

Museums and Collections

Subject explorer : history of enslavement

Content note

Resources mentioned in this subject explorer include racist language, images, and content, and accounts of violence, murder, and abuse. Most titles are provided in full for citation and research purposes and the titles include racist language.

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Introduction to the subject explorer

Accessing collections

The resources referenced below form part of the University's Special Collections, Archives or the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) Library. These resources can be accessed in the Reading Room, and advance booking is typically required, with the exception of the few items available on the Open Access shelves at the MERL. To view items from the Penguin Random House archives (references starting BH and JL), researchers must request permission in advance from the publisher. Please contact the Reading Room team for more information.

Using the catalogue effectively

Special collections and archive material can be searched for via the Enterprise catalogue, the same way that main library material can be searched. Using the date filters, or changing the search limit to 'Special Collections and MERL' can help filter out secondary material and focus on primary sources.

Scope

This subject explorer was created to supplement the existing Dissertation Subject Explorers for History and English Literature.

- The subject explorer is primarily concerned with transatlantic slavery and British sources. We recognise that there were and are many forms of enslavement and forced labour.
- Most works are in English and were published in Britain, although there are also many American works, as well as some by other European authors.
- The works cited range from 17th century to the 20th century.

Structure

This Subject Explorer is broadly structured by theme. Each collections item appears once, although items can of course have relevance for studying multiple topics.

- 1) Slavery in Africa and the Middle East
- 2) Transatlantic slavery
 - a) Experiences of enslaved people
 - i) 'Slave narratives'
 - ii) Escape
 - b) Plantation management and agricultural history
 - i) Plantation case studies
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 - c) 18th and 19th century accounts of slavery in the USA
 - d) Free Trade debates in 17th and 18th century
- 3) Abolition and anti-slavery debates
 - a) Abolition and pro-slavery texts
 - i) Pro-slavery debates
 - ii) Abolitionist works
 - iii) Historiography on William Wilberforce
 - iv) Abolition debates in parliament
 - b) Processes of abolition
 - i) Right of search
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- 4) Representations of enslavement and race in popular culture
 - a) Fiction
 - i) *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
 - ii) Other fiction
 - b) Spellman Collection of Victorian music covers
 - i) Music inspired by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
 - ii) Minstrelsy and blackface minstrelsy
 - iii) Other

1. Slavery in Africa and the Middle East

The Cole and Overstone collections both hold travel narratives and descriptions of Africa and the Middle East. The full list of travel narratives is not provided here but it could be fruitful avenue for research.

These books and pamphlets include accounts of enslavement practices in Africa and the Middle East which were sometimes used to explain, contextualise, or justify the transatlantic slave trade:

The river Niger and the progress of discovery and commerce in Central Africa,
Archibald Hamilton, (1862), **PAMPHLET BOOK—T199.**

Turkey and Egypt, past and present : in relation to Africa / by Joseph Cooper ; with an appendix on consular reports concerning slavery and the slave-trade throughout the Ottoman Empire by Aaron Buzacott, B.A., Joseph Cooper (1876), **PAMPHLET BOOK—T201.**

The anonymous author of the following work argues that British plantation slavery offers better treatment than that experienced by enslaved people in Africa:

Considerations upon the trade to Guinea, Anon, (1708), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 11C/25.**

The following are the French and English translations respectively of Bosman's work:

Voyage de Guinée : contenant une description nouvelle & très-exacte de cette côte où l'on trouve & où l'on trafique l'or, les dents d'éléphant, & les esclaves, Willem Bosman, (1705), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 25E/18.**

A new and accurate description of the coast of Guinea, divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts : containing a geographical, political and natural history of the kingdoms and countries..., Willem Bosman, (1705), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 25G/26.**

The following works in French are bound together in **OVERSTONE—SHELF 28C/17** :

Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité [History of slavery in antiquity], Henri Wallon, (1847).

De l'esclavage dans les colonies [On slavery in the colonies], Henri Wallon, (1847).

Accounts of slavery in Africa also featured in abolitionist works, such as:

Some account of the trade in slaves from Africa as connected with Europe and America; from the introduction of the trade into modern Europe, down to the present time, James Bandinel, (1842), **RESERVE--326.1-BAN.**

The African slave trade and its remedy, Thomas Fowell Buxton, (1840?), **RESERVE--326.1-BUX.**

2. Transatlantic slavery

a. Experiences of enslaved people

Most works referenced throughout this subject explorer present the voices of slave-owners, or other privileged white groups. The short list of works by formerly enslaved people in this section should be read critically with an awareness of how racist power structures influenced their freedom of expression. It is often challenging to find the voices of enslaved or marginalised people in historic collections, but many other sources listed in the subject explorer could be read against the grain.

i. Slave narratives

The 'slave narrative' genre refers to memoirs or autobiographical accounts written by enslaved or formerly enslaved people. The Special Collections hold the following:

A narrative of some remarkable incidents, in the life of Solomon Bayley, formerly a slave, in the state of Delaware, North America... Solomon Bayley, (1825), **PAMPHLET BOX--T701(6)**.

