



A demonstrator with letters 'BLM' written on her forehead attends a protest at the Place de la République square, in Paris, June 2020

# LEGACY & LASTING IMPACT

*An exploration into the lasting legacies of more than 400 years of transatlantic trafficking of enslaved African people*

Written by Josephine Hall

We can't be sure how many African people were enslaved during more than 400 years of the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement they endured. Most records only count the people that arrived alive, not the millions who died during raiding and transporting while still in Africa, or during the horrifying journey across the Atlantic known as the Middle Passage. Estimates vary from 12 million to 100 million people. UNESCO estimates that 30 million African people were forcibly uprooted from their homeland during this time. Given the level of trauma, death and oppression over such an extended

period of time, there has been a deep, lasting impact experienced in the ancestral communities of both the captives and captors, around the world. From the west coast of Africa (where most enslaved people were taken from), to countries like Britain, Brazil, France and the United States (who were some of the main perpetrators of the atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade, and also where many of the African diaspora now reside), to the countries in the Caribbean and South America that were once colonies of Britain or other European countries, the lasting legacies of hundreds of years of trafficking and enslaving African people are woven intricately into the fabric of our societies.

Image: Alamy

### SYSTEMIC RACISM

The terms 'systemic racism' or 'institutional racism' are now widely understood and there has been a lot of research that evidences their existence within structures and systems across the world. It is increasingly accepted that there is a direct connection between these structural inequalities and the institutional racism experienced by the African diaspora today.

The Covid-19 crisis exposed some of these more hidden inequalities – a 2020 study estimated that Black people in the US were 3.57 times more likely to die from Covid-19 than White people, UK Government statistics showed Covid was also more lethal for BAME people in the UK, and a Brazilian study found that 55 per cent of Black and mixed-race Covid patients died, compared to 38 per cent of White patients.

