

HOMEWORK HELPSHEET / REVISION FILE

THE ORIGINS OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

KP1

BACKGROUND

Today Africa is often seen as a continent of poverty, starvation and disease where millions of people are dependent on aid and charity from the developed industrial countries. This has not always been the case. During the sixteenth century, when Europeans first made regular contact, West Africa had highly developed civilisations such as the kingdoms of Yoruba and Benin. Africans were keen to trade their gold, copper, ivory and spices for European pots, pans, cloth and guns. However Europeans soon became more interested in buying people than anything else Africa had to offer. Slavery had a long history in Africa going back to the ancient Egyptians, the Romans and in more recent times the Arabs captured and enslaved Africans. In African societies, slavery was used as a punishment for serious crimes and prisoners of war were often made slaves. Most slaves were owned by other black Africans and there was no real organised trade in slaves. Accounts of slavery in Africa suggest that slaves were treated well, were not expected to work any harder than free men and lived in the same house and ate the same food as their owners.

- In 1492 Columbus discovered America and soon settlers from Spain, Portugal, France, England and Holland began to colonise the New World. They set up plantations growing new crops such as cotton, tobacco and sugar. The biggest problem they faced was to find enough people to do the work.
- At first Europeans made slaves of the native people. They did not make good workers and most died of disease, overwork or even committed suicide. Criminals from Europe were also sentenced to slavery but they had to be set free if they survived long enough.
- Africans were less likely to die from European diseases and often had the farming skills needed to grow crops in a tropical climate.
- The Atlantic slave trade began in the sixteenth century when the Spanish and Portuguese started to ship slaves to their colonies in South America the trade increased as other countries such as Britain and France became involved.
- African kings and traders became rich and powerful by selling slaves and began to organise raids and start wars to capture slaves. The slave trade began to penetrate deep into the African continent, as Europeans demanded more and more slaves.
- In 1672 British merchants set up the Royal African Company and by the eighteenth century Britain was the biggest slave trading country supplying slaves to North and South America and the Caribbean. The slave trade grew larger and crueller than anything seen before.
- Slaves had no freedom, worked until they died and even their children were born into slavery. They were no longer seen as human beings but as things to be bought and sold – it was even thought they did not have souls.
- As ships became bigger more slaves could be carried - between 300 and 700 on each voyage. The total number of Africans shipped to America and the Caribbean will never be known but it has been estimated that 20-30 million people were enslaved. Many millions were also killed in the wars raids and in the horrific conditions that slaves had to endure.
- Responsibility for the cruel trade in human beings is blamed on the white merchants who controlled the trade. But it must be remembered that without the help of African kings and traders they could not have captured and enslaved millions of Africans.

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THE TRIANGULAR TRADE

KP2

BACKGROUND

The Triangular Trade was the name given to the trading route used by British merchants involved in the slave trade during the eighteenth century. It was called the triangular trade because the ships made three journeys, which formed the three sides of a triangle. The first stage of the journey was from Britain to West Africa where goods made in British workshops were exchanged for slaves. The second stage was the transport of slaves from Africa to the West Indies where they were sold for a large profit. The third and final stage was the transport of produce from the West Indies back to Britain. Merchants who traded in this way became very rich as they made a profit at each stage of the journey and West Indian produce sold for a very high price in Britain. In 1767 the Liverpool slave ship 'Thomas' is reported to have made a profit of £24,000 on a single voyage round the triangle. At this time worker's wages were about 25 pence a week. Slave trading with Africa was a risky but highly profitable business.