A narrative of the adventures and escape of Moses Roper, from American slavery with a preface by Rev. T Price, Moses Roper, (1838), **RESERVE--326.92-ROP.**

Esteban Mesa Montejo (1868-1973) was born into slavery in Cuba but escaped and lived as a *cimarron* or maroon before fighting in Cuba's independence war. The English version of his (auto)biography was published by Bodley Head in 1966; the publishing archive collection includes review files showing how the publication was received.

Review file for 'The autobiography of a runaway slave' by Esteban Montejo, **BH1 RPU/62.**

ii. Escape

The John and Griselda Printing Collection holds a notice advertising a reward for apprehending an escaped enslaved man, Abraham, dated 1829, USA.

Proclamations, Broadsides and Chapbooks: Board 2, **JGL 25/2.**

NB: see the University of Glasgow's online database 'Runaway Slaves in Britain: bondage, freedom and race in the eighteenth century' to see how these notices can be used.

b. Plantation management and agricultural history

The MERL library has many works on American and Caribbean agriculture during and after the period of enslavement which are not available in the Main Library or online. It is worth looking at the open access shelves, specifically **MERL LIBRARY—2262**.

i. Plantation case studies

These two case studies contain primary sources and statistical data about specific plantations.

This publication consists primarily of transcriptions of plantation owner Hugh Fraser Grant's journals written between 1834-1861:

Planter management and capitalism in ante-bellum Georgia : the journal of Hugh Fraser Grant, ricegrower, Albert Virgil House, (1954), **MERL LIBRARY--2262-GRA**.

This case study of Worthy Park plantation in Jamaica over three decades, including statistical data about the number of people enslaved on the plantation at different points:

A Jamaican plantation : the history of Worthy Park, 1670-1970, Michael Craton, (1970), **MERL LIBRARY--2267-CRA**.

ii. Secondary sources: MERL open access collection

The MERL Library open access shelves hold numerous histories of plantation agriculture, enslaved labour, and sharecropping, in the United States and British Empire before and after emancipation.

From plantation to ghetto, August Meier, (1970), **MERL LIBRARY—2262-MEI**.

Cry from the cotton : the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal, Donald H. Grubbs, [1971], **MERL LIBRARY--2262-GRU**.

The following work focusses on farming techniques in American frontiers and relationships with native American people.

The Southern frontiers, 1607-1860 : the agricultural evolution of the colonial and antebellum South, John Solomon Otto, (1989), **MERL LIBRARY--2262-OTT**.

c. 18th and 19th century accounts of slavery in the USA

For eighteenth century accounts of enslavement in British Caribbean colonies, see section 3.a.i.

Thomas Jefferson's *Notes* are not primarily about slavery. However, this work includes his view that Black people are inferior to white and Native American people.

Notes on the state of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, (1787), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 25F/21.**

The following works are histories of America and slavery written in the 19th century.

Slave states of America, J.S. Buckingham, (1842), **RESERVE--917.3-BUC.**

The political history of the United States of America, during the great rebellion, from 1860, to 1864, Edward Macphearson, (1865), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 37F.**

The slave power : its character, career and probable designs : being an attempt to explain the real issues involved in the American context, John Elliott Cairnes, (1865), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 37F.**

Union--disunion--reunion : three decades of Federal legislation, 1855 to 1885 : personal and historical memories of events preceding, during, and since the American Civil War, involving slavery and secession, emancipation and reconstruction, with sketches of prominent actors during these periods, Samuel S. Cox, (1885), **RESERVE--973.6-COX.**

d. Free Trade debates in 17th and 18th century

These works contribute to the debate around protectionism and free trade.

Littleton is concerned with the economic impact of competition from French and Dutch planters.

Groans of the plantations : or a true account of their grievous and extreme sufferings by the heavy impositions upon sugar, and other hardships. Relating more particularly to the island of Barbados, Edward Littleton, (1689), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 9E/28.**

Gee discusses the balance of trade between England and other nations or regions including tobacco plantations, sugar colonies, and Africa.

