

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention



Teachers' Notes

Information and activities for teachers

These notes are a guide to the painting *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840* by Benjamin Robert Haydon. These notes and *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840* can be used as tools through which to explain the reasons for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in 1833. Key figures within the fight for the abolition of slavery are highlighted and key terms are explained. These notes can be used on a self-guided visit to the Regency Galleries at the National Portrait Gallery, where the painting is displayed, or within a classroom. Ideas for a visit to the National Portrait Gallery and related classroom activities appear at the end of these notes.

Teachers' guidelines

Introduction

The Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1823. It grew out of the African Institution, and its members included Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce MP. The Emancipation Bill for the abolition of slavery in all the British colonies was passed by Parliament in 1833 and slaves were partially freed in 1834, when they became 'apprentices', and were fully freed in 1838. This group portrait commemorates the celebratory meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1840, after all the slaves in the British Empire had been freed. Haydon's painting is not a truthful depiction of the event but it does show the main figures involved in the campaign, including women and a few of the freed slaves.

Schemes of Work

KS3 History: QCA Unit 15. Black Peoples of America; from slavery to equality?

KS3-4 Citizenship: QCA schemes of work Unit 01. 'Human Rights'.

Activities and questions

These notes provide the stimulus for some suggested questions and activities. The 'Questions' aim to enable pupils to process and think about the historical facts given to them, while the 'Talking Points' are aimed at stimulating debate and drawing out opinions.

Bibliography

Books

- James Walvin
Atlas of Slavery (Longman, 2006)
A useful account of the different slave trading routes, with maps and statistics, covering slave trade routes other than the 'transatlantic triangle'.
- Gad Heuman and James Walvin (ed.)
The Slavery Reader (Routledge, 2003)
An academic volume of essays covering all aspects of slavery. Very useful for an account of black African history, slave culture and race.
- Adam Hochschild
Bury the Chains. The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery (Macmillan, 2005)
A readable account of the campaign for the abolition of slavery in Britain. Explains why women and Quakers were a force in the abolition movement.
- Hugh Thomas
The Slave Trade (Simon and Schuster, 1999)
An account of the Slave Trade in its global entirety – one of the most popular works on slavery.

Websites

- **www.antislavery.org**
This website is linked to Anti-slavery International a charity concerned with slavery issues in the present day.
- **www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk**
US based information site about slavery; British campaigners are also listed.
- **www.bbc.co.uk/history/society_culture/protest_reform/antislavery_01.shtml**
BBC essay on the anti-slavery movement with related links to a time line.

Teachers' guidelines

- **www.discoveringbristol.org.uk**
Website based on the exhibition at the Science and Industry Museum at Bristol. It gives a general overview of slavery as well as specifically linking the trade to the city of Bristol and landmarks within slavery.
- **www.understandingslavery.com**
One of the main education sites about slavery. Hosted by the National Maritime Museum, it has useful information and images of objects involved both in the slave trade and the campaign to abolish slavery.
- **www.100greatblackbritons.com**
Lists the key black figures involved in the abolition of slavery.

Groups at the Gallery

Learning Services books group visits from schools, colleges and adult organisations. We require a minimum of two weeks' notice for visits. Groups are defined as 10 adults/children or more. Contact us at:

