Why Reparations for African Enslavement is a Social Justice Issue for Everyone

by
Ayodele Martin,
Kwabena Dennot Nyack,
Luke Daniels and
Steve Cushion

Why Reparations for African Enslavement is a Social Justice Issue for Everyone

by
Ayodele Martin,
Kwabena Dennot Nyack,
Luke Daniels and
Steve Cushion

Caribbean Labour Solidarity

Published by
Caribbean Labour Solidarity, 2025
as a special issue of "Cutlass" ISSN 2055-7035

Introduction
What are "Reparations for Enslavement"?
The Road Ahead
Challenging the Myths
History of Reparations
Why does it matter? The Legacy of Enslavement
How does this affect the descendants of the enslaved today?
Health Outcomes
Educational Attainment
Economic Consequences
Debt
The Environment
Who profited?
What has it got to do with me?
"My grandfather was not a slave-owner".
"There has always been slavery".
"Cannot judge by today's standards".
"It was not illegal at the time"
Why should all workers in Britain support the claim for Reparations?
How Much?
To whom should the money go?
Who pays?
Why are you putting Britain down?
Surely, however, we can all be proud that Britain was the first to abolish slavery and the slave trade?
More than just money
Apology
Education and the curriculum.
Memorials and statues
Restitution of looted artefacts and remains of ancestors
Free Movement
Indigenous Slavery and Genocide
What's in a name?
The Campaign for Reparations

Why Reparations for African Enslavement is a Social Justice Issue for Everyone

Introduction

In the 400 years of the ‘Atlantic slave trade’, between 12 and 15 million Africans were kidnapped, enslaved and transported by force to the Americas and the Caribbean. Between one and two million died in the crossing and millions more people in Africa also died because of raids, wars and while being marched to the coast for ‘sale’ to European traffickers.

Once in the Americas, these enslaved labourers were forced to work in labour camps called "plantations", where they worked from sunrise to sunset and beyond, whipped and tortured into working harder and harder, while being fed a totally inadequate diet. The ruthless focus on profit dictated conditions so harsh that most only lived for about seven years before the accumulation of fatigue, whipping and hunger sent them to an early grave. The UN World Conference Against Racism 2001 recognised this as a Crime against Humanity.

For the African continent, trafficking represented depopulation of its societies, the destruction of political and social structures, the stifling of economic development and prepared the way for eventual conquest and occupation by the European powers.

The British Empire consisted of two sorts of colonies. In "White settler states" such as Canada and Australia, the indigenous population were subjected a process of genocide and ethnic cleansing, their stolen land was then given or sold to settlers from Europe. In "colonies of exploitation" such as India or South Africa, a minority of White administrators and businessmen, backed up by the British Army and Royal Navy, forced the Native workers to produce mineral raw materials or agricultural products, which were then shipped to Britain. The British West Indies were an extreme example of a colony of exploitation in that, having wiped out the First Nations, the British Empire was responsible for trafficking kidnapped Africans to replace them as forced labour.

What are "Reparations for Enslavement"?

Many supporters of the call for reparations by people of African descent struggle to explain what this means and how the concept should be communicated to others. The term Reparations has been defined as:

> Reparations are measures taken to compensate for historical injustices, such as slavery, colonialism or systemic racial discrimination. They may include financial compensation, public apologies, institutional reforms or educational initiatives aimed at acknowledging harm and addressing its lasting effects. Reparations seek to promote

> justice, healing and equality by recognising the wrongs of the past and working to repair their continuing impact on affected communities.

Although the word "compensate" is used in the above definition, reparations should not be confused with compensation, which is:

> Something, often money, given to someone to make up for loss, damage, injury or unfair treatment. In legal contexts, compensation aims to restore an individual, as far as possible, to the position they would have been in had the harm or loss not been caused or occurred.

Reparations are measures taken to compensate for past injustices, which can include financial payments, land restitution, or other forms of support aimed at addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of enslavement.

Reparations are a form of restorative justice, aiming to repair the harm done to individuals and communities, rather than merely punishing perpetrators.

Reparations may include financial compensation, but also other forms such as educational programmes, public apologies, and institutional reforms to address systemic inequalities.

Reparations must be demanded and paid within a legal framework that ensures transparency, fairness, and accountability, potentially involving international courts or treaties.

Beyond financial compensation, reparations serve as a symbolic acknowledgment of past wrongs and a practical step towards achieving racial and social justice.

The so-called "Transatlantic Slave Trade" involved the systematic kidnapping, trafficking, and enslavement of millions of Africans, causing profound and lasting harm to individuals, families, and communities. Reparations would acknowledge this historical wrong and seek to address its legacy. Nations and institutions that benefited from the trafficking in enslaved Africans, including the UK, have a moral obligation to repair the damage caused by their participation in this exploitative system. Failure to do so perpetuates the injustices and damage.

The call for reparations is part of a broader global movement seeking justice for historical crimes, recognising that addressing past injustices is essential for a more equitable future.

Reparations are not just about money, though financial redress must play a part. Reparations must also involve a national apology, official acknowledgement of wrongdoing, the inclusion of accurate history in school curricula, structural reform to dismantle institutional racism and a commitment to repair the damage by means of development aid, educational partnerships, and cultural restoration.

Caribbean Labour Solidarity supports the 10-point plan put forward by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission, which outlines a holistic framework for reparations. This includes demands for full, formal apology, debt cancellation, repatriation of those who wish to return to Africa and the return of cultural artefacts stolen from Africa and the Caribbean Region.