The trade and navigation of Great Britain considered : shewing, that the surest way for a nation to increase in riches, is to prevent the importation of such foreign commodities as may be raised at home, Joshua Gee, (1755), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 11C/25.**

Great-Britain's commercial interest explained and improved... also a clear view of the state of our plantations in America, their constitution, trade, and revenues, with a certain method to encrease their commerce and strength, Malachy Postlethwayt, (1759), **MERL LIBRARY RESERVE—630-POS.**

3. Abolition and anti-slavery

Numerous items in the collection demonstrate how abolition was enacted, and how the idea of Britain as a leading anti-slavery power was created and propagated.

a. Abolition and pro-slavery debates

i. Pro-slavery texts

Many of the texts in the subject explorer are pro-slavery and/or promote racist ideologies.

The following authors are considered influential in pro-slavery thought. As histories of the Caribbean, the works argue that there is an inherent difference between white and Black people, which is used to justify the enslavement of Africans.

Edward Long was a judge and historian from a family of plantation owners. His *History of Jamaica* is pro-slavery and reflects his polygenist views (the idea that Black and white people were separate species).

The history of Jamaica : or, General survey of the antient and modern state of that island ; with reflections on its situation, settlements, inhabitants, climate, products, commerce, laws, and government ; in three volumes ; illustrated with copper plates,
Edward Long, (1774), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 35D/04 Vol 1-3.**

Bryan Edwards was a pro-slavery advocate. This work includes tables of exports for different islands, as well as describing the workings of the slave trade. He describes the traits of enslaved people from various African tribes.

The history, civil and commercial, of the British colonies in the West Indies ; in two volumes, Bryan Edwards, (1794), **OVERSTONE—35D/07 Vol. 1-2.**

ii. Abolitionist works

Richard Price was an 18th century British Nonconformist minister who corresponded with Americans including Benjamin Franklin. In *Observations* he highlights contradiction between slavery and the revolutionary ideal of liberty.ⁱ

Observations on the importance of the American Revolution: and the means of making it a benefit to the world. To which is added, a letter from M. Turgot ...: with an appendix, containing a translation of the will of M. Fortuné Ricard, lately published in France, Richard Price, (1785), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 30H/23.**

The collection holds multiple copies of this work by famous abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson.

The history of the rise, progress, and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave-trade by the British Parliament, Thomas Clarkson, (1808), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 30I/1-2.**

James Stephen talks about the politics of abolitionism in Britain, for example petitioning, lobbying, party politics.

England addressed by her own slave colonies : an address to electors and people of the United Kingdom, James Stephen, (1826), **OVERSTONE—SHELF 31F/7.**

iii. Historiography of William Wilberforce

For a pre-1950s bibliography of historical writing about the slave trade, abolition, and William Wilberforce in particular, the below pamphlet may be useful. It provides titles for many nineteenth century publications, which it may be possible to locate in other collections.

William Wilberforce, 1759-1833. : a catalogue of the books and pamphlets on William Wilberforce and slavery in the Reference Library of Kingston upon Hull Public Libraries... [Kingston upon Hull] : Kingston upon Hull Public Libraries, (1959), **MARK LONGMAN 016-PAM-020.**

iv. Abolition debates in parliament

The Special Collections include accounts of parliamentary debates from the 1790s and 1820s discussing the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery.

Minutes of the evidence taken before a committee of the House of Commons, being a select committee, appointed on the 23d day of April 1790, to take the examination of the several witnesses ordered by the House to attend the Committee of the whole House, to whom it is referred to consider further of the circumstances of the slave trade., Parliament, House of Commons, (1790?), **RESERVE FOLIO--360.362-GRE.**

The appendix of Gisbourne's work discusses the debate around immediate as opposed to gradual abolition.

The principles of moral philosophy investigated, and applied to the constitution of civil society : the fourth edition, corrected and enlarged, to which is added, a new edition, being the fifth, with an appendix, of Remarks on the late decision of the House of Commons respecting the abolition of the slave trade, Thomas Gisbourne, [1798], **OVERSTONE—SHELF 5G/30.**

More detailed accounts of parliamentary debates can be found in:

The debate on a motion for the abolition of slave-trade : in the House of Commons, on the second of April, 1792, reported in detail, printed by W. Woodfall, (1792),

PAMPHLET BOOK—T106.

Papers presented to Parliament in 1819 Parliament, Great Britain, [1820?], **RESERVE--942.07395-GRE VOL. 1-2.**

Papers presented to Parliament in 1822, Parliament, Great Britain, [1823?], **RESERVE-942.07395-GRE VOL. 1-2.**

Papers presented to Parliament in 1823, Parliament, Great Britain, [1824?], **RESERVE-942.07395-GRE VOL. 1-2.**

b. Processes of abolition

In response to the abolition of slave trade and slavery there were several processes which protected the interests of slave owners and Britain in general.

i. Right of Search

After 1807, British vessels searched ships suspecting of trafficking enslaved people from Africa. When ships were intercepted, these enslaved people were 'repatriated' to places like Sierra Leone.