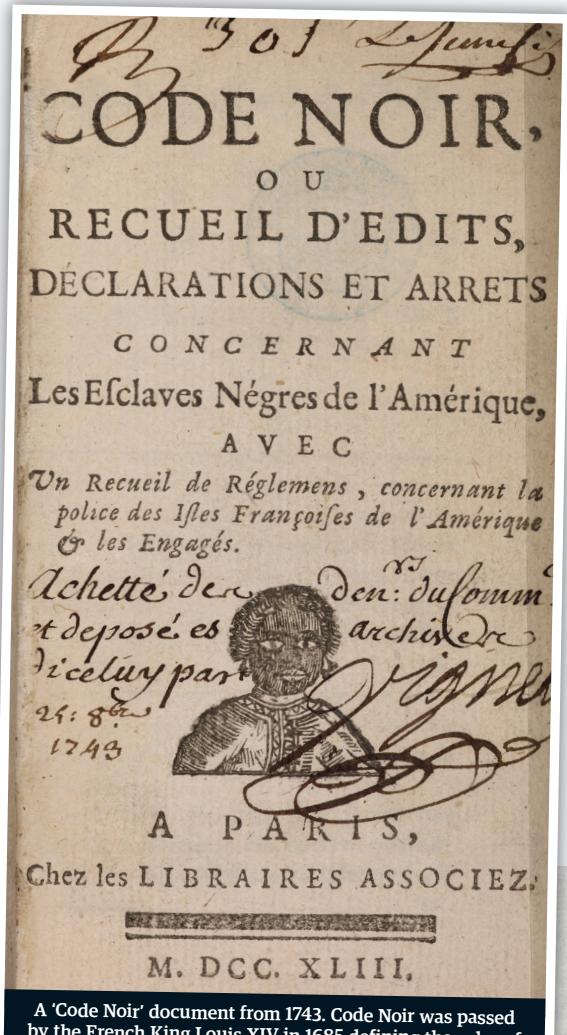
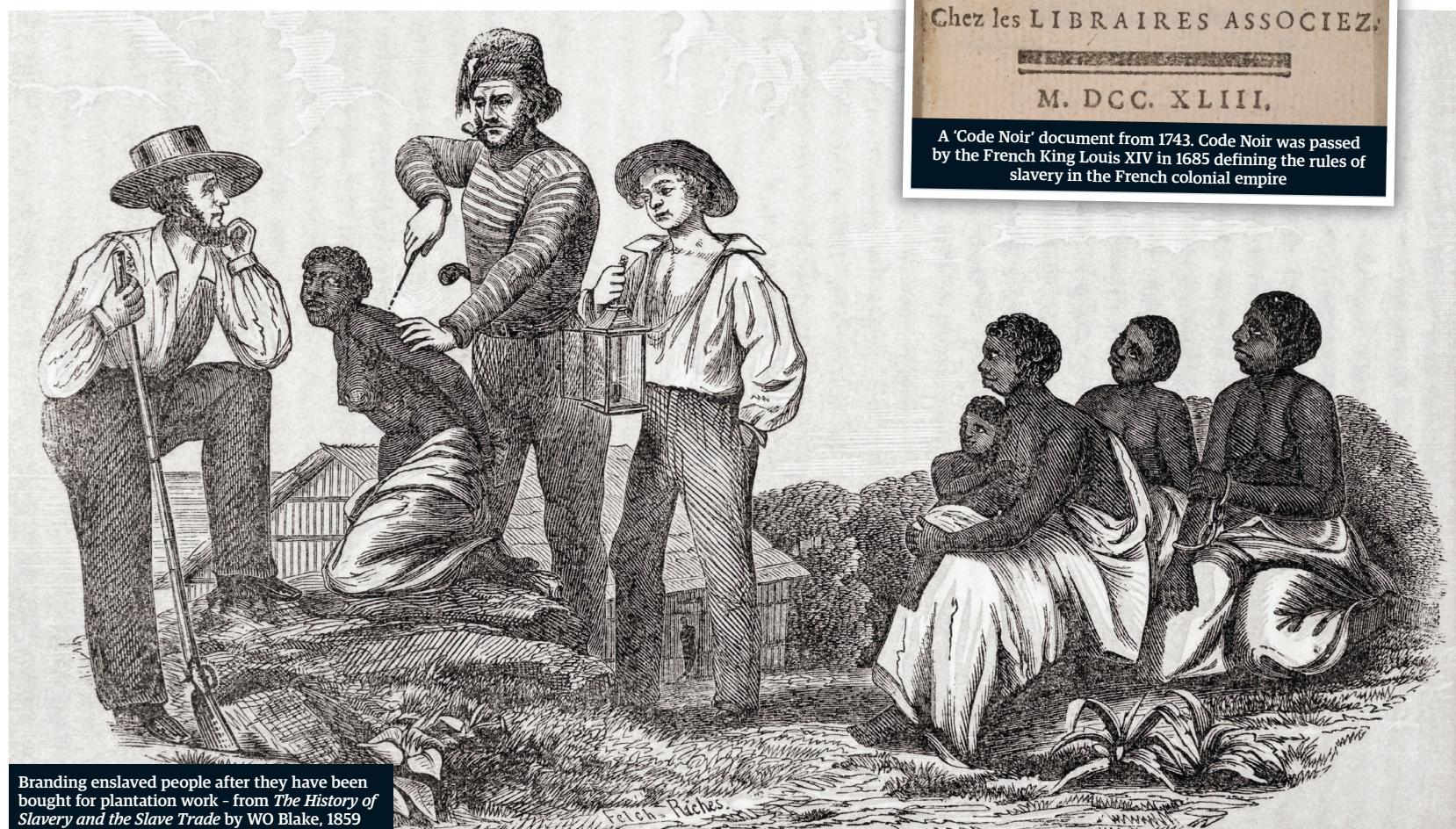
The disparity in these figures between ethnic groups is no surprise when we look at the other documented figures around healthcare inequalities between different groups. For

example, there have been several research studies in the US that have shown that Black adults and children are less likely to be given pain medication. A 2016 study discovered that many White medical students held the same false beliefs (such as Black people having thicker skin or less sensitive nerve endings) that were used by some 19th-century doctors to justify the inhumane treatment of enslaved people.