We reject the argument that the passage of time diminishes Britain's responsibility. The Holocaust is not forgotten, nor is the genocide of the First Nation people in the Americas. In fact, precedents for reparations already exist. Germany has paid reparations to Jewish survivors of the Nazi era. Canada has compensated indigenous peoples for residential schools.

Our fervent hope is that this book will serve as a vital tool for all those who stand in solidarity with the cause of Reparations for the descendants of those kidnapped from Africa and enslaved in the Caribbean, a horrific chapter in history more widely known as the "Transatlantic Slave Trade" but perhaps better described as the "Great Kidnapping".

We aim to equip our allies across the trade union movement, religious institutions, civic associations, political parties, educational organisations, and individuals of conscience with the arguments, facts, and strategies necessary to campaign for justice. That justice must include full and meaningful Reparations for the deep and lasting harm inflicted by Britain's past imperial rampage and its role in one of the most brutal crimes against humanity.

We believe that this book can be used as both a quick reference guide and an accessible primer for those who wish to understand the historical and moral necessity for Reparations. It will also serve as a handbook for supporters seeking guidance about how best to advocate for this long-overdue cause, whether through public speaking, lobbying, education or community engagement.

This book is not intended to be a detailed chronicle of Britain's empire. However, we will examine key elements of that history with a particular focus on the forced removal and enslavement of millions of African men, women, and children. We will explore how this heinous enterprise enriched a small segment of the British population, primarily the monarchy, commodity traders, landowners, industrialists, the Church of England, and those tied to banking, insurance, and shipping, while inflicting trauma, destruction and loss on generations of people of African descent.

Importantly, we will also examine how the consequences of these crimes are not confined to history. They are still with us today. The legacy of the kidnapping persists in the form of institutional racism, economic underdevelopment across the Caribbean and parts of Africa, social inequality, poor health outcomes, and limited access to opportunity among Black communities in the UK and elsewhere. Reparations are not about financial compensation alone; they are about truth-telling, accountability, and healing.

The Road Ahead

Bringing people around to supporting Reparations will require conversation, education, and, sometimes, confrontation. Our supporters will need to be prepared for resistance. They may be met with ridicule, accusations of “wokeness,” or claims that slavery was too long ago to matter now.

We must meet these challenges with understanding, compassion and resolve. The movement for Reparations is a human rights campaign and like all such struggles, from Anti-Apartheid to the fight for civil rights, it will be met with denial before it is finally accepted as necessary.

But it will be accepted. Justice demands it. History requires it.

Caribbean Labour Solidarity is committed to continuing this work. This book is one of many tools we will produce to assist in that mission.

Challenging the Myths

One of the major obstacles that supporters of this campaign will face is the widespread ignorance, denial, and misinformation embedded in Britain's education system and national consciousness. Many people in the UK continue to cling to a comforting but false narrative of Britain as a benevolent empire, a kindly uncle, if you will, who went about the world spreading civilisation, charity, and goodwill.

Dislodging this myth is no easy task. It requires courage, patience, and clarity of thought. Asking people to confront the darker truths of their country's past is unsettling. It is rather like discovering that the kindly uncle who once took you to the seaside and bought you sweets was, in reality, complicit in the most unimaginable crimes such as working as a guard at a Nazi extermination camp, or a habitual abuser. The emotional response is often disbelief, followed by defensiveness.

Yet confronting this history is necessary. Until we tell the truth about the empire, the traffic in enslaved Africans and the profits that financed the wealth of institutions that still exist today from banks and insurance companies to elite universities, there can be no justice, no reconciliation and certainly no closure. That is why this book insists that reparations must be placed at the centre of Britain's reckoning with its past.

Some argue that the present-day descendants of the Africans who were kidnapped and trafficked across the oceans do not need compensation, since they did not personally suffer the original harm. However, it is now widely recognised that the effects of enslavement very much affect the present generation today. These tribulations include poor health outcomes, limited access to quality education, significant underdevelopment and numerous other disadvantages.

A US organisation, Learning for Justice, has produced a website entitled "Teaching Hard History". They say "Most students leave high school without an adequate understanding of the role slavery played in the development of the United States - or how its legacies still influence us today. In an effort to remedy this, we developed a comprehensive guide for teaching and learning this critical topic at all grade levels".

https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery

History of Reparations

The concept of Reparations has ancient roots. It is not a recent idea invented by Caribbean Labour Solidarity or any other left-leaning activists. Its formal use in international relations and justice can be traced back to antiquity, with more structured development in 17th to 20th century European legal thought. This does not mean other civilisations did not develop their own forms of reparations. Societies across history, from the Mali Empire to the people of Vanuatu, practised their own versions. Reparations is not a new concept.

For example, reparations were carried out in ancient Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome, often in the form of tribute or compensation after war or wrongdoing. In Europe, the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia is seen as a landmark moment, signifying the start of modern international law, recognising state sovereignty and laying the foundation for reparations between states.

After the so-called Napoleonic Wars, defeated nations, such as France, were required to pay reparations to other European powers. This helped formalise the concept in treaties. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which imposed heavy and ultimately catastrophic reparations on Germany after the First World War, is one of the most well-known examples in modern history.