- The three stages of the triangular trade were known as: -

The Outward Passage	The Middle Passage	The Home Passage
Britain to West Africa	West Africa to the West Indies	West Indies to Britain

- **The Outward Passage** - Ships would load goods in Britain and sail to West Africa to trade for slaves. African rulers provided the slaves in exchange for British goods guns, metal, cloth brandy and cheap trinkets such as glass beads.
- **The Middle Passage** - Slaves would be loaded and then be shipped to the West Indies and sold. Slaves endured terrible conditions on the voyage to the West Indies and on average 12% of them died.
- **The Home Passage** - The ship would load West Indian produce to sell when it returned to Britain. In the West Indies, slaves were exchanged for sugar/coffee/ tobacco and cotton, which sold for high prices in Britain. West Indian produce was often exported to Europe where prices were even higher
- Ships would aim to complete the voyage around the triangular route in about eight or nine months but depending on the weather and trading conditions it could take a year or more.
- The voyage from Britain to West Africa would take on average around 40 days.
- On reaching West Africa the ship might have to stay for 4-8 months trading for slaves with local African rulers and traders.
- The voyage from West Africa to the West Indies would take on average 38 days. The ship would remain for 1-2 months selling slaves and buying local produce.
- The Voyage from the West Indies back to Britain would take on average 50-60 days. It was important to get a cargo of sugar, coffee, tobacco or cotton at a good price. This would gain the biggest profit in Britain and pay for the next voyage.
- Bristol, Liverpool and London were the main ports involved in the slave trade. In 1755 there were 237 licensed slave traders in Bristol, 147 in London and 89 in Liverpool. There were also slave traders operating from Glasgow, Chester, Exeter, and Whitehaven. By 1770 Liverpool was the leading slave trade port with 40% of all slave ships.

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THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

KP3

BACKGROUND

The transport of slaves from West Africa to the West Indies became known as the 'Middle Passage' because it was the middle stage of the Triangular Trade route used by British merchants. African slaves were treated as cargo by the traders and were packed into the hold of the ship with no thought for their human rights or their health and safety. Slave ships could use either 'a loose pack' or a 'tight pack'. In a loose pack slaves had more space to move, lie down and sit up which meant that most of them survived the voyage. In a tight pack slaves were crammed together with very little space between them and many more died during the passage. By the second half of the eighteenth century more ships were using a tight pack because it brought bigger profits and British ships were carrying about 50,000 slaves a year. It has been estimated that more than 450,000 Africans died on British ships during the horrific 'middle passage'. One African historian wrote: -

“If the Atlantic Ocean were to dry up, it would reveal a pathway of human bones, African bones marking the route of the Middle Passage.”

- African slaves came from a huge area of the continent. Some were marched hundreds of miles and spent weeks or even months in a slave factory or baracoon before beginning the terrible 'middle passage' to the West Indies.
- Slaves were shackled together in pairs with leg-irons and ferried to the ships in canoes. Once aboard, their clothes were removed and they were branded with a red-hot iron, like cattle, to show who owned them.
- Slaves were then packed tightly into the ship's hold. The men were kept in chains and lay on specially built shelves with about 0.5 metres between them. While in the hold slaves had to remain lying flat on their backs.
- Women and children had separate quarters, sometimes on deck and were often allowed to move about the ship but this put them at risk of violence and sexual abuse from the crew
- At sea, the slaves were brought up on deck each morning. The men's' leg-irons were linked to a chain running down the centre of the ship's deck to prevent them jumping overboard. On some ships they were made to dance for exercise.
- In the darkness and filth of the hold seasickness and disease were rife. The temperature could be over 30°C and the slaves had no toilets or washing facilities. In these conditions disease spread and many slaves died. Their bodies would be thrown overboard. Royal Navy sailors said that they could smell the stench of a ship carrying slaves anything up to 10 miles downwind.
- The slaves were fed porridge made from maize or millet. While on deck a good captain had the slaves washed down with warm vinegar and scrubbed. Some did not bother and in bad weather the slaves would not be allowed out at all.
- Bad weather might make the crossing longer than planned, leading to a shortage of food and water. Sometimes, slave ship captains threw Africans overboard to save provisions. Sick slaves were also thrown over the side. The Africans were insured like cattle and the captain could make a claim for 'losses'.
- The crews of slave ships were always afraid of a revolt and discipline was imposed by floggings, torture and hangings. Very few slave revolts on ships were successful. Even if the Africans did get control of a ship, they did not know how to navigate and steer the vessel to shore.