In 2021, the British government published a controversial report that claimed institutional racism did not exist. It received extensive criticism, with anti-racism campaigners describing it as a 'whitewash' of the lived experiences of people of colour and UN experts calling it an "attempt to normalize white supremacy".

A 2021 survey of nearly 1,300 workers from BME backgrounds in Britain, carried out by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), found that more than a third reported that they had been unfairly turned down for a job, a quarter said they had

***"Black people in the US were 3.57 times more likely to die from Covid-19"***





The 'Plantation Police' inspect the passes of enslaved Black men in 19th century Louisiana



African Americans are around three times more likely to be killed by the police than White Americans

been singled out for redundancy and 15 per cent of those who said they'd been harassed left their job because of racist treatment.

Many other indicators of how enslaving Africans until the 19th century still influences the structural racism found in today's institutions can be found across housing, education, employment and many other areas of society - in Britain, Europe, the United States and around the world.

#### WHAT DO THE POLICE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

In 1661, the British colony of Barbados passed its first 'slave law' - a special set of rules for "the good regulating and ordering" of enslaved people. Equivalent measures, sometimes called 'slave codes', were adopted in English and European colonies around the world. In 1797, Patrick Colquhoun - a London magistrate who had previously served as an agent for British cotton manufacturers and owned shares in sugar plantations in Jamaica - published *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, which later inspired Robert Peel to initiate the

establishment of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829.

In the US in 1829, a Black abolitionist in Boston named David Walker published a call for rebellion. Within the year, he was found dead and a series of mob attacks against other abolitionists in Boston followed. Walker's words had terrified Southern enslavers, and in response the governor of North Carolina formed a statewide 'patrol committee'. Even as the main players in the transatlantic slave trade began to abolish slavery throughout the 1800s, it did little to change the core purpose of policing - especially in the US, where all expressions of Black freedom were criminalised. Domestic security forces, which began as White vigilante groups, soon became formal law enforcement agencies and were designed not to ensure law and order for all citizens, but to 'protect' White communities from Black people.

#### DO THE POLICE OPERATE DIFFERENTLY NOW?

Centuries after the first police forces were created to control enslaved people and the

## Reparations Now!



A speaker at The Afrikan Emancipation Day Reparations March in Brixton, 2019 - calling on the government for "holistic reparatory justice" for the legacy of slavery

Black people have been calling for financial reparations throughout history, along with their calls for freedom and equality. Yet, this has repeatedly been met with resistance from governments around the world.

Writing for *The Guardian* in 2020, journalist and broadcaster Afua Hirsch wrote, "The debate about reparations has, conveniently, been branded extreme and unrealistic by those who don't want to pay them. We happily listen to the heir to the throne - who on Windrush Day said Britain owed a "debt of gratitude" to the people of the Caribbean - while ignoring the reality that what Britain owes is, in fact, a straight-up financial debt."

Despite the resistance of Western nations to the topic they have been comfortable with receiving compensation themselves. France extorted huge sums from Haiti for over a century, as reparations for loss of earnings when enslaved Africans on

the island overthrew their enslavers. In the United States, the Confederates who lost the civil war received compensation for their loss of 'property' (ie enslaved people). Similar examples can be found in the records of other countries, including the Netherlands, Colombia, Peru and Brazil.