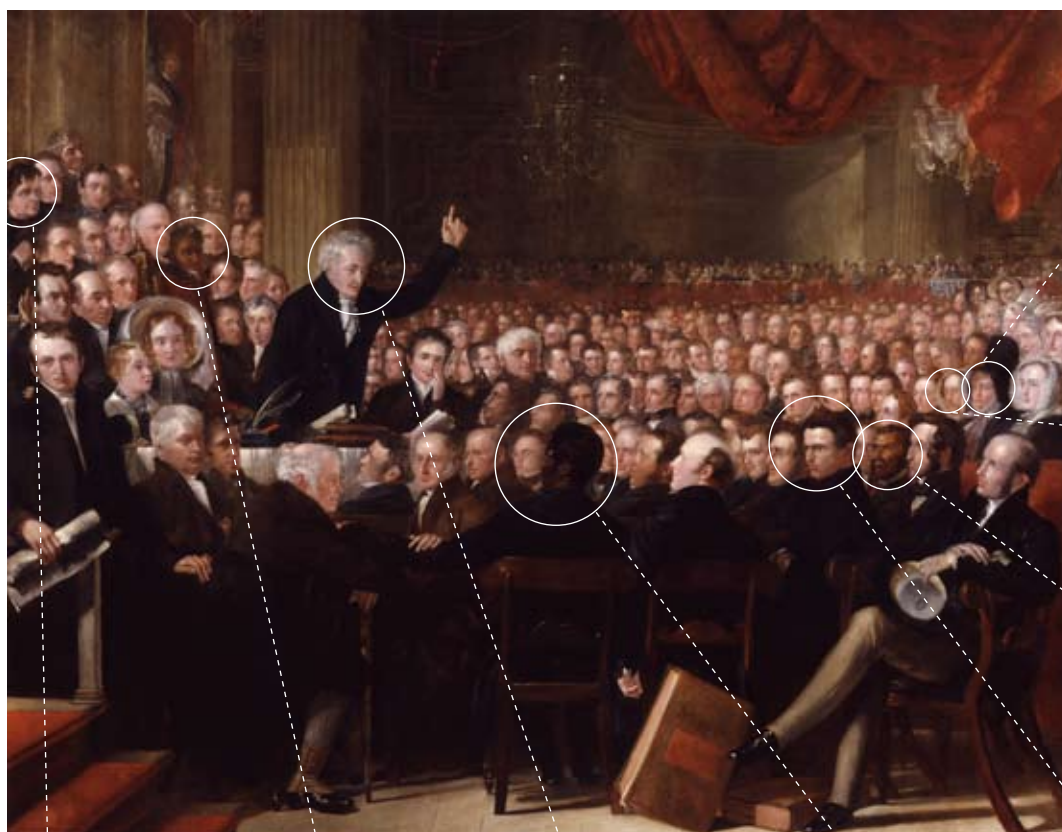
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Slavery and the Slave Trade: Some Key Facts

- British involvement in the slave trade began in the sixteenth century. By 1770 more than 100,000 Africans a year were being forced into slavery to work the plantations in the new world.
- Slavery was the world's first global industry and slaves on the sugar plantations in the British West Indies were the first industrial workers.
- The organisation of the slave trade was referred to as the 'Triangular Trade'. Traders shipped manufactured goods from Britain to West Africa and traded them for enslaved Africans. The slaves were then shipped across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and American Colonies to work the sugar and tobacco plantations. Sugar and tobacco were shipped back to Britain.
- Not all black people in the Caribbean were slaves. There were free blacks and an army of escaped slaves called Maroons fought the British army for years.
- Abolitionists were campaigners who set out to abolish slavery, not only in the British colonies but also worldwide. They set up local societies and women played an important role in anti-slavery actions such as boycotting goods, like sugar or coffee, produced by slavery.

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840 context



Amelia Opie



Lady Anna
Isabella Byron



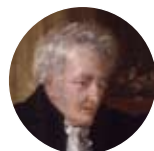
Monsieur L'Instant,
delegate Haiti



Daniel O'Connell
Radical Irish MP



Louis Lecesne,
leader of free coloured
movement Jamaica



Thomas Clarkson,
president of the convention



Henry Beckford,
delegate Jamaica,
freed slave



Samuel Prescod,
delegate Barbados

The Convention of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was held in The Freemason's Tavern, London in June 1840. The aim of the society was the abolition of slavery and the slave trade worldwide (slavery had only been abolished within the British Empire) and the protection of emancipated slaves in British Colonies.

The majority of the delegates were middle-class Nonconformists – many were Quakers. Women delegates, however, were not allowed to speak in the discussions. Members of the Anti-Slavery Society asked the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon to paint a record of the Convention, possibly because he was known to be politically sympathetic to their cause.

The painting depicts the moment at the end of Thomas Clarkson's moving speech when 'women wept and men shook off their tears'.

Thomas Clarkson is looking directly at Henry Beckford, a freed slave from Jamaica who came to address the convention. The artist shows Beckford looking up at Clarkson with deep interest. Haydon wanted to portray those who worked for the abolition of slavery and the emancipated slaves side by side in equality. Despite this, the prominence of Beckford in the portrait was controversial when the painting was exhibited.

When the picture was finished it was displayed at the Egyptian Gallery, May 1841. It had mixed

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840 context

reviews. As a work of art the painting leaves much to be desired – the sea of faces in the foreground and the dim and distant background of the hall is crudely handled – but it is of importance historically as a record of some of the people involved in the abolition of the slave trade.