After the Second World War, reparations were paid to a number of Holocaust survivors and other victims of Nazi atrocities, setting a precedent for personal reparations in response to systemic injustice. Some see these payments as compensation rather than reparations, but the principle of reparative justice was established.

From the late 20th century onwards, the idea expanded to include within its scope slavery, colonialism and racial injustice, with growing demands for reparations to formerly colonised peoples and the descendants of enslaved Africans.

Britain’s entry into the kidnapping and trafficking of Africans began in the late 16th century but intensified in the 17th and 18th centuries. British ships transported over 3.1 million Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, of whom nearly half a million died en-route in the appalling conditions of the so-called "Middle Passage".

1562 – Captain John Hawkins made his first enslaving voyage to West Africa, initiating English involvement in the trafficking of enslaved Africans He sold Africans in the Caribbean in exchange for sugar, pearls, and hides.

1672 – The Royal African Company was granted a monopoly on British trade in West Africa, institutionalising large-scale trafficking of enslaved Africans.

1700s – British ports such as Liverpool, Bristol and London flourished through profits from the commerce in human beings, both direct and indirect. Cities, banks, and universities, as well as the Church, benefited directly from this related wealth.

1807 – Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807), ending Britain's legal involvement in trafficking. However, the captivity itself continued in British colonies.

1833 – Enslavement was abolished in most British colonies with the Slavery Abolition Act (1933), but the British government compensated "slave owners" with £20 million, around £17 billion in today's money, rather than the formerly enslaved labourers. The British government took out one of the largest loans in history to pay this compensation.

2015 – It was only ten years ago that the UK government finished repaying the loan taken out to pay compensation to "slave owners". Therefore, decisions taken to compensate the enslavers in 1833 by a British government elected by 3% of the population has made all taxpayers in 21st century poorer. British taxpayers, including descendants of the enslaved Africans, have been servicing this debt for generations.

As historian David Olusoga has noted that, "Britain's slave-ownership is a history that dare not speak its name. It's not just about black history; it's about British history."

Why does it matter? The Legacy of Enslavement

The effects of enslavement, including systemic racial discrimination, social inequality, and economic disadvantage, continue to affect descendants of enslaved people. Reparations seek to mitigate these ongoing harms.

Racism, when a person is discriminated against, belittled, excluded, disadvantaged, harassed, bullied, humiliated or degraded because of their race, skin colour or ethnic origin, proved an effective tool in the armoury of those who control British society. This is not to suggest that racism was a deliberate, cynical conspiracy by the rich and powerful. Having presided over a system based on the enslavement of Africans in the West Indies for two hundred years, they clearly believe their own propaganda.

Racism, which the supporters of the trafficking used as a justification for enslavement, has infected British society. Racial discrimination has meant that workers from the former colonies of the British Empire have suffered lower wages, worse conditions, worse housing and oppressive policing. The institutional racism of the police, the unemployment figures for young Black people, the endless discrimination and petty humiliations of everyday life, the Windrush scandal: all these factors and more have their origins in the invention of racism to explain the wealth and power that the British ruling class gained from enslavement.

The ending of institutional racism will require, at the very least, the complete restructuring of the Police and Home office in Britain, probably their abolition and starting again from scratch. This will cost money.

A similar disbanding and reconstruction of the police and army in the Caribbean nations will need to be funded. Without such reconstruction, their origins in the slave patrols will still surface.

On 24 May 2010, Jamaican police and military initiated a joint operation in the West Kingston community of Tivoli Gardens, to arrest Christopher Coke, wanted in the USA for drug and arms trafficking charges. During the first two days of the operation, at least 74 people, including one member of the Jamaica Defence Force, were killed. More than 40 of those killed in Tivoli Gardens are alleged to have been the victims of extrajudicial executions by the security forces.

The "Tivoli Gardens Massacre" can be traced back to mental attitudes developed during enslavement.

How does this affect the descendants of the enslaved today?

Health Outcomes

Centuries of brutality, malnutrition and poor healthcare have created intergenerational impacts. Today, African-Caribbean populations show higher incidences of hypertension,

diabetes and other chronic illnesses. These are linked, in part, to diets imposed on enslaved populations, high stress levels and systemic inequalities in access to healthcare.

In relation to diet, it was well understood by the managers of the work camps, using the knowledge gained in animal husbandry in the United Kingdom, that certain types of diets can lead to certain types of outcomes. This knowledge was applied to the kidnapped Africans when a diet, already inadequate for the work being demanded, was top-loaded with sugars and carbohydrates in order to increase the energy levels of the enslaved.

Sugar has become ubiquitous in the modern diet, with 40 percent of sugar being consumed in processed and preprepared food. Sugar is, in general, the key to the commercial success of a food or drink product. It is also an essential ingredient of processed meat. It is what makes Kentucky Fried Chicken appear edible.

There is now an epidemic of obesity. The World Health Organisation estimates that two billion people in this world are overweight, with 600 million classified as obese. This has devastating implications for their health; diabetes, hypertension, myocardial infarction, angina, osteoarthritis, stroke, gout, gallbladder disease, colonic and ovarian cancer, breathing difficulties and back problems, for which the vast amount sugar in the modern diet is largely responsible. Sugar is also responsible for the widespread dental problems in young people and many diseases of the pancreas. This public health situation is one of the continuing legacies of the business of slavery.