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PLANTATION LIFE

KP4

BACKGROUND

When a slave ship arrived in the West Indies the crew prepared the Africans for sale. They washed, shaved and rubbed them with palm oil and rust or black lead to hide any sores and some times a plug of tar or rope was inserted into a slave's anus to hide the signs of dysentery. Slaves were usually sold by auction. The ship's gun would be fired and buyers would gather for the sale. The slaves were treated like animals, not human beings. Slaves were brought in one at a time and stood on a chair to be prodded poked, inspected and then sold to the highest bidder. At a 'scramble' auction buyers paid a set price, then the doors of the auction yard were opened and buyers rushed in to grab any slaves they could get their hands on. Any who were too sick to sell were left to die on the pier. Plantation owners liked to pick and choose their slaves to get a 'mixture' of Africans from various tribes (they thought this would prevent rebellions). Slave families were split up and sent to different plantations and friendships made during the voyage were also broken. The slaves now existed only to work. They had no future other than a life of endless labour - and their children after them, and their grandchildren, for all time.

- Immediately owners began to break in new slaves. They brutally forced Africans to adapt to new working and living conditions, learn a new language and take a new name. Many died or committed suicide. Others resisted and were punished.
- Most slaves, including women and children, worked on sugar plantations where conditions were very harsh. They were forced to work a 12-hour day and at harvest time work was almost non-stop. Slaves were subjected to severe discipline, torture, cruelty and sexual abuse.
- Most slaves, including women and children were field hands. They cleared and ploughed the land. Then holes 15cm deep were dug for plants, a backbreaking task for the line of slaves who moved slowly across the field with the whips of the overseers ready to lash at them. At harvest time the sugar cane was cut and tied in bundles to be carried to the mills.
- Sugar was made by crushing the cane then boiling the juice. Slaves often had fingers trapped and crushed in the giant rollers as they fed in the cane. In the boilers, the scum that formed on top of the boiling syrup had to be ladled off, a tricky and dangerous job.
- Working in the sugar boiling house was very unpleasant. The smell was like sickly manure and the heat was unbearable. Arms and legs swelled up in the hot, damp atmosphere and even the strongest slaves could not work in the boiling house for more than four hours.
- The slaves lived in flimsy huts that were draughty and cold in winter. They were fed only the cheapest food and meat was almost never eaten. Salt herrings from England often turned rotten before they arrived. On some plantations slave families were given small gardens to grow yams and vegetables and raise pigs and poultry.
- Some slaves tried to escape, but if caught they got no mercy from their owners, who would want to make an example of them. Terrible whippings and torture were common. Some slaves had their hands or feet cut off. Owners could also execute slaves who rebelled.
- On average slaves in the British West Indies survived for only seven years. By that time planters calculated they had made a return on their investment.

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RESISTANCE AND REVOLT

KP5

BACKGROUND

Africans resisted their loss of freedom by individual acts of resistance and by organised revolts. Most of these revolts were unsuccessful and were severely punished. Resistance began in Africa. Villages that were attacked usually fought to avoid capture and enslavement but they stood little chance with knives and spears against slave raiders armed with rifles and pistols. On the journey to the coast slaves captives were chained together with leg irons and roped together in a coffle. Any attempt to escape or resist resulted in a flogging or even death. When they reached the coast captive slaves were kept in chains and imprisoned in a slave factory or a baracoon where they were closely watched day and night. Once on board ship captains and crews were always worried about revolts. They searched the holds daily for possible weapons and severely punished any acts of resistance. In the West Indies Africans faced brutal treatment and a total lack of freedom. This was because owners lived in constant fear of rebellion. Owners and overseers abused their slaves and inflicted cruel punishments for even small mistakes in the belief that this would put an end to any thought of resistance and slaves would be too scared to disobey.