Questions

- Who is the most important/prominent figure? Thomas Clarkson, one of the most important anti-slavery campaigners. Describe his age, pose, etc.
- How many black delegates can you see? There are 5: Henry Beckford, a freed slave from Jamaica; Samuel Prescod from Barbados; M. L'Instant from Haiti; Louis Lecesne from Jamaica and Edward Barratt a freed slave.
- Why do you think the prominence given to Henry Beckford and his depiction as an equal among white delegates was considered controversial?
- Are there many women present? There are a few. The most prominent are Amelia Opie, novelist and poet, Lady Byron and Mary Clarkson. Women society members organised boycotts on sugar, produced pamphlets and organised talks.
- Why are there only about 130 clearly identifiable people in an audience of 500? Because Haydon couldn't fit everyone in, but he also tended to relegate to the background people he didn't like and put the sitters he admired closer to the foreground.
- Why do you think there were so few black delegates at the Convention?
- Why do you think people wanted to abolish slavery worldwide?

Key Words:

Nonconformist

Members of religious organisations. These people were not members of the established Church of England e.g. they were Methodists, Baptists or Quakers.

Emancipated

Freed: a freed slave.

Abolition

Getting rid of – in this case slavery/slave trade.

Abolitionist

Someone who supports the abolition of slavery/slave trade.

Boycott

To withdraw support/refusal to buy a product.

The Road to Emancipation

- 1569 – English judge ruled against the mistreatment of a Russian serf-slave.
- 1706 – Lord Chief Justice Holt ruled that as soon as black slaves came to England they became free.
- 1772 – Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's ruling that the runaway slave, James Somerset, was not a slave in England.
- 1775 – First Anti-Slavery Society established in Philadelphia.
- 1787 – Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharpe founded the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in Britain.
- 1807 – British parliament passed a law abolishing the slave trade.
- 1823 – New Anti-Slavery Society formed with members including Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce.
- 1833 – Abolition of Slavery Act passed by British Parliament.

Key black people who helped end the slave trade



Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797)

Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped from his African village when he was about 11, enslaved, and was renamed Gustavas Vassa, working in Barbados, Virginia and eventually London, where he learnt to read. Equiano was then sold again and he was sent to Montserrat. Eventually Equiano saved enough to buy his freedom in 1766 and returned to London, where he vigorously campaigned against the slave trade in the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. His biography *The Life of Olaudah Equiano the African* became a best seller and has been called the most important literary contribution to the campaign for abolition.

Mary Prince (1788–?)

Mary Prince was the daughter of slaves and was born in Bermuda. She was sold to various owners and worked on the fields of plantations, as a domestic servant and on the saltpans. Mary learnt to read at the Moravian church in Antigua and married a freed slave, Daniel Jones, in 1826. However, she did this without the permission of her owner John Wood, who took her as a servant to England. Mary ran away from Wood in 1828, shortly after arriving in London. She published her biography *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* in 1831 and it was the first life of a black woman to be published in Britain. Mary Prince's book helped further the cause of the complete abolition of slavery.

Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780)

Ignatius Sancho was born on a slave ship in the mid-Atlantic and was brought to England at the age of two and given to a group of sisters in Greenwich. Sancho taught himself to read and write and eventually secured his freedom. Sancho could not make a living, except as a servant, so became a grocer. He became a composer and writer and was embraced by the literary and artistic intelligentsia of London. His letters were published after his death and were very popular, proving to eighteenth-century society that black men were just as intelligent as white, which helped the cause of abolition.

Ottobah Cugoano (c.1757–1801)

Ottobah Cugoano was born in Ghana in about 1757 and was enslaved in his early teens. By 1788 he had become a free man and worked as a servant for Richard Cosway. The year previously he published a tract against slavery, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, which was sent to King George III and other politicians. Cugoano worked with Equiano in London for the abolition of slavery.

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840: key figures



Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846)

Thomas Clarkson was one of the greatest champions of the abolition of the slavery. It was while at the University of Cambridge that he became aware of the evils of the slavery trade and its abolition became his life's work. Working with James Ramsay and Granville Sharpe, Clarkson was one of the twelve men who formed the Committee for Abolition of the African Slave Trade in 1787.