The following four works, three of which are bound together in one volume, are mostly concerned with the international relations and legal implications of this activity, as well as giving an insight into how this practice was received by different groups. The American Henry Wheaton critiques the British self-fashioning of themselves as an anti-slavery power; the 'Reply to an "American's examination"' discusses the prejudiced treatment of Black people in the USA, for example with regard to wrongful imprisonment.

Visitation and search : or, An historical sketch of the British claim to exercise a maritime police over the vessels of all nations, in peace as well as in war, with an inquiry into the expediency of terminating the eighth article of the Ashburton treaty,
William Beach Lawrence, (1858), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 10G/12.**

Enquiry into the validity of the British claim to a right of visitation & search of American vessels suspected to be engaged in the African slave-trade, Henry Wheaton, (1842), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 10H/12.**

Reply to an "American's examination" of the "Right of search" : with observations on some of the questions at issue between Great Britain and the United States, and on certain positions assumed by the North American government / by an Englishman.,
Anon, (1842), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 10H/12.** [A manuscript note names Sir William Gore Ouseley as the author.]

A letter to the Right Honourable Lord Ashburton, suggested by the questions of international law, raised in the message of the American president, Robert Phillimore, (1842), **OVERSTONE--SHELF 10H/12.**

This pamphlet, primarily concerned with the balance of trade, also discusses the success of Liberia, and provides numbers of enslaved people captured by the British and 'repatriated' to Africa.

On the trade with the coloured races of Africa, Archibald Hamilton, (1868),
PAMPHLET BOOK--T199.

ii. Amelioration

After the abolition of the slave trade, the government and plantation owners in the British Empire introduced 'amelioration' policies designed to increase the life span and birth rate of enslaved people.

The four essays focus on amelioration and the condition of enslaved people in Saint Lucia in the 1820s, covering topics such as punishment, working hours and runaways. The author was President of the Royal Court of St. Lucia; It has an emphasis on legal issues:

Four essays on colonial slavery [second edition], John Jeremie, (1832), **PAMPHLET BOOK--T110.**

iii. Compensation

The debate around compensation for British slave owners is explored in multiple sources including:

First letter to the freeholders of the County of York, on Negro slavery : being an inquiry into the claims of the West Indians for equitable compensation, Horton R. Wilmot, (1830), **RESERVE--326.4-WIL.**

This pro-abolition pamphlet discusses the compensation paid to British slave-owners and seeks to influence the US to emancipate enslaved people by proving it is beneficial economically for the planter to pay free labourers than enslaved people.

The effect of an alteration in the sugar duties on the condition of the people of England and the Negro race considered, Macgregor Laird, (1844), **PAMPHLET BOOK—T199.**

4. Popular culture representations of enslavement and race

a. Fiction

i. Uncle Tom's Cabin

Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe was first published in 1852.

The Children's Collection includes five editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* all with call number **CHILDREN'S COLLECTION--813.3-STO**. Each edition has different illustrations and different (decorated) bindings and could be used in a comparative study. As the title and author information remains the same, the publishers' information is given here:

London : Ingram, Cooke & Co, 227 Strand, MDCCCLII [1852].

London : Frederick Warne and Co., Bedford Street, Strand, [1875].

London : Frederick Warne and Co., Bedford Street, Strand, [approximately 1888].

London : Ward, Lock & Co. Limited, Warwick House, Salisbury Square, E. C., [19--?].

New York : Books, Inc., [1945].

In addition, the Children's Collection also holds *The key to Uncle Tom's cabin* which purports to provide 'original facts and documents' that influenced the story, working chapter by chapter through the novel providing context:

The key to Uncle Tom's cabin : presenting the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded together with corroborative statements verifying the truth of the work, Harriet Beecher Stowe, (1853), **CHILDREN'S COLLECTION--813.3-STO**.

See also: Victorian music covers depicting characters or scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in section 4.b.i.

ii. Other fiction

The collection includes two American 'slave narratives' by Moses Roper and Soloman Bayley, see section 2.a.i.