The African descended population in the Caribbean has the highest incidence in the world of chronic diseases in the form of hypertension and Type 2 diabetes. New medical evidence has shown that this is a result of the nutritional experience, physical and emotional brutality, and overall stress profiles associated with 400 years of enslavement. The centuries of poor nutrition and overly salted foods given to the enslaved have now transmitted an intergenerational tendency for hypertension.

Dealing with this health crisis requires the use of science, technology, and capital beyond the capacity of the Caribbean region. European countries that are responsible for the crisis have an obligation to participate in its alleviation and to restore good health through the provision of hospitals and health care. These chronic health conditions now constitute the greatest economic risk to sustainability in the region.

European colonialism has inflicted serious psychological trauma upon African and First Nation peoples who therefore need rehabilitation for their affected populations. Mental health issues need to be treated like other manifestations of illness. Medical evidence for other traumatised populations now demonstrates that there can be intergenerational transmission of trauma such as the kidnapping, trans-Atlantic trafficking, enslavement, terror and brutalization experienced by enslaved Africans.

Seeing the rich and powerful shell out money in Reparations will be enormously beneficial to the self respect of the descendants of the enslaved and thereby assist in the improvement of their mental health.

One of the principal causes of mental health problems is poverty. Poverty is only cured by money. We are not arguing for money to be distributed to individuals, rather for proper, democratically run, development projects. Well trained, well paid employment results in a remarkable improvement in self respect and mental health.

Educational Attainment

When Caribbean nations gained independence in the 1960s and 1970s, they inherited education systems that were underdeveloped and elitist. Designed to serve colonial administrators, not to empower the masses, these systems left many citizens without the tools for self-determination.

It is no surprise that the primary and secondary educational material used in the limited educational provision of these territories were geared around life in Britain. Many Caribbean elders will recall having to read the Janet and John books in primary school. These were later criticised for being overly simplistic, socially conservative and, amongst other things, culturally outdated.

In addition, the focus of the remainder of the curriculum was based on a sanitised version of British history with an emphasis on Kings and Queens and UK mainland geography. There was an absolute denial of the history of the subject people, which, of course, is to be expected. The thieves cannot be expected to teach those being stolen from that they are being robbed.

This abject and deliberate lack of investment in education under colonial rule stunted opportunities and reinforced the post-independent dependency of these newly independent states, a situation in which they remain trapped.

Economic Consequences

For 400 years the trade and production policies of Europe could be summed up in the British slogan: “not a nail is to be made in the colonies”.

Even after the abolition of enslavement, workers in the British West Indies faced having to pay rent, frequently deducted from their miserable wages, while their exploitation was reinforced by penal laws against vagrancy and debt. Protest was met by eviction, the demolition of their houses and destruction of provision grounds. Colonies passed "Master and Servant Acts" restricting the right to strike and other collective activity that might have increased wages.

Newly independent nations emerged with economies structured around extraction, not development. This was as a result of the central policy of the British Empire that the colonies

would not be allowed to refine or process the raw materials that they produced. These had to be transported to Britain to promote industrialisation there. The profits from centuries of forced labour had long since enriched Britain, leaving Caribbean states with few resources and limited industrial capacity. Economic vulnerability, foreign debt and dependence on imports became common traits in the post-independence era.

Of course, the situation has been partially reversed in that much assembly work, textile manufacture etc. has now been outsourced to the former colonies, where wage rates are considerably lower than in Europe and North America. But this does not assist independent development, as the manufacturing corporations quickly move their operations from one part of the Third World to another as soon as demands for wage increases threaten their profitability or when governments demand a tax increase.

Debt

Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty. Correcting the burden of colonialism has fallen on these new states. They were unable to deal with the challenges of development without taking on onerous levels of debt. This debt cycle properly belongs to the governments responsible, European countries who have made no sustained attempt to deal with debilitating colonial legacies.

This situation is made much worse by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which administers much of the debt on behalf of the financial services industry, much of which is based in the City of London. The IMF acts as a collection agency for foreign capital. IMF policies are aimed at making countries more attractive for foreign capital to take over their economies and enabling increased extraction of profits.

There is a long history of "neocolonialism through debt". In 1825 a French naval blockade forced the government of Haïti to agree to pay an indemnity of 150 million francs to compensate their former enslavers. In order to finance this, the Haïtian government contracted a number of loans from French-owned banks that they could not afford to service. The rapacious banks, particularly CIC and National City Bank, both supported by their respective governments, charged exorbitant interest and commission which left the country impoverished and underdeveloped.

Cancellation of Third World debt is a universal demand from all the former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas. It is demanded in addition to the specific demands of the Reparations campaign.

The Environment

There are ongoing environmental consequences of the legacy of slavery. James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, drew much of his early finance from the business of slavery. The fossil fuel-driven steam engine started industrial capitalism onto the path that leads to the present crisis of global warming and climate change. But climate change is not the only environmental legacy of slavery. Intensive monocrop production, begun during the slavery era, has deforested much of the Caribbean and depleted the soil of the islands. As the fertility of existing cleared land fell, the landowners ordered the clearing of hillsides and uplands previously thought unsuitable for cultivation, but the heavy rainfall quickly washed away the topsoil. As an example, Bridgetown Harbor in Barbados began to silt up, and cane plants were increasingly vulnerable to wind damage.