Writing for the *New Statesman* in 2014, Priyamvada Gopal commented on the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans' crucial role in helping to set up capitalism itself - the system that we all live under today. She wrote, "Maybe this is why there is such resistance at governmental and corporate levels to opening up the question of reparations. It might lead us to ask why large corporations, like slave owners, receive bailouts or compensation for losses incurred, as did slave owners, but people who inherit landlessness and poverty, whether descendants of slaves or not, are repeatedly told not to expect help or benefits, to look to themselves."

working class, we can still see evidence of unequal and racist policing all over the world. In the US, African Americans are 20 per cent more likely to have their vehicles pulled over and about three times more likely than White Americans to be killed by police. In the UK in 2018-2019, Black people were eight times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than White people, and 43 times more likely to be stopped under the use of Section 60 - which allows police to stop people without suspicion that a crime is actually taking place. Metropolitan Police officers are also four times more likely to use force against Black people, compared to White people, according to Greater London Authority estimates released in 2020. Brazil is the country with the highest number of

killings perpetrated by the police worldwide. In Rio de Janeiro, more than three quarters of the close to 9,000 people killed by police between 2010 and 2020 were Black men.

Even in many Black majority countries, there is a historical disregard for Black life left over from colonial times that continues to form the basis of policing. Victims of police brutality in Jamaica are usually poor, and because of the distinct connection between class and colour on the island, usually dark-skinned. The colourism that plagues Jamaican society has its origins in the history of mixed-race children fathered by White enslavers - often as a result of sexual violence - that were given special privileges, such as exemption from working in the fields. When talking to *The World* in 2020, author and



University of Pennsylvania professor, Deborah Thomas said, "It [anti-Black violence] doesn't go away because there's a Black person in power, because, in fact, the societies were built on this."

In 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a milestone UN resolution to investigate the root causes of systemic racism and police violence. Led by three independent experts, and brought forward by the Group of African States, the investigation aims to examine systemic racism, particularly in law enforcement. It will also look into government responses to peaceful anti-racism protests, discriminatory policing and other human rights violations against African people and their descendants, all around the globe.

### DEFUND THE POLICE?

In light of the violence perpetrated by police officers, and the continued lack of protection for racialised communities, there have been calls to defund, or even entirely abolish, the police, from human rights and racial justice campaigners around the world. To some, this sounds radical. But advocates explain that it is about instead investing in services specifically designed to address issues in the community, such as rehabilitation, homelessness and mental health crisis. The concept of complete abolition may seem drastic, but the goal of the movement is simply to get to a place where police aren't needed, due to the strategic redistribution of resources, funding and power into specialised community-based alternatives.

In 2020, *The Guardian* reported that in the three months following George Floyd's murder,



a dozen local governments in the US moved to reduce their police budgets by more than \$1.4 billion - seeming to mark a significant shift in US politics. There have also been calls to defund the police in Britain, with organisations such as the youth advocacy group The 4Front Project campaigning for funding to be shifted from police forces into projects aimed at improving healthcare, education and social services. Temi Mwale, executive director of The4FP told CBS News in 2020, "We do not want to invest in institutions that are inherently violent, inherently racist, and that continue to perpetuate cycles of harm, violence and abuse in our communities. We would rather invest in services that... increase our protection and safety, that increase our ability to move forward and fight for racial justice."

In both the US and Britain, budget cuts to psychiatric services have resulted in police taking on more of a role when managing those in psychological distress. In 2015, a *Washington Post* analysis found that 25 per cent of those shot and killed by police in the United States, within a six-month period, were experiencing a mental health crisis. Other countries, such as

Sweden, operate differently - since 2015, they have deployed mental health professionals onto the streets, without police officers - freeing up police resources to focus on the fields they have expertise in.

#### BLACK LIVES MATTER

In 2013 in the US, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi created #BlackLivesMatter, in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin. In 2014, following the fatal shooting of Mike Brown by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, BLM gained national attention after street demonstrations were organised to support the Ferguson community. Since then, BLM has developed and organised into a decentralised political and social movement fighting against legacies of slavery - police brutality and racism against Black people.