- Once on board ship some slaves committed suicide by jumping overboard and drowning, or by starving themselves. To prevent this nets were placed at the side of the ships to catch slaves. Those who refused to eat were force fed using an iron jaw-opener or tortured until they ate.
- There were many attempts by slaves to take over ships during the middle passage. They attacked and killed members of the crew. Most of these revolts were unsuccessful and resulted in severe floggings and execution of the ringleaders. Even if they were successful, slaves did not have the skills to navigate and steer the ship.
- When they arrived in the West Indies slaves were weak and in no state to resist after the middle passage. Slaves from the same tribe were usually split up to stop them joining together in rebellions.
- There were slave rebellions against plantation owners but they were usually put down quickly. Slave owners had guns and were backed up by the army if this was necessary to put down rebellions. Rebellion usually meant a long painful death for slaves who took part.
- Plantation slaves in the West Indies attempted to escape but very few were successful. Some set up communities in the swamps and mountains out of the reach of slave-owners.
- Runaway slaves found it difficult to survive and were easily identified by their skin colour and the brand mark of their owner. Rewards were offered for the return of runaway slaves and there were professional hunters who made their living re-capturing escaped slaves.
- If caught runaways were punished by flogging or being forced to wear heavy iron collars around heir necks. Repeated attempts to escape could lead to a hand or foot being cut off or even death.
- Many slaves pretended to be stupid, worked slowly and broke tools and machines or committed acts of individual revenge.
- Slaves were in a strange land far from home with no hope of getting back and no place to run to. Punishments for slaves were painful and cruel -it took a lot of courage to resist.

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BACKGROUND

When the first Europeans came into contact with Africa they found societies on the West Coast that were settled peaceful and well ordered. The Kingdoms of Yoruba and Benin had a highly developed culture and the city of Timbuktu was greatly admired by European visitors. In the interior of the continent most tribes lived by farming and herding animals. The peace was occasionally disrupted by inter-tribal wars but these were short lived and according to European observers they were mostly shows of strength and resulted in few actual deaths. At first Europeans traded with Africa for gold, silver, copper, ivory, palm oil and spices. This changed with the discovery and colonisation of America and the demand for workers this created. By the eighteenth century Europeans came to see Africa simply as a source of slaves and there was no shortage of greedy African rulers willing to capture and sell fellow Africans. The trade in slaves caused terrible suffering and Africa lost millions of its youngest and best people.

- Slavery existed in Africa before Europeans arrived. Slaves were taken as prisoners of war, in payment for debt or as a punishment for a crime.
- African kings wanted European goods, especially guns, and were willing to trade slaves for them. Those who obtained a lot of guns became more powerful and could capture more slaves. Selling slaves made many African chiefs very rich.
- By providing firearms Europeans encouraged and increased warfare and political instability in West Africa. Some states, such as Ashanti and Dahomey lived by organizing slave raids and grew powerful and wealthy as a result. Other less powerful societies were destroyed.
- The slave trade led to a big increase in wars, raids and kidnapping. Tens of thousands of people could be slaughtered in a single battle. The wars and kidnappings made Africa a dangerous violent place where people could no longer live in peace and safety. Tribes who had lived in peace became enemies and their whole way of life was destroyed.
- The loss of life that this constant warfare caused must have been enormous. The destruction of crops and granaries led to starvation. Some of the best farmland in Africa was abandoned or destroyed and people moved to less fertile areas to escape from slave raids and wars.
- The long march to the coast by millions of captives shackled together in coffles, over hundreds of miles, must have been just as deadly. It has been estimated that something like 30 per cent of the captives died before reaching the coast.
- Africa lost a large number of people who were taken as slaves – possibly 20-30 million. Most of the slaves taken were males aged 15-25 – the most important working age group.
- The slave trade stopped economic development in Africa. The loss of so many people damaged farm production. Manufacturing and crafts were destroyed by cheap European imports. African cloth makers could not compete with cheap cloth from Britain.
- It was during the slave trade and slavery that white people began to think they were better than black Africans. White traders who bought black people and packed them onto slave ships like cattle believed themselves to be superior.
- Slave trading became the main source of wealth in Africa and was seen as a normal way of life. This was very damaging to African societies and is the root cause of many of the problems of modern Africa.