The 2018 hurricanes Irma and Maria signaled the emergence of a new climate pattern in the Caribbean. At no point in the historical records dating back to the 1880s have two Category 5 storms struck the eastern Caribbean in a single year. The Caribbean is experiencing repeated and prolonged droughts, an increase in the number of very hot days, intense rainfall events causing repeated localised flooding, and rising sea levels. Caribbean economies are built on industries and sectors that are extremely sensitive to climate variations, such as tourism and agriculture. The ferocity of Irma and Maria brought devastation of catastrophic proportions. Without global action, it is predicted that by the end of the current century the Caribbean region will warm a further 2–3^{o} C over the 1^{o} C already seen in the last century. Annual rainfall amounts will decrease by up to 40 percent, posing a significant challenge to already water-stressed islands. Projections also show sea levels rising by one or two meters. There will be more of the strongest tropical Atlantic hurricanes. The region's climate will be altered beyond recognition. The Caribbean islands are minor emitters of greenhouse gases, but the future viability of the region depends on collective global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is for this reason that the Caribbean and other small island and developing states have argued for a limit to global warming of 1.5^{o}C. The slogan "1.5°C to Stay Alive!" was adopted by the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. A world warmed by no more than 1.5°C is one in which existing Caribbean societies have a future. The emissions reductions that have been voluntarily agreed through the United Nations have been predicted to lead to warming of 2.7–3.7°C.

The deforestation of the Caribbean Islands to produce sugar along with the soil exhaustion resulting from mono-crop, export-based agriculture, has severely damaged the possibilities for sustainable development. In turn, the deforestation of the region has adversely affected weather patterns, making the general effects of global warming more severe. Rewilding projects and sustainable agriculture cost money.

Climate reparations are financial payments and other forms of assistance, including debt relief and technology transfer, provided by historically high-emitting countries to Third

World nations to address the historical injustices and ongoing harms caused by climate change, exacerbated by colonialism.

This claim is in addition to the specific demands for Reparations for African Enslavement. Caribbean Labour Solidarity supports both.

Who profited?

The wealth generated from enslaved labour contributed significantly to the economic development of many nations. Reparations aim to redress the economic disparities that persist as a result of this exploitation.

The business of slavery took place within a context of other systems of exploitation and expropriation. West Indian plantation slavery, East Indian and African colonisation, and genocidal land-grabbing in the white settler colonies are normally treated as separate phenomena. However, closer examination shows that they were interconnected, with many individuals profiting from more than one of these income streams. The development of capitalist agriculture was deeply entwined with the business of slavery, as funds from the business of slavery were also important in financing the mass privatisation of agricultural land in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period known as the Enclosures in England and the Highland Clearances in Scotland, when thousands of peasant farmers were driven from their family farms, initially by gangs of armed thugs in the pay of the landowners, with the backing of corrupt lawyers and magistrates, and later by the forces of the state on the instructions of Parliament.

Atlantic slavery was an important component of the development and expansion of modern capitalism, both through the profits made from sugar and other tropical products as well as the supply of cheap raw materials such as cotton to European and North American manufacturers. These profits went, directly or indirectly, to the manufacturers and other suppliers of trafficking in enslaved Africans, to the shipping industry, to the construction of infrastructure such as canals and railways, but above all to the financial services industry. Many of today's large banks and insurance companies can be traced back directly to concerns that had their first growth as part of the slave economy. It would therefore seem reasonable that these modern firms should refund the unpaid wages from which their predecessors profited so handsomely, forming the basis of their current prosperity. Those that did not directly gain, benefited from the investment of slave compensation payments in infrastructure projects that helped the reorientation of the British economy away from agricultural production towards manufacturing.

British upper classes made one thousand five hundred billion pounds in unpaid wages from their involvement in the business of slavery. This is the basis of their control of today's capitalist economy. One of the essential arguments for Reparations in the trade union and working class movement in Britain is for the repayment of unpaid wages. If we let them off with an apology, they will just say sorry and move on. They will only be really sorry if it costs them deep in the purse.

What has it got to do with me?

"My grandfather was not a slave-owner".

And it would not matter if he was, we are not responsible for the actions of our family past or present, we are responsible for our own actions. Reparations is a social justice issue and we shall be judged on how we respond to that, not on the actions of our ancestors.

However, there are some families, such as the members of "Heirs of Slavery", who, being aware that their family ancestors were enslavers or traffickers, have sought to reclaim their family honour by supporting the Reparations campaign. As they say ‘We cannot change the past. But we can change the consequences’.

While this is welcome, the majority of the descendants of the enslavers cannot be relied upon to return their ill-gotten gains. The campaign demands that the State organise the payment of Reparations. Enslavement could not have existed without the support of the State: the Royal Navy to protect the ships trafficking the enslaved from piracy, the British Army to seize the colonies, suppress the indigenous populations, protect the colonies against rival imperialisms and to put down the resistance of the enslaved workers. The British government created the legal, financial and fiscal policies necessary for the enslavement of Africans, refused compensation to the enslaved with the ending of their enslavement, but compensated slave owners at emancipation for the loss of legal property rights in enslaved Africans

It is therefore the responsibility of the State to repair the damage and force those who still retain the profits of the business of slavery to release their ill-gotten gains.

"There has always been slavery".

And there has always been resistance to enslavement and forced labour. Spartacus led a rebellion of enslaved labourers against the Roman Empire.

But the real difference is that the systematic enslavement of Africans in the Americas was many times vaster in scale than any previous system. The consequences are still with us today and the profits from the business of slavery were an important foundation block of the system of industrial capitalism that still dominates the World. The ill-gotten gains of the traffickers and enslavers can be traced right through to today.