Since George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in 2020, the movement has gained further international attention and an estimated 15 to 26 million people participated in the 2020 Black Lives



*"Black Lives Matter has developed into a decentralised movement fighting against legacies of slavery"*

Images: all Alamy except Getty Images (Marcus Garvey)

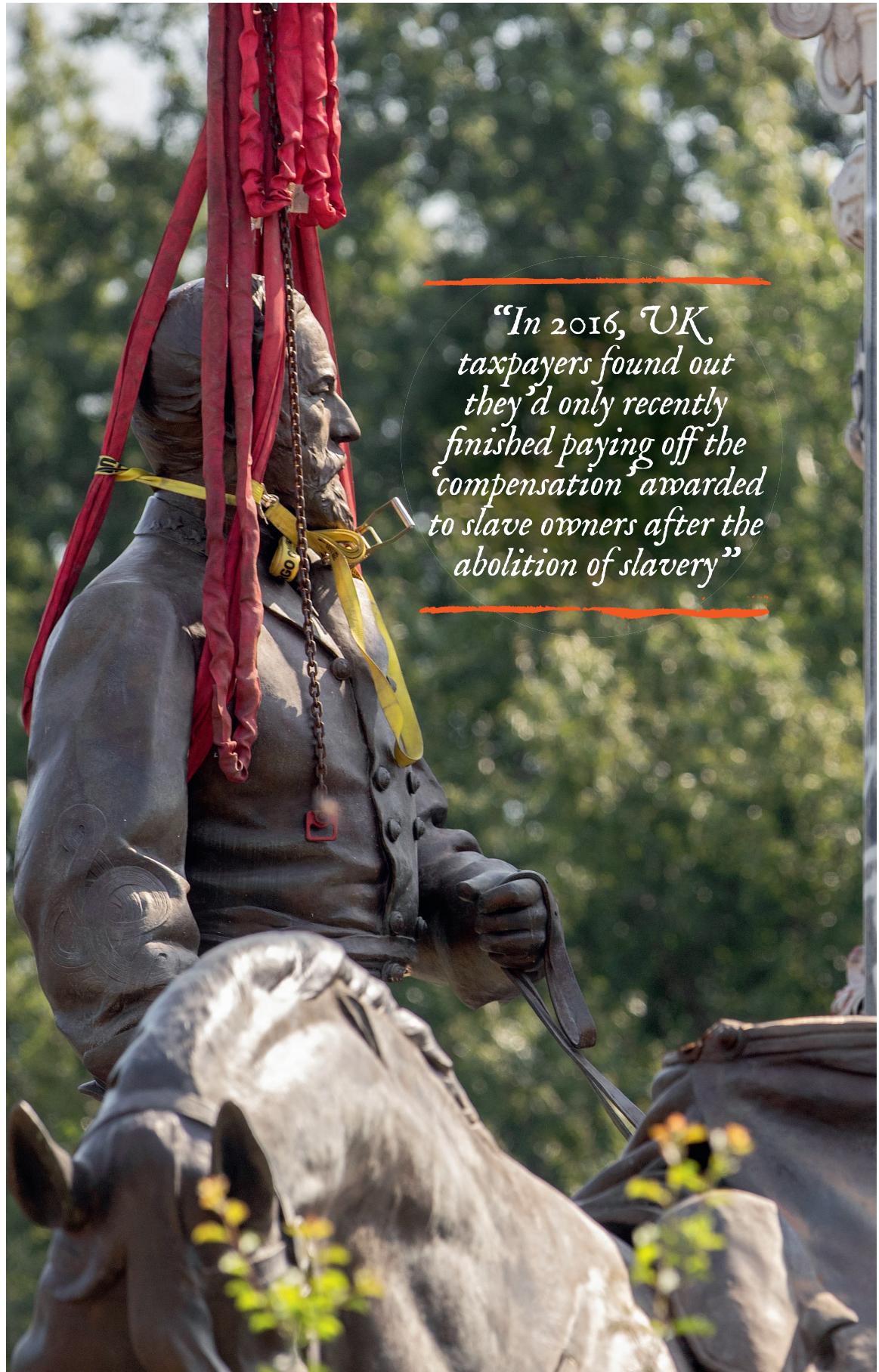
Matter protests in the United States - making it one of the largest movements in the country's history. BLM comprises many views and demands, but the focus is on criminal justice reform. There are also active and growing BLM movements happening all around the world, including in Britain, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, France and Canada.

### MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

In the United States, the origins of the staggering Black-White wealth gap can be traced back to the country's inception. African Americans' efforts to build wealth have been obstructed in many ways. From mismanagement of banks, to violent massacres such as in Tulsa's Greenwood District in 1921 (often referred to as 'Black Wall Street'), to countless discriminatory policies, such as Jim Crow's 'Black Codes' and 'redlining' - wealth has been systematically taken from Black communities in the US for centuries.

In 2016, taxpayers in the UK found out that they'd only recently finished paying off the 'compensation' awarded to slave owners after the abolition of slavery in 1833. In a now deleted tweet, the British Government's Treasury Department tried to offer a positive spin for its followers: "Here's today's surprising #FridayFact. Millions of you helped end the slave trade through your taxes." The tweet went on to explain how in 1833, Britain borrowed £20 million (40 per cent of the national budget, and around £17 billion in modern terms) in order to compensate 46,000 enslavers for their loss of property. The loan was one of the largest in history, and was not paid off until 2015, meaning that living British citizens - including the descendants of those that were enslaved - have been helping to pay for the lives of traffickers and enslavers, and their descendants, for centuries. Despite the misleading name of the 'Slave Compensation Act', the former enslaved people were not compensated.

Since the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests swept the world after George Floyd's murder in the US, several financial institutions in the UK issued public apologies for their ties to the trading of enslaved people. Some have also announced they will stop displaying images of former governors connected to enslavement in their buildings. But many say this is not enough. A 2020 Runnymede report 'The Colour of Money: How racial inequalities obstruct a fair and resilient economy' found that the stark disparities between the financial outcomes of different ethnic groups has emerged from historical racial inequalities and colonial history. It found that African and Bangladeshi households hold ten times less wealth than White people, as well as persistent inequalities across education, health, employment, poverty and housing. University College London's 2012 'Legacies of British Slave Ownership' project





showed that 10 to 20 per cent of Britain's wealthy have significant links to slavery.

#### ARE APOLOGIES ENOUGH?

Many anti-racism campaigners feel that governments and powerful organisations are not doing enough to take responsibility for their links to the transatlantic trading of enslaved people.

Speaking to Reuters in 2020, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles - a Barbadian historian and vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies - said that many British and European firms "drank from the well of Caribbean slavery" and "all the institutions that created this mess really have to come and help in practical ways to clean it up." He called on British and European firms to fund development projects in the Caribbean, saying: "It is not enough to make your apology as a public spectacle, it is not enough to present it as a public relations exercise."

In 2006, the Church of England publicly apologised to the descendants of enslaved people, after acknowledging that its missionary group had inherited three sugar estates in the Caribbean which were run for the Church with the forced labour of enslaved people, branded with the word 'society' on their chests. In 2020, *The Telegraph* reported that nearly 100 clergymen also benefitted individually from the trafficking and trading of enslaved people. A spokesperson from the Church said it was "a source of shame" that some within the Church had "actively perpetrated slavery and profited from it."

*"Over 170 Confederate monuments were removed between June 2020 and June 2021"*

During 2020 protests against police brutality and structural racism, protestors took matters into their own hands - by taking down or defacing monuments celebrating colonial figures, all over the world. Governments soon started to remove statues themselves. In the US, over 170 Confederate monuments were removed between June 2020 and June 2021, according to data from the Southern Poverty Law Center.

