

Abolition of Slavery; Historiography

This overview has been compiled by Patrick O'Shaughnessy (@historychappy) using the works below. When quotes are used, they correspond to the relevant colour.

- **Carrie Gibson, Empire's Crossroads, 2014.**
- **Robert Tombs, The English & their History, 2014.**
- **Lawrence James, The Rise and Fall of the British Empire, 1998.**
- **Matthew Parker, The Sugar Barons, 2012.**
- **John Darwin, Unfinished Empire, 2012.**
- **Ian Thomson, The Dead Yard, 2009.**

Abolition

- *"There was an economic element to the end of slavery. The cost of sugar production had risen sharply on the British islands."*

(By 1787, the cost of producing a hundredweight of sugar was 75% more than 50 years previously. The price of slaves had risen by 140%. By 1806, the price of sugar in London was down 75% on the 1793 price.)

- *"Jamaica's sugar exports throughout most of the nineteenth century were around 20,000 tons a year - down from a peak of 100,000 tons in 1800."*
- *In 1807, the efforts of William Wilberforce and thousands of abolitionists in Britain were finally successful - a bill was passed by 41 to 20 in the House of Lords, and 114 to 15 in the Commons to outlaw the slave trade, and the Slave Trade Act entered the statute books on 25 March 1807."*
- *"... while the British were - and remain - rightly proud of their humanitarian leanings in stopping the trade, it seems to ignore the fact that the slaves in Saint-Domingue were the vanguard of true abolition."*
- *"As ever more tales of brutality and injustice reached the public, attitudes began to change ... in 1789, British audiences were the first to hear the story of slavery from an African himself, in Olaudah Equiano's account. People now not only heard of the horrors of the Slave Trade and Middle Passage, but they did so from someone who had lived through it."*

- **"... after the French were deprived of most of their Caribbean trade by the great Saint-Domingue slave revolt in 1791, hard-headed English politicians could contemplate abolition not only as morally desirable, but as politically feasible."**
- **"The power of the anti-slavery movement owed much to the energy and singlemindedness of its leaders, William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson."**
- **"... there were slave uprisings in Barbados in 1816, in Jamaica in 1823, 1824 and 1830, and in British Guiana in 1823. The last was a nuisance to the Colonial Office which was hard pressed to find additional troops to put it down."**
- **"Adam Smith ... argued in favour of free (not slave) labour. To increase the productivity of their workers, slave-owners could not sack them or lower their wages, but could only whip them."**
- **1772 Somerset Case & Granville Sharp: "It was a great victory, interpreted by the public as the prohibition of slavery in Britain."**
- **"In the West Indies, there was an almost palpable sense of decline in the years following the abolition of the slave trade. The sugar price rose briefly in 1814-15, but by 1822 had fallen by half, as sugar from newly exploited territories in Cuba, Mauritius and India started flooding the market."**
- **"After intense public agitation against slavery, the election that followed the Great Reform Act in 1832 brought many more MPs into Parliament who were committed to the abolition slavery."**
- **"The sugar money, flashed around in England, had never smelt quite right. Now, for many in Britain (in the 1800s), the whole West Indian imperial adventure stank, and was a cause for national regret."**
- **"Abolition was hastened by the Haitian slave uprising."**
- **"The Baptist uprising (1831-1832) under Samuel Sharpe, and the retributions that followed, at long last convinced Britain that the price for maintaining slavery was too high ... Though the loss of life in the campaign was low, huge damage, valued at GBP1.25 million, was done to plantations**

across Jamaica ... In the witch-hunt for agitators, the Reverend Bridges called for Baptist missionaries to be hanged; many were beaten and tarred ... The burning of Baptist Churches profoundly shocked the British public and made their demands for emancipation the more clamorous."

- ***"The influence of Baptist missionaries and catechists was widely blamed by the planters for the Jamaica rebellion. The slave Sam Sharpe, its main instigator, was just such a preacher."***
- ***"The slave rebellions of the British West Indies after 1815, especially the Jamaica rebellion at Christmas 1831, in which some 20,000 slaves joined, were the final proof that abolition could not be delayed any longer; the abolition act followed in 1833."***