"Cannot judge by today's standards".

Why not? Most people feel it is quite right to condemn the Nazi genocide even though it occured 80 years ago.

But this objection leads to others: "People thought differently then" or "No-one opposed slavery". Both these statements beg the question of who do you mean by "People" or "No one"? It is safe to say that the enslaved Africans themselves opposed slavery. But the

successful ideological dehumanisation of the enslaved Africans removes them from the category of "People".

But, even if we just count the inhabitants of Britain, opinion was deeply divided. Workers in Britain, particularly trade unionists in Yorkshire and Lancashire, have a proud history of internationalism and opposition to slavery and racism, from the anti-slavery petitioning campaigns of the late 18th and early 19th centuries through the immense solidarity with the anti-slavery forces in the United States civil war to the more recent support for Anti-Apartheid. More workers signed anti-slavery petitions than signed the Chartist petitions for the right to vote.

The Sheffield cutlery workers made a particularly firm connection between abolition of slavery and reform at home; a mass meeting in Sheffield in 1794, the largest ever in the town, called for total abolition of enslavement, at a time when William Wilberforce was merely calling for the end of trafficking, leaving in bondage those who had been previously enslaved.

In 1819, at a meeting in his Hopkins Street Chapel in London, Robert Wedderburn asked the congregation "Has a slave an inherent right to slay his master, who refuses him liberty?" Following a discussion, "nearly the whole of the persons in the room held up their hands in favour of the Question". Wedderburn then exclaimed "Well Gentlemen, I can now write home and tell the Slaves to murder their masters as soon as they please."

The first Parliament that was even remotely democratic followed the Reform Act of 1832. One of its first acts was to legislate against slavery.

If the business of slavery was so respectable, why do those who profited not proudly have the word "Slave Driver" inscribed on their tombstones and monuments?

"It was not illegal at the time"

In the case of Crimes Against Humanity, the United Nations and other Human Rights conventions take precedence over national law. Thus, in the case of genocide, enslavement and trafficking in the enslaved, international law provides for the prosecution of perpetrators of such crimes, even if these actions were legal in the jurisdiction of accused.

The Nuremberg Laws laid the foundation for the Holocaust, but the post-war Nuremberg Tribunal did not accept that this was a defence. The defence that "I was acting under orders" was equally rejected.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) explicitly transcends national laws.

- Article 6 - the right to be free from arbitrary deprivation of life
- Article 7 - prohibits torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Article 8 - outlaws slavery, servitude or compulsory labour.

The covenant allows for retrospective application of its provisions.

In France, in 2001, the Parliament passed a law, known as the *loi Taubira,* which recognised that trafficking and enslavement were "Crimes Against Humanity" and decreed that "School curricula and research programs in history and humanities will give the slave trade and slavery the significant place they deserve". Since 2014, there has been an official "National Day in Tribute to the Victims of Colonial Slavery" held on 23 May.

Why should all workers in Britain support the claim for Reparations?

When West Indian bus-workers were recruited directly from their homelands by London Transport, it had been the employer's intention to pay them a lower rate. The insistence by the Transport and General Workers' Union on strict equality was repaid by these migrant workers who became enthusiastic supporters of the union. It was a commonplace that, during the heyday of the London Transport bus-worker during the 1970s and 80s, the main defence of wages and conditions depended on the militancy of the Inner London garages which had a much higher proportion of Black workers. The worsening of wage rates and hours of work in the 1990s was as a result of deregulation and privatisation, not the presence of immigrant workers.

While Bill Morris, who became General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, is the most high profile example, a disproportionately large number of Black West Indians have been active leaders of the trade union movement in Britain, in a tradition going back to William Cuffay who led the London Chartists in the 1840s.

Workplace solidarity proved to be a significant step in overcoming racial prejudices in many White workers, particularly where they were involved in joint strikes in multiracial workforces. The inspirational effect of Jayaben Desai and the Grunwick strikers has become legendary. "We have shown," she said, "that workers like us, new to these shores, will never accept being treated without dignity or respect. We have shown that White workers will support us". In 1992, the Commission for Racial Equality reported that there was a "link between greater involvement of Black trade union members and effective union organisation".

Eric Williams, in his classic book, "Capitalism and Slavery" argued that racism was "a consequence, not the cause of slavery". Workers in Britain have long suffered from divisions caused by racism that have weakened our ability to defend and advance our wages and conditions. A recognition of the origins of such divisions in the slave-based economy of the 18th and 19th centuries will go some way to combating racial prejudices and assist in building a united response to the problems facing today's workers.

We urge the British trade union and labour movement to follow in the radical internationalist tradition of so many 18th and 19th century workers and support the claim of the descendants of the British West Indian slaves for reparations. As Thomas Hardy of the London Corresponding Society wrote over 200 years ago: "for I am persuaded that no Man who is an advocate from a principle for liberty for a Black Man but will strenuously promote and support the rights of a White Man and vice versa".

An injury to one is an injury to all.

How Much?

Any modern trade union representative worth their salt immediately responds to support any worker who is not paid their wages. Reparations for slavery is a means to address a similar grievance for many millions of unpaid enslaved labourers whose descendants are calling for solidarity.