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THE EFFECTS OF SLAVE TRADE: BRITAIN

KP7

BACKGROUND

The profits from the slave trade were tremendous. One of the first English slave traders, Sir John Hawkins made two slaving voyages from Guinea to the Caribbean in 1562 and 1564. The profits from these made him the richest man in England. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch were the main slave traders but British involvement gradually increased. Under the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 Britain gained the right to supply Spanish colonies with 160,000 slaves each year. By the 1730s the British ships dominated the Atlantic slave trade. British merchant sold slaves in the West Indies, America and the Spanish colonies in South America. For the rest of the century, until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, Britain was the world's leading slave trader. The slave trade dominated the British economy. It supplied Britain with sugar, chocolate, rum and coffee to consume, American cotton cloth to wear and tobacco to smoke. Between 1700 and 1810 British ships carried about 3.4 million African slaves across the Atlantic. From 1699 to 1807 there were 12,103 slaving voyages from British ports.

3,351 from London
2,105 from Bristol
5,199 from Liverpool

- Two hundred years of trading in African slaves allowed Britain to become a world economic power and helped to finance the Industrial Revolution. British merchants involved in the slave trade became very rich.
- Britain sold many goods (cloth, metals, guns) to Africa. The trade provided work for thousands of manufacturers of cloth, metal and guns.
- Britain imported valuable produce (sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton) paid for by the sale of slaves. Much of this was re-exported to Europe for very large profits
- The slave trade made Britain the world's leading sea power. More ships were needed and thousands of jobs were created making ships, sails, ropes etc. The trade provided thousands of sailors with work.
- The government got most of its money from customs duties (tax) related to the slave trade. The government tightly controlled the trade and all slave ships had to be licensed.
- Banking and insurance services developed as a result of the slave trade. Many well known British banks and businesses - Lloyds insurance market, Imperial Tobacco, the Midland Bank and more - grew out of slave labour and slave dealing.
- The trade led to the growth of ports such as Bristol and Liverpool. The slave trade made Liverpool one of the largest ports in the world and led to a big increase in the population of the town.
- New docks and warehouses were built and thousand were employed as dock workers etc. Liverpool became an important center of shipbuilding. Many manufacturers and craftsmen moved to the town and worked making goods for the trade.
- The slave trade brought a lot of money to the town- many Liverpool merchants became very wealthy. Many of the public buildings in Liverpool (and private mansions) were built from the profits of the slave trade.

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THE ABOLITIONIST CAMPAIGN

KP8

BACKGROUND

In 1781 Captain Collingwood of the slave ship Zong threw more than 100 slaves overboard and tried to claim insurance. The court case, which followed, was reported in newspapers and brought the slave trade into public view. The Quakers who set up a committee to abolish slavery in 1783 started the abolitionist movement. In 1787 other religious groups opposed to slavery came together to form the **Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade**. They set up branches all over Britain and organised the first, and one of the most successful, public campaigns in history. This was due to three men in particular – Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce. The abolitionist opposed the whole idea of slavery but recognised that the government would not interfere with the property rights of slave owners and that it would cost too much to compensate them for the loss of their slaves. They believed that if they could persuade Parliament to abolish the trade in slaves this would eventually lead to the end of slavery and that slave owners would treat their slaves better because they would become more valuable.

