Borough of Newham participated in a unique experience.

Assisted by video artists and historians, the teenagers uncovered sites related to historical racism and anti-racism in the West India Docks area, and expressed their interpretation of this history and heritage creatively, using digital media and the imagination.



At the end of the 5-day workshops, each young participant had produced a personal short video, or 'postcard', informed by their workshop learning—in total, 33 videos.

This year's bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade provided an opportunity to revisit history and develop new work on slavery and anti-racism.

For Manifesta and the Runnymede Trust, it proved to be an ideal occasion to devise a project that would enable young people to engage in work exploring connections between slavery, resistance and contemporary issues of racism while proposing alternative means of expression, using artistic creativity and imagination.



Focusing on the links between History and local history, *Video Art Postcards* was designed to inspire young people about contemporary struggles against racism and injustice, through looking at the legacy of slavery and the abolitionist movement locally. The aims of the project were for the young people involved to:

- research and explore the colonial past and the related anti-racist heritage of their particular cities and neighbourhoods;

- learn to express their exploration and interpretation of their heritage research creatively through the use of digital media;

- produce short video works (or 'postcards') informed by their historical research and personal interpretation of the material.

The starting point for tackling such emotive and often difficult issues as racism was the commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade and the traces of slavery in their local and contemporary environment. The Museum in Docklands with its artefacts was a particularly rich site of exploration for the teenagers - built on the foundations of the old West India trading docks.

The project centred on the statue of Robert Milligan (trader/MP/West India lobbyist); the West India Dock founders' wall, the Museum in Docklands. Historians highlighted that the trade funded much of the city's industrial and financial success. The Museum is itself located at Warehouses No. 1 and No. 2, where sugar, rum and coffee—produced in the slave plantations—were stocked.



After touring the West India Docks and the Museum, the young people began to make connections between the past and the present.



Assisted by video artists, they developed their ideas and used digital video as a means to capture and work with sites, symbols, marks/traces while expressing their personal views, feelings, questions and emotions.

Rather than using linear words for expression, the young people were encouraged to reflect on the issues raised and to react, report, question and express themselves creatively, through video. Helped by the workshop facilitators (video artists and historians) each





of them developed an idea and a narrative, and prepared a shooting script.

The following days were devoted to filming in small groups—with young people helping each other with sound, camera work and performance—as well as researching sounds and images from the past on the internet.

Once they had collected their images, the editing phase started: how to organise those images to ensure that the key messages were delivered; how to convey emotions and tensions, what music, and sounds to add; use of a narrative voice—all these questions had to be answered.



In doing so, the young participants gained new skills and engaged with new subjects—social research, links between local and global history, media education, campaigning, team work, artistic expression, promotion.

The aim of *Video ART Postcards* in exploring the slave trade and its legacy was to help young people tackle issues related to racism/anti-racism, social exclusion, and cultural diversity. Young people have opinions on these issues and are eager to have their own voices heard; the project helped them express their opinions in a format that then allows us to put their voices on public platforms.

The *Video ART Postcards* works will be exhibited in a variety of events and sites—from museums and

community centres to TV and online platforms, and a dedicated web-site.

All the videos will be premiered at the Museum in Docklands, as part of the public opening of their new permanent gallery 'London, Sugar and Slavery' on 10 November.

Selections of the postcards will be incorporated into a teachers' toolkit in line with the National Curriculum. It will be made available on the Runnymede Trust web-site (www.runnymedetrust.org).

Video ART Postcards is a joint initiative of the Runnymede Trust and Manifesta—designed to demonstrate links between contemporary and historical struggles against racism and related injustice, and looking in particular at the legacy of slavery and the abolitionist movement.

For more information, please contact Manifesta Co-Director Marion Vargaftig, marion@manifesta.org.uk.

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Resources

If you are interested in researching local history, there are a number of resources included in the Real Histories Directory that might be of interest.

Many areas have resources within libraries that are geared to helping with research. For example, Birmingham City Libraries have a web page called **Sources for the Study of the Slave Trade in**

Birmingham City Archives

(www.birmingham.gov.uk/GenerateContent?CONTENT_ITEM_ID=2070&CONTENT_ITEM_TYPE=0&MENU_ID=11006). Its aim is to help and encourage anyone wanting to start a project by providing some idea of the type of records available and help with reading old documents.

Hull Local Studies Library (www.hullcc.gov.uk/) collects all kinds of information relating to Hull and the surrounding area. Material held includes local newspapers from 1791 to the present; thousands of photographs and illustrations, including portraits, aerial shots, local streets etc.; books and journals on all aspects of Hull and the East Riding, ancient and modern; local maps and plans, from around 1293 to present; census records.