Enslaved workers were paid nothing for their labour power. Let us do a calculation for the amount of unpaid wages owed in the case of Barbados alone:

- Take the available figures for numbers of enslaved laborers between 1617 and 1838.
- Calculate the average number for each period under consideration.
- Multiply this figure by the number of years in that period.
- Multiply by £15, the average annual wage of a British agricultural worker for the years 1650 to 1780, or by £25, the average annual wage for the period 1780-1850.

This gives a total of £211,113,465, worth £564,200,000,000 today. Similarly, for Jamaica we have a figure of £612,794,965 [£1,722, 000,000,000 today]. Applying this calculation to the whole of the former British West Indies produces a figure of £1,222,781,000, which is worth approximately two thousand, five hundred billion pounds sterling in today's money.

We also need an estimation of the cost of repairing the health and education systems of the Caribbean and of promoting sustainable economic development. In short, how much will it cost to "right the wrongs"?

These figures can make the basis of a claim for Reparations. Rather than trusting international courts to adjudicate, a better approach would be to demand negotiations between the governments of the Caribbean nations and the British government. Negotiations, not consultation. Negotiations occur between equals, the very act of negotiations recognises the importance of the issue and would be the first time the British government has shown any respect to the people of the Caribbean. That would be a step forward in itself.

To whom should the money go?

The answer is to the Caribbean nation states, perhaps through an institution with an international charter or status under the UN. It will be the nation states of the Caribbean that will be responsible for implementing the repair: the money must go to them.

Who pays?

Twenty million pounds was given to the slave owners in compensation for their loss of human property. The emancipated enslaved labourers received nothing for their years of toil and oppression.

This compensation was largely paid by the workers in Britain as, in those days, the majority of state revenue was raised by regressive taxation on items of basic consumption, which always hit the poor hardest. The money borrowed to finance the compensation was finally paid off in 2015.

We need to be careful that any reparations for slavery are not similarly shifted onto the shoulders of ordinary people. The best way to do this would be to propose a special, additional Corporation Tax to fund reparations, so that the descendant institutions of those who did not pay the enslaved Africans their wages might now be made to do so.

Equally, raising the sum via a wealth tax would avoid the unfairness of the cost falling on the poor. Of course, a wealth tax may fall on some of the descendants of the enslaved, or some recent immigrants to the UK who have no links through the generations to the colonial period. But those who have achieved economic success in the UK, wherever they started and however they have done so, have themselves benefited from an economy that was immeasurably enhanced by the wealth generated by colonial slavery.

Why are you putting Britain down?

This frequently asked question begs another and makes unfounded assumptions. What do you mean by "Britain"? There are a number of alternative, contradictory answers to this question.

- The Government and machinery of state?
- The great men of the nation, political leaders, the rich, powerful and famous, in short, the ruling class?
- The islands that comprise Great Britain?
- The whole population of these islands irrespective of ethnicity?
- A nativist, White supremacist view of who is really "British"?
- A class based view that sees that different classes have different and frequently contradictory interests? It used to be said that the British always support the "underdog".
- A national chauvinist conception that seeks to Make Britain Great Again?

Most people probably have an image that is a personal combination of more than one of these abstractions, but not all. Equally most people will assume that the vast majority share their "imagined community". This conception can be contradictory and change according to circumstances.

Depending on your conception of the nation, speaking of the crimes committed in the name of the British Empire can either be seen as treason or as seeking to rectify injustices that are a legacy of past oppression and thereby make the country a fairer, more equal and just society, as well as restoring the reputation of Britain in the World.

Surely, however, we can all be proud that Britain was the first to abolish slavery and the slave trade?

The British Establishment has boasted of its freedom-loving generosity ever since, probably believing its own propaganda. Unfortunately for mythology, Denmark outlawed its citizens' involvement in the traffic of enslaved Africans in 1792 and Mexico abolished enslavement in 1829. Meanwhile, it took the British Empire until 1807 to stop the trafficking of enslaved Africans and 1838 to finally abolish legalised chattel slavery.

In any case, desisting from a Crime against Humanity, while welcome, should surely be a cause for remorse and apology rather than rejoicing.

More than just money

Apology

Only a full and formal apology can allow for the healing of wounds and real reconciliation.

A full apology accepts responsibility, commits to non-repetition, and pledges to repair the harm caused. Governments whose predecessors were responsible for enslavement have refused to offer apologies and have instead issued "Statements of Regret". These statements do not acknowledge that crimes have been committed and continue to represent a refusal to take responsibility.

An apology, if it is to mean anything, must be more than the regret and remorse expressed by a criminal in the hope of a lighter sentence after they have been found guilty. It must involve real and appropriate action.

Education and the curriculum

Colonialism created the situation where European culture was forced on the indigenous populations and the people forcibly brought to the Caribbean region. This forced acculturation was based on the incorrect and racist idea that the full and rich cultures of each of these groups was ‘inferior’ and needed to be erased. European countries involved in colonialism deliberately tried to distance people from the sources of their culture and belonging.

Education has been and still plays a central role in the transmission of values as well as knowledge. The education system has been central to enabling British institutions to maintain their institutional racism through the periods of colonisation, enslavement, empire building and post war immigration. This has had a knock-on effect on the persistence of both widespread racism and the institutional discrimination experienced by children of Caribbean, African and Asian heritage. Notable historical examples are the discriminatory labelling of Black children as Educationally SubNormal (ESN) that happened in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the continuing prevalence of discriminatory exclusions from education.