Campaigning against the slave trade was a dangerous activity, especially in slave ports such as Liverpool and Bristol, but Clarkson was undeterred and risked physical injury from the henchmen of the rich merchants and business men whose wealth was made from the slave trade. Clarkson acted as a fact finder and information gatherer for William Wilberforce who was steering the abolition campaign through parliament. Between 1787 and 1794 Clarkson brought the brutal facts of the slave trade to a wide international audience.

Unfortunately, popular enthusiasm for the cause of abolition cooled during the period of the wars with France, and Clarkson suffered a physical breakdown caused by disappointment and overwork. In the early years of the nineteenth century the abolitionists launched a new and

successful campaign and in 1807 Parliament voted overwhelmingly in support of the abolition of the slave trade.

Clarkson spent the rest of his life campaigning to abolish slavery worldwide. He continued his campaigning into the 1840s and died in 1846 at the age of 86.

Questions

- Why were people against the abolition of slavery? And why do you think violence and intimidation was used to try to stop people like Clarkson?
- Near the picture of the Anti-Slavery Convention in the National Portrait Gallery is a portrait of William Wilberforce – look at the portrait, describe what kind of man you think he was. Is there anything unusual about his pose?
Wilberforce had a health condition that caused curvature of the spine and he wore a neck brace.

Talking Point

- Can you think of examples today where violence and intimidation might be used to stop people speaking out about the treatment of others? Can you think of examples abroad and in this country?

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840: key figures



Amelia Alderson Opie (1769–1853)

Amelia Opie was the charming and intelligent daughter of a noted doctor. When her mother died she had to take charge of her father's home and became hostess at many formal gatherings. She wrote poetry for these occasions.

In London she met three writers William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Inchbold. Amelia's novels were not radical but had a firm moral undertone. Amelia married John Opie the painter and she continued to write. On her husband's death she returned home to care for her ailing father. Amelia drew away from former previous social acquaintances and joined the Society of Friends often called Quakers.

Amelia Opie devoted the rest of her life to charity and hospital reform. She was active in anti-slavery circles and was the Norwich delegate at the Anti-Slavery Society Convention in 1840. Her 1826 poem 'The Black Man's Lament' reflects her strong anti-slavery beliefs.

Key Words

Quakerism/Society of Friends

A religious organisation which was not part of the established Church of England. The Quakers were also known as the Society of Friends and believed all people were equal before God.

Questions

- In his diary Haydon discussed Amelia Opie as 'a delightful creature' when she sat for her portraits. Look at her image – why has Haydon painted her so unfashionably?
- Why do you think women delegates were not allowed to speak on the debate at the Anti-Slavery Convention?

Talking Point

- Given that the petitioning and boycotting of slave trade goods by women was so crucial to the abolition movement, do you think it is fair that so few women were represented in the painting and that were not allowed to speak? Are women under-represented in the same way in business or politics today?

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840: key figures



Samuel Jackman Prescod (1806–1871)

Samuel Jackson Prescod has been described as ‘the greatest Barbadian of all time’ because of his mission to liberate slaves and improve the condition of ‘Free Coloured’ (mixed race) people.

Prescod detested the plantation owners’ bad treatment of people who were black or mixed race or poor white people. He fought for social justice and enfranchisement. Prescod, as the son of a wealthy landowner and a freed coloured woman, would not allow himself to be treated as a second-class citizen.

Through the power of his position as editor of a radical newspaper, he wrote scathing articles accusing planters of pursuing policies that suppressed black people. Free coloured people got the vote in 1831 and Prescod was the first non-white to sit in the House of Assembly in Bridgetown. Prescod’s radical newspaper earned him the reputation of a revolutionary troublemaker – it was as a journalist that he was most effective at upsetting the established order.

In 1840 he travelled to London to represent Barbados at the meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society Convention.

Key Words

Enfranchisement

Being able to vote in elections and have a say in government.

Questions

- Look at Haydon’s portrait of Samuel Prescod. Why do you think the artist thought this was ‘the best painted head yet’?
- What difference might giving the vote to ‘Free Coloured’ (mixed-race people) make? Why do you think they were disenfranchised?

Talking Point

- Why do you think Samuel Prescod was successful in his fight against injustice and discrimination?
- What power today do newspapers and journalists have to change public opinion?

The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840: key figures



Henry Beckford (1809–?)