Works written about fictional enslaved people include:

H.H. Johnston, *The history of a slave / by H.H. Johnston, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S., &c. author of 'The Kilimanjaro Expedition' etc. ; with 47 full-page illustrations engraved facsimile from the author's drawings, (1889)*, **RESERVE--962.4-JOH.**

The happy Negro ; being a true account of a very extraordinary Negro in North America, and of an interesting conversation he had with a very respectable gentleman from England. To which is added, The grateful Negro. London : The Religious Tract Society, [n.d.] [c. 1861-1893],

For a representation of free Black people in the writings of the Religious Tract Society, see another pamphlet in the above volume:

The History of a Poor Black Widow, Legh Richmond, [n.d.], **RESERVE--243-REL.**

b. Spellman collection of Victorian music covers

The Spellman collection comprises over 2500 sheet music covers from the Victorian period, mostly British and American examples. Around 800 covers are digitised and are available to view via the University of Reading's Virtual Reading Room. There are many depictions of race and enslavement, but the collection is not fully catalogued, so the list below is non-comprehensive.

The covers themselves are mostly examples of colour lithography, featuring detailed illustrations and sometimes lyrics of the songs, designed to appeal to middle class consumers who could play and sing the songs at home.

i. Music inspired by 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'

Two covers feature the character 'Topsy' from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; another the scene where Phineas Fletcher pushes Tom Loker off the precipice; another Eliza's escape:

- *Topsy's polka*.
- *Topsy's song* [shows Eva and Topsy, with the text 'I love you because you haven't had any Father, or Mother, or Friends, because you've been a poor abused child!'].
- *Liberty* (sung by George Linley).
- *The slave mother : ballad* (sung by George Linley).

ii. Minstrelsy and blackface minstrelsy

Blackface characters and minstrel performers, such as the American 'Ethiopian serenaders' and the London-based groups 'Mohawk Minstrels' and 'Manhattan Minstrels'. Blackface minstrelsy was 'an entertainment purporting to depict the recreational activities of black plantation slaves'ⁱⁱ Many of the performers and writers were white, but there were also Black performers and writers, so it is worth researching the individuals associated with each song.

- *Carry me back to old Virginny : negro melody* (written by African-American songwriter James A. Bland who is not credited here, this cover for an arrangement by Charles Anderson, performed by J.H. Cave, blackface performer).
- *The celebrated walk-round* (The Christy's minstrels, inspired by a cakewalk).
- *Come to the window, Nellie?* (Harry Hunter in the Mohawk Minstrels).
- *The dandy-coloured coon* (Eugene Stratton, blackface performer).

- *The Ethiopian quadrilles* (The Ethiopian Serenaders).
- *If you see Lucy, let me know, or send me word by the first balloon* (Harry Hunter's Manhattan Minstrels).
- *Johnny will you come along now? Or Yookah, dookah, day* (The Mohawk Minstrels).
- *Lucy Neal : the favorite negro melody* (The Ethiopian Serenaders).
- *The musical shoebblack : clean your boots & play you a tune for a penny* (composed by Cecil Hicks).
- *Nuffin hurts me, or sleep on a cotton-bale - roost up a tree* (Harry Hunter's Manhattan Minstrels).
- *Rosa Lee, or don't be foolish Joe* (G. W. White of the Ethiopian serenaders).
- *Sich a getting up stairs* (Thomas D. Rice, credited as being the first blackface performer).
- *Tambo Sambo, or there was a saucy n----* (The Mohawk Minstrels).
- *To be continued in our next* (The Mohawk Minstrels).
- *Where's that n---- Josey, or there'll be no fun at the ball to night* (The Mohawk Minstrels).
- *Whist! the bogie man* (The Mohawk Minstrels).
- *Who's dat knockin at de door?* (The Ethiopian serenaders).

iii. Other

Two covers show the game 'Aunt Sally' being played with a blackface doll:

- *Aunt Sally* (composed by J F Brian).
- *Aunt Sally polka* (composed by R Coote).

The following digitised items are not linked to specific minstrel troupes but include racialised characters, language or imagery:

- *De railroad overture, (adapted by J.J. Haite, image depicts five Black musicians sitting on top of a train)*.

- *Happy darkies : a barn dance* (composed by Arthur E. Godfrey).
- *The octoroon waltz* (composed by ‘Wagner’, image depicts a slave auction).
- *The piccaninnies : barn dance* (composed by Arthur E. Godfrey).
- *The quadroon* (written by Charles Jeffreys).
- *When you ain't got no money, well you needn't come round* (words by Clarence S. Brewster).

ⁱ Page, Anthony, “‘A Species of Slavery’: Richard Price’s Rational Dissent and Antislavery.” *Slavery & Abolition* 32 (1 (2011)): 53–73.

ⁱⁱ Scott, Derek B., ‘Blackface Minstrels, Black Minstrels, and their Reception in England’ in *Europe, empire, and spectacle in nineteenth-century British music* edited by Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (2006); 265-280.