Collections include over 1500 volumes on William Wilberforce, the abolition of slavery and all aspects of slavery, ancient and modern. **Bristol Libraries** (www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/leisure-and-culture/libraries/) have a collection of material relating to slavery and its abolition that is available in the main catalogue and local studies section.

The **Butetown History & Arts Centre** (www.bhac.org/), based in the heart of Cardiff Bay, is a unique, innovative scheme. It involves local people in collaboration with professional researchers, artists and media workers.

The **Local Studies Library & Archives**

(www.richmond.gov.uk/home/leisure_and_culture/local_history_and_heritage/local_studies_collection.htm) in Richmond, Surrey, is a local history reference library that houses source material; books; pamphlets; periodicals; illustrations; maps; videos; tapes and education resources.

Within London, **Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archive** (localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

has books, pamphlets, newspaper cuttings, audio-visual material, maps and pictures. **Brent Museum** (www.brent.gov.uk/museum) records the history of the local community in Brent. They have printed and audio-visual education resources and a loan service to local area. Brent Museum and Brent Archive have recently produced a series of local history articles covering the major population centres within Brent. The articles are 'tasters' intended to provide an introduction to the history of a district. They should prove useful to children doing local history projects. The **Greenwich Heritage Centre**

(www.greenwich.gov.uk/Greenwich/LeisureCulture/HistoryAndHeritage/HeritageCentre/) houses an extensive and growing collection of documents and books, photographs and maps, prints and drawings. The Heritage Centre is the perfect place to explore the background of your family or area. It has records dating back to the 1600s. Items in the collection include: maps from the seventeenth century to the present day; files of local newspapers from 1834 to date. **Hackney Museum**

(www.hackney.gov.uk/index.htm/cm-museum.htm) explores why people have come to the area from all over the world for more than 1,000 years. The museum displays investigate reasons for people moving to Hackney using objects, interactives, computer programmes and the stories of real people. Westminster City Archives' collections guide **Sources for Black and Asian History at the City of Westminster**

Archives Centre (www.westminster.gov.uk/libraries/archives/publications.cfm) includes listings of illustrations, theatre programmes and playbills, parish register and parish record entries, material from directories, periodicals and newspapers, business records, letters and family papers, and the records of institutions, clubs, societies, and military and armed bodies. The City of Westminster Archives Centre is the record office and local studies library for Westminster. It is open to the public without formality. Details of its holdings are given on its website.

Online, **Digital Handsworth** (www.digitalhandsworth.org.uk/) provides history of the ancient parish of Handsworth including illustrated articles giving an introduction to the key topics, images by local photographers and online exhibitions relating to the Handsworth area. Manchester and its surrounding towns are intimately connected with the history of slavery through the development of the cotton industry. But there are other stories too, including the region's influential abolitionist movements. This year, eight museums and galleries across Greater Manchester have joined together to explore the lasting local legacy of the trade. They look at their collections (and buildings) in a new light, investigating their origins and revealing some of their stories through a series of events, discussion and debate. On the **Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery** website (www.revealinghistories.org.uk/), you can explore stories about the objects in the collections or the wider history of the Greater Manchester area. The **Brighton & Hove Black History Project** (www.black-history.org.uk/) was launched in 2002 and the website that forms its main focus aims to reveal the area's past by helping local people to become involved in mapping their own history of Brighton & Hove. The site also aims to enable all communities - Black and White - to learn from each other and become more aware of Brighton & Hove's cultural heritage. The material featured on the site is an amalgamation of outreach workshops conducted locally, interviews, photographs, creative writing and video gathered from a cross section of the community. **Discovering Bristol**

(www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/) is a website with information and resources about Bristol's role in the transatlantic slave trade. Who was involved, what was bought and sold, who stopped it, and what is the effect of the trade today? It has information on slavery routes, the people involved, the campaign against the slave trade and Black resistance and the effects of the trade today. You can also browse Bristol's collection of photographs, paintings and objects.

Nationally, students and academic researchers can use the **Moving Here** catalogue (www.movinghere.org.uk/) to find out about heritage items relating to people, places or subjects they are

researching, while teachers and school students can use it to find details of original sources to support their teaching and learning.

Remembering Slavery in 2000

(www.hlf.org.uk/English/PublicationsAndInfo/AccessingPublications/Publications.htm) is a guide to resources for projects inspired by the anniversary of the abolition of slavery. It includes details of libraries, archives, record offices, museums, historic houses and sites and websites across the UK.

Pathways to the Past (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/localhistory/) is the lifelong learning section of The National Archives. Whether you are at university, evening class, pursuing the history of your own family or just curious about an historical topic, *Pathways to the Past* offers opportunities to learn about history and its sources.

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The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (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.