THE ABOLITIONISTS

- **Granville Sharp**, a lawyer won the cases of escaped slaves Jonathan Strong (1765) and James Somerset (1771). Owners now had rights over a slave only if the slave agreed in writing and they could not force a slave to return to a foreign country – Africans now had legal rights in Britain.
- **Thomas Clarkson** interviewed 20,000 sailors and collected equipment used on slave-ships such as iron handcuffs, leg-shackles, thumbscrews, jaw-openers and branding irons. He spoke at public meetings and produced pamphlets and books showing the cruelty of the slave trade.
- **William Wilberforce** led the campaign in Parliament. In 1787 he introduced a Bill to abolish the slave trade. It was thrown out, but in 1792 MPs agreed to abolition. However war with France saved the trade. Wilberforce introduced an abolition Bill every year and in 1807 finally succeeded.

ABOLITIONIST ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE SLAVE TRADE

It was immoral and against the Bible and God's will to use other human beings as slaves.

The trade caused cruelty, suffering and thousands of deaths.

Slaves were treated very badly during the horrific middle passage and many died.

The slave trade led to wars, death and destruction in Africa.

American and French revolutionaries and many writers argued all humans had a right to be free.

Some opponents believed that if the slave trade stopped, all slavery would soon end.

Adam Smith argued that slaves were more expensive than free labour.

British trade with India and the Far East was increasing where cheaper sugar could be produced.

The slave trade prevented the development of British industry and the creation of new jobs in Britain.

The trade led to the deaths of thousands of British sailors.

METHODS OF THE ABOLITIONISTS

Books, newspapers, posters and pamphlets, letters to newspapers to gain public support.

Olaudah Equiano, a former slave published his autobiography telling of his experiences as a slave – It was a best seller and became one of the most important abolitionist books.

John Newton, a former slave ship captain spoke at meetings and published a book about the evils of the slave trade

Abolitionists collected signatures and sent hundreds of petitions to Parliament

Josiah Wedgewood produced a cameo of a poor African begging to be free – thousands were sold.

Large public meetings were held and clergymen used Sunday sermons to condemn the slave trade

Abolitionists campaigned to persuade people not to buy sugar produced by slaves.

In Parliament, William Wilberforce argued against the trade and introduced Bills to abolish it.

The Society for Abolition organised witnesses to give evidence to Parliament about the slave trade.

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SUPPORT FOR THE SLAVE TRADE

KP9

It is difficult to understand how a civilised Christian country like Britain could allow the misery and cruelty of the slave trade to continue. However, until it was abolished the slave trade remained very profitable and there were powerful groups who wanted it to continue. The King, members of the Government, the Anglican Church, the Aristocracy and business and trading interests not only supported slavery but also allowed it to develop in a more extreme and cruel form than any other nation. However, it is important to remember that very few people in Britain came into direct contact with the slave trade. Even the merchants who made fortunes from the trade knew little of the cruelty or turned a blind eye to it. For many of them the trade in slaves was no more than a neat row of figures in an accounts book.

THE SUPPORTERS OF THE SLAVE TRADE

- The merchants and councillors of Liverpool were opposed to the abolition of the slave trade because they claimed it would damage their business and threaten prosperity and jobs in the town.
- British owners of plantations in the West Indies did not want the trade to end because they needed cheap labour.
- Manufacturers who supplied trade goods for Africa did not want the trade to end.

ANTI-ABOLITIONIST ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE SLAVE TRADE

Britain's position as the world's greatest naval power depended on the slave trade.

The trade employed thousands of British sailors and taught them seafaring skills.

Abolition of the slave trade would destroy Britain's empire and her sea power.

The slave trade was very profitable and brought huge wealth to Britain.

The government got most of its money from taxes related to the slave trade.

Plantation owners argued that abolition would ruin them and there would be no sugar etc.

Other countries would take over the trade and the profits if Britain abolished it.

Africans were happier, civilized and could be converted to Christianity when they were slaves.