In 2020, wires and guards were deployed in São Paulo to protect a statue of Borba Gato - one of Brazil's most prominent enslavers. In 2021, the monument was set on fire by campaigners - but the event was quickly controlled and the statue remained in place.

In 2021, Germany announced it would return hundreds of stolen artefacts to Benin, in West Africa, that had been pillaged, distributed and

Image: Getty Images



sold amongst the various White European nations during the late 19th century. The University of Aberdeen also announced it would return a Benin Bronze to Nigeria, more than a century after Britain looted and auctioned it.

### THE LASTING IMPACT IN AFRICA

The transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans left an extensive impact in the countries that people were taken from - mainly on the west coast of the continent. This ubiquitous influence spreads across economic, institutional, political and cultural spheres.

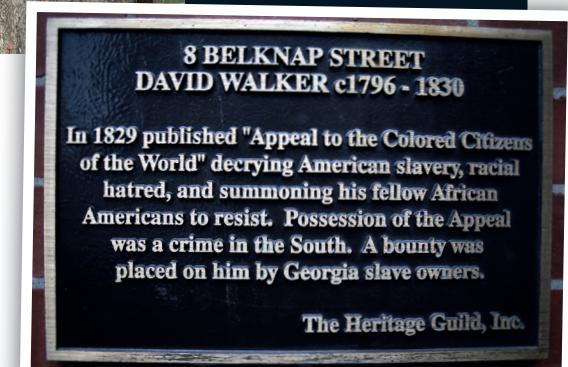
For example, we can look at some of the long-term impacts of the sudden influx of firearms into African countries - a direct consequence of the trading of enslaved people with Europe and Britain. It is estimated that 20 million guns were imported to Africa in the second half of the 18th century, many of which were manufactured in Birmingham, UK. In a 2012 paper, 'The Gun-Slave Cycle in the 18th Century British Slave Trade in Africa', Warren Whatley found evidence of a 'gun-slave cycle' - African people being captured by other Africans and traded in exchange for firearms, which sustained internal wars. This mass importation of guns in exchange for people altered the conduct of warfare across Africa, and changed the balance of power between regions. With their new weapons, warfare became increasingly attractive to kings and rulers. Wars created captives - and therefore, potential enslaved

people to traffic and profit from. The demands of the trafficking business destabilised existing kingdoms, and existing systems of governance and social bonds based on kinship, consent and trust were destroyed.

The increase in wars intensified economic inequalities already present among leaders and kingdoms, as well as creating additional problems. Nathan Nunn presented a systematic empirical analysis of the effects of this on current economic performance ('The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades', 2008). It showed a robust negative relationship between the number of enslaved people exported from a country and per capita income in 2000, despite evidence that the trafficking was more intense in the most developed and most densely populated areas in Africa.

### ONGOING TRAUMA

The most significant and devastating impacts of the transatlantic trafficking empires were felt by the millions of individuals that were enslaved. It has also left a lasting legacy of trauma within the African diaspora, still felt today and exacerbated by ongoing social, political and economic inequalities. The term 'post-traumatic slave syndrome' was coined by Dr Joy DeGruy in 2005 and described as "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma... and continues to experience oppression and institutionalised racism today." For many, the wounds of slavery are still open and festering.



### MODERN SLAVERY

Systems of enslavement and what is referred to as 'modern slavery' are still present in many African societies, as well as in other countries around the world. In 2018, the Global Slavery Index (GSI) published these staggering statistics: "An estimated 40.3 million men, women, and children were victims of modern slavery on any given day in 2016. Of these, 24.9 million people were in forced labour and 15.4 million people were living in a forced marriage. Women and girls are vastly over-represented, making up 71 per cent of victims. Modern slavery is most prevalent in Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific region."

Despite the practices of enslavement still being widespread globally, it remains a largely invisible issue. Partly because the people it disproportionately affects are the most marginalised members of society - ethnic minorities, women and children.

