

Slavery and Reparative Justice

by

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British slavery in the West Indies was Chattel Slavery and was legal. This slavery was supported by a Slave Trade which was abolished in 1807. One important aspect of the abolition of the slave trade was that the powerful Scottish politician Henry Dundas proposed successfully in Parliament in 1792 that this trading in slaves should be "gradually" abolished. This prolonged the Slave Trade for another 15 years during which time about 630,000 African people were transported into slavery. There were about 800,000 British Slaves in the West Indies when slavery was finally abolished in 1838.

About 30% of the slave plantations in the British West Indies were owned by Scots. There is now significant evidence of Scotland's involvement in this slavery. It is worth noting that documents such as the Jamaica Telephone Directory contain a significant number of Scottish surnames. Many place names in Jamaica are Scottish in origin and the flags of Jamaica and Scotland are of the same design.

The year 2007 was the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Slave Trade. Since this date there has been a significant growth in interest in this slavery. Evidence seems to suggest that many Scottish people were not aware of the extent to which Scotland was involved in the practice of British slavery in the West Indies. It is this 'public interest' that has induced institutions to adopt a more serious approach to the study of Chattel Slavery. This extends from schools to universities to national and international organisations. Including this history in the curriculum of schools will help to reduce racial prejudices associated with slavery.

It is clear that many of our racial prejudices are based on the cruelties of Chattel Slavery. We cannot change the past but we can change the consequences. Glasgow University's report (2018), on its links with historical slavery, deals with its approach to redress the consequences of slavery.

Between 2016 and 2018, the University of Glasgow, which dates from 1451, carried out research to investigate the financial benefits received from historical racial slavery. It was decided that this research project would recommend "reparative justice" based on Enlightenment ideals and contain a statement on the relationship between the University and the history of racial slavery. This report appeared in September 2018. It was widely complimented for the details revealed about the financial benefits the University received from West Indian slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The report stated that the University never owned slaves or traded in the goods they produced and it supported the abolition of the slave trade. However, the University received about £200M in terms of Legacies, Prizes and Donations. The contributions of various slave owners are outlined, for example, Robert Cunninghame Graham (1735-1797), travelled to Jamaica from Scotland in 1752 and returned to Scotland in 1771, a rich man. His wealth came from owning and trading in slaves. He became Rector of Glasgow University in 1785 to 1787 and

was a Member of Parliament for Stirlingshire between 1794 and 1796. He donated the Gartmore Prize in 1788 which is still of great financial value today.

Another slave owner who is associated with the history of the University is Robert Bogle. Both he and his brother Hugh Bogle owned slaves in Jamaica. The Gilbert Scott building, Gilmore Hill, on the University campus, was built on Robert Bogle's 1802 estate in Glasgow. One of the National Heroes of Jamaica is Paul Bogle. In 1865 he was executed for challenging colonial injustices in Jamaica. Was there a greater link, than the name Bogle, between black Paul Bogle and the white slave-owning Bogles of Glasgow and Jamaica...were they family? Such is the legacy of this slavery.

Famous economists and philosophers such as Adam Smith and Professor John Millar are associated with the Enlightened Education for which Glasgow University is well known. They suggested in the 18th century that slavery was economically inefficient because paid workers work more efficiently. The great profitability of Chattel Slavery at that time allowed slave owners to disregard a concept that was applied successfully to servants in Britain. Nevertheless, Millar was concerned that despite enlightened thinking in Britain, Britain was enslaving black people in the West Indies who were regarded as 'property'. Indeed, at the emancipation of slavery in 1833-1834 slave owners were given £20M compensation for their 'slave property'.

An important objective of Glasgow University's slavery project was to set out a programme of "reparative justice". The transfer of funds to organisations or individuals was not part of this programme. The intention of the programme was to increase the racial diversity of students and staff and to reduce attainment gaps in society. Scholarships would be awarded to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students of Afro-Caribbean descent in order to reduce under-representation in the University.

This programme also includes the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of the West Indies and the University of Glasgow, designed to fit the needs of staff and students in areas such as medicine, engineering and advanced research areas such as health, history of slaveries and their legacies. Short term professorial exchanges would also be considered.

A commemorative plaque will be placed on the Gilbert Scott building, Gilmore Hill, to remember that this building stands where the house of the slave owner Robert Bogle stood in 1802. Also, a new building has been named after James McCune Smith – the first black American student, an ex-slave, who graduated in medicine at the University in 1837, a year before British slavery was abolished in 1838.

On the 9th April, 2019, Reach Society will hold its 8th free careers conference in London with regard to Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM). Reach Society, which promotes the education of black children will be supported by representatives from Glasgow University for the first time. At present, this is an *active* part of Glasgow University's programme of 'reparative justice'. I was an adviser to this independent project of Glasgow University and I hope that this contact between the University and the Black

community will remain an important part of the "reparative justice" programme of the University. Education and reparation go together.

The importance of diversity is that we are all different but have the same humanity...there are no colours to our hearts. We should not need laws to protect human rights. However, although Equality Laws can limit racism an honest approach to the history of Chattel Slavery, such as that applied by Glasgow University, should lead to a better understanding of the causes and cures of racial prejudice. It is my hope that this 'first light', lit by Glasgow University, will be followed by other institutions and organisations.