Henry Beckford was a freed slave from Jamaica who addressed the Convention. His prominence in the portrait was controversial since it presented Beckford as an equal among his white peers. Although slavery had been abolished in the British Empire, it did not mean that black and white people were viewed as equal citizens or partners and racial prejudice in favour of whites was prevalent. The position of Beckford at the front of the portrait shows Haydon to have been making a political point as much as an artistic one.

Very little is known about Henry Beckford. However, his name is of interest as it means that he is likely to have been one of the Beckford family's slaves, who had plantations in Jamaica from as early as the 1660s; their enormous wealth was the result of the slave trade. The writer and art collector William Thomas Beckford (1760–1844) is the most famous of the Beckford's family and for a period he was one of the wealthiest men in England.

Henry Beckford is a slave name, which means that it is a name given to slaves as part of a 'branding' process to identify slaves as the property of a certain family. Their African names would be changed to a 'typical' British name and their surname would become the surname of the family who owned them.

When slavery was abolished slave owners received compensation for the loss of their 'property', but slaves and the descendants of slaves did not. For example, the Beckfords received over £200,000 in compensation in 1834 but Henry Beckford would not have received a penny.

Questions

- Why do you think Haydon wanted to make a political point through where he placed Beckford in this painting?
- Why do you think so few former slaves were able to come to the Convention?

Talking Point

The theologian and historian Robert Beckford is a descendent of the Beckford slaves and he argues that his name has political ramifications because he and his family still have the identity of a slave owner forced on them. Robert Beckford also claims that the descendents of slaves should receive some form of compensation today, arguing that much of the wealth of modern Britain has been built on the brutal oppression and exploitation of Africans in the slave trade. See www.open2net for more details – search 'bloodlines'.

- Do you think it is possible for slave descendants to trace back their ancestry and recover their African names? What problems do you think might hinder them from doing so?
- Is it possible to work out the debt that modern Britain owes the descendants of slaves? Do you think that there should be a form of reparations for slavery? Or is it now pointless? Or too expensive?

Suggested Activities

Suggested Gallery Activities:

- Use these notes as a discussion point with *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840* and ask pupils to answer the questions on a worksheet.
- Fact finding: split the class into groups and ask one group to look at the portrait of William Wilberforce and write their observations. Another group can be asked to compare *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention* with *The House of Commons, 1833* and write down any differences/similarities between the portraits; another group can look up information about the portraits on the Portrait Explorer in the IT Gallery.
- The students could be asked why they think there are no single portraits of ex-slaves in the Gallery. For example, we have Wilberforce but there is no individual portrait of Henry Beckford. Ask the students what kind of people they think are represented in the Regency Galleries and send them to go and list the different types. Ask them to make their list of who they think should be in the Gallery – given the Gallery’s collection policy is around the status of the sitter (i.e. their historical and cultural importance and fame).

Suggested Classroom Activities:

- Split the class into groups of four and ask an individual each in the group to take the part of either Clarkson, Opie, Prescod or Beckford. Get them to write a few lines each arguing why they were against slavery and how they feel now that it has been abolished.
 - Ask the class why they think it took so long for slavery to be abolished, which was not until 1833, when the slave trade was abolished in 1807. Discuss the idea of the trade in slaves: the transatlantic crossing etc. Being seen as particularly bad; the impact of the wars with France on the trade, and the economic and human rights issues involved with the slave trade. Also, discuss the role of the reformed House of Commons in bringing about the abolition of slavery within the British Empire.
- Get the class to list the other areas of the world where slavery was actively practised after 1833.
 - Organise a debate on whether reparations for slavery should be paid today. The linked article could be used in any discussion as background information: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,1552921,00.html>. Students can think about the profit to the economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the cost to the economy now. Discussion can be focused around whether the reparations should be to slave descendents in Britain, the Caribbean and the Americas, or whether to Africans. Also, should reparations be in the form of personal handouts or a more general form of remuneration?
 - After slavery was abolished in 1833, some British people in the church and government used the crusade against slavery as justification for controlling or, at least, becoming more powerful in parts of Africa so that slavery could be stamped out. Ask the class whether the expansion of Britain’s empire could be justified by the attempt to abolish slavery globally? And whether they thought such an attempt worked?
 - List places in the world where there are slaves today and lead a discussion on why slavery still exists in the world? Also, get them to think about what constitutes slavery in the modern world.