## Language is important

Many academics and anti-racism campaigners have called for an increased awareness around how we speak about the 400-plus years of transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans. It is a part of the larger debate over 'people first' language - eg 'a person with diabetes' rather than 'a diabetic person' - which seeks to centre the humanity of the individuals, rather than characteristics. Although calls for changes in language are often met with resistance, history has shown that we are capable of proactively making these changes and it is now second nature to use terms that were once controversial, such as 'African American' or 'firefighter'.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the USA's oldest and largest civil rights organisation. On their website, is a community-sourced guide called 'Writing About Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help' (P Gabrielle Foreman, et al). Here are some suggested takeaways:

- **To avoid the objectification of African people, say 'enslaved people' or 'captives' rather than 'slaves'**
- Likewise, we can say 'trafficking of enslaved Africans' rather than 'slave trade'
- We can use 'enslaver' or 'those who claimed people as property/held people in slavery' instead of 'master' or 'owner'
- Instead of 'runaway slave' or 'rebel', we can say 'self-liberated'/'self-emancipated' or 'freedom fighter'
- Avoid saying 'slave mistress' or 'enslaved mistress' and instead name the sexual violence/conditions
- Consider using not only 'stolen labour' but also 'stolen labour, knowledge and skills'



NAACP President Cornell William Brooks speaking during a press conference on 19 June 2015 in Charleston, South Carolina

African-American visitors pose for pictures at the Cape Coast Castle, Ghana in August 2019 - during the 'Year of Return'



### BACK TO AFRICA

Amongst some of the earliest returnees to Africa were a group of Afro-Brazilians, who later became known as Tabom people, in 1835. After the Malé revolt, thousands of free and enslaved Africans emigrated from Brazil to present-day Nigeria, Benin, Ghana and Togo.

Throughout the 19th century, the United States was responsible for several programmes that encouraged the return of Black people in the US to African countries. Led by organisations like the American Colonisation Society, this impulse resulted in the founding of West African colonies such as Sierra Leone in 1787 and Liberia in 1819.

Then in the 20th century, Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey and his organisation the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) led one of the largest mass movements in African-American history. Although a divisive figure, criticised by many in the Black community due to his collaboration with white supremacists, UNIA attracted followers throughout the Caribbean, Africa, South America, and Great Britain. Garvey's 'Back to Africa' message appealed to Black people around the world who needed an alternative to the oppressive societies they lived in, and would go on to influence the framework of Rastafarianism.

The Rastafari movement developed in Jamaica in the 1930s, and although it doesn't promote all the same views that Garvey did and in fact Garvey is said to have been a critic of the religion, some Rastas today still consider him a prophet. Leonard E Barrett Sr wrote in *The Rastafarians* (1997), "The movement views Ethiopia as the promised land, the place where Black people will be repatriated through a wholesale exodus from all Western countries where they have been in exile (slavery)". In 1948, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia



Bronze sculptures looted by British soldiers from the Kingdom of Benin in 1897 hang on display in the 'Where Is Africa' exhibition at the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Germany - before being returned to Nigeria in 2022

donated some land in Shashamane to Rastafarians for all African-Caribbean people to return to. After his 1966 tour of the Caribbean, thousands relocated to Shashamane. The emphasis on the need for physical repatriation to Africa has declined in recent years, with many now following the call to 'return to Africa' in a more spiritual sense.

In 2019, Ghana hosted the 'Year of Return' - a 365-day programme of activities to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first recorded enslaved Africans arriving in British North America. It welcomed people of African descent from around the world to return 'home'. In 2020, Ghana announced a ten-year 'Beyond the Return' project which aims to provide a platform for engagement among the African diaspora worldwide.

### LASTING LEGACY

There are many more legacies of the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans that haven't been explored in this feature, as the lasting impacts are so huge, widespread and complex. We all have a responsibility to educate ourselves on those legacies and to consider what actions we can take to help create a more equal society that isn't modelled on such a horrifying history.