Slaves were prisoners of war and would be killed if they could not be sold.

Some argued that abolitionists were exaggerating and that slaves were well treated on British ships.

Some people believed that abolition of the trade would lead to slave revolts in the West Indies.

Many people had racist views and believed Africans were inferior, not ready for freedom and it was God's will that they should be slaves.

After 1792, Britain was at war with France and people argued that the country needed money from the slave trade.

METHODS OF THE ANTI-ABOLITIONISTS

Merchants set up organisations to oppose the abolitionists.

Anti abolitionist petitions were sent to Parliament.

The African Committee and the West Indies Planters Association were set up to oppose abolition.

The ruling Assemblies of West Indian Islands sent petitions to Parliament in support of slavery.

Slave owning Members of Parliament voted against abolition of the slave trade.

Merchants and plantation owners bribed members of Parliament to vote against abolition.

Anti abolitionists gave evidence to Parliament claiming the trade was vital to Britain and was not cruel

Letters were written to newspapers supporting the slave trade.

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THE END OF THE SLAVE TRADE

KP10

BACKGROUND

It took twenty years of campaigning, from 1787 until 1807, before the slave trade was finally abolished. In 1792, Wilberforce gained House of Commons support for a Bill that would gradually end the trade but no timetable was agreed for abolition. Again in 1793 Wilberforce reintroduced his Bill but this time it was blocked. Britain was now at war with France and Parliament was worried about the spread of revolution. In 1792 the French Assembly abolished slavery and abolition became associated with revolutionary ideas from France. Many MPs believed that it would not be a good idea to abolish slavery while Britain was at war. It was thought that the profits from the slave trade were needed to pay for the war and that the slave trade provided sailors for the Royal Navy. It was argued that the French might take over the slave trade if Britain abolished it. The slave revolt on the French island of Haiti led to the slaughter of white planters and the freed slaves set up an independent state. The army of ex-slaves on Haiti led by Toussaint L'Ouverture defeated the French, Spanish and British forces and there was concern that they would set free the slaves on other Caribbean islands. Abolition of the slave trade might encourage slaves in the British West Indies to rebel. Despite these setbacks Wilberforce introduced a Bill for the abolition of the slave trade every year until he was finally successful in 1807.

The 1807 ACT FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

- It became illegal for British subjects to buy or sell slaves.
- British ships were forbidden to carry slaves.
- Ships carrying slaves could be confiscated if caught.
- The Royal navy was given powers to stop and search any ship suspected of carrying slaves.
- Individuals who were caught had to pay a fine of £100 – around £5,000 in today's money.
- British merchants and ship owners could be fined £100 for each slave found on their ships.
- Insurance of slave ships was forbidden - companies who disobeyed were heavily fined.
- Repeat offences could lead to imprisonment or transportation.

WHY THE SLAVE TRADE WAS ABOLISHED

- Abolitionists got public support by a brilliant propaganda and publicity campaign.
- They were successful in persuading many people not to buy sugar produced by slave labour.
- They were able to persuade a majority of MPs to vote for the abolition of the slave trade.
- Wilberforce was very persistent and his Bill abolishing the slave trade became law in 1807.
- Abolitionists attacked the slave trade and not all slavery - this would have been more difficult.
- Most religious groups and churches in Britain were against the slave trade.
- In 1776 after the American War of Independence Britain lost her North American trade in slaves.
- More of Britain's trade was with India and the Far East
- By 1807 British industry had new markets and the slave trade was not so important.
- Sugar from Brazil and India was cheaper than slave-produced sugar from the West Indies.
- During the war against France Britain gained more islands in the Caribbean and plantation owners did not want competition from new plantations.
- Abolition of the slave trade gave the British navy an excuse to stop ships from other countries and confiscate their cargoes and the ships.
- The high death rate of Africans led to a big fall in population on slave islands compared to areas where Africans were free.