The official history ignores completely that the enslaved did not sit passively and await "saviours from on high to deliver". They fought on the beaches of Africa, they mutinied on the slave ships, they deserted to form maroon communities in the hills of the Caribbean colonies and, given the slightest opening, engaged in full scale rebellions. The enslaved were the first abolitionists.

We need to challenge the comfortable and self-congratulatory view of abolition and emancipation summed up by the inscription on William Wilberforce's monument in

Westminster Abbey which claims that he "removed from England the guilt of the African slave trade".

While there can be no doubt that the prominent elite abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson were genuinely and deeply appalled by the violence and cruelty of slavery, they still firmly believed in the sanctity of property and were extremely reluctant to do anything that might undermine the capitalist system. Thus they supported the £20 million given to the slaveowners and nothing to the enslaved labourers. The nature of emancipation can be seen in the full title of the Act of Parliament of August 1833: "An Act for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies, for promoting the industry of the manumitted slaves and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of such slaves".

One way of recognising the contribution that the enslaved Africans made to their own liberation would be to formally overturn the convictions of those rebels who fought for their freedom and were executed or otherwise brutally punished as a result. This would send a powerful message that they were right to fight for their freedom.

Memorials and statues

Why does the British Establishment go to such lengths to defend memorials to enslavers?

"Culture Wars" have become a right-wing cover for otherwise unacceptable justifications for racism, sexism, imperialism and class privilege. An important battlefield in this struggle concerns statues of enslavers.

The overwhelming majority of statues raise issues around class, gender and race, as they usually portray members of the ruling class of the time. Given the importance of profits made from slavery and the trafficking in enslaved Africans in the rise of British capitalism, it is inevitable that a very large number of statues in public places will be memorials to businessmen who made their fortunes in the business of slavery or Generals who seized the colonies and made the world safe for the enslavers.

The purpose of public statues throughout history has been to reinforce the rule of the elite, to make their dominance look permanent and to sanitise their history for future generations. It is also "dog-whistle politics" - a nod and a wink to white-supremacists and right-wing nationalists, reassuring them that, as far as the powers that be are concerned, Black Lives do NOT matter.

Philanthropy and charity were useful ways to disguise the shabby origins of so much wealth, but to be effective, this apparent generosity had to be very public. Thus the proliferation of statues and other memorials to these ruthless businessmen. Charitable giving

also has the advantage of allowing the rich to determine social policy as they wish. The rich never give money away without strings attached.

Statues are part of a cumulative ideological construction that extols the great and the good: pub signs, street names, buildings, and schools, all named after upper class worthies. This cultural absorption of capitalist memorabilia has become part of a proxy war for control of the dominant narrative of how history is told. When right-wing politicians speak of "taking back our culture," they are referring to a culture of White supremacist nativism and national chauvinism.

Campaigns for the removal of the statues of enslavers are a public part of the education process. When the people of Bristol pitched the statue of Edward Colston in the river, the story of how he made his money was heard the world over. This was a fitting culmination of a campaign that many people in Bristol had been waging for years. Mark Steeds and Roger Hill's finely researched book "From Wulfstan to Colston" had provided the historical information; the statue's headlong dive in the river completed the history lesson.

This is a battleground that we did not seek, but one that we cannot avoid.

Restitution of looted artefacts and remains of ancestors

How would you feel if the earthly remains of your great-grandmother were part of a museum display or kept in a box in an archive to be occasionally pawed over by a researcher?

Until 2015, during formal dinners at Worcester College, Oxford, the academics used to serve wine in a chalice made from a human skull, which had been made from a sawn-off and polished braincase adorned with a silver rim and stand. No record has been kept of the person from whose skull the cup was made, although carbon dating showed the skull is about 225 years old and circumstantial evidence suggest it came from the Caribbean and possibly belonged to an enslaved woman. The cup was donated to Worcester College in 1946 by a former student, George Pitt-Rivers, whose name is inscribed on its silver rim. A White supremacist, he was interned during the Second World War because of his Nazi sympathies. The skull is now stored in the college archive "in a respectful manner, where access to it is permanently denied".

This is an extreme example, but it illustrates how the identities of the victims of colonial rule have been erased from history because they were not considered noteworthy.

Lord Wolseley is quoted as saying "In planning a war against an uncivilised nation your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion". So much of the content of British museums consists of objects looted during colonial wars. The hundreds of institutions, individuals, and families that hold this loot today, universities,

museums, charitable trusts, local governments, nation states, descendants of the soldiers who did the looting and private collectors, need to take meaningful action towards cultural restitution, informed by the understanding that the violence is not some past act, to be judged by the supposed standards of the past, but an ongoing event. Merely changing the labels and rearranging the exhibits is not enough.

Part of the devastation of European colonisation was the deliberate attempt to destroy the cultures and languages of the First Nation people and enslaved Africans. This has left a gap in the knowledge of the history of their ancestors as well as an inability to deeply appreciate the full and complete lives and cultures they had before European colonisation.

The restoration of historical memory by establishing museums and research centres in the Caribbean will allow citizens to understand these crimes against humanity as well as other colonial harm and to memorialise their ancestors' contributions to modern disciplines such as health care and technology. The return of cultural heritage for display in the region would also allow Caribbean teachers, children, academic researchers and the general public to have the benefit of access to the information that is now locked up in European institutions.

Free Movement

Today, the world is in crisis with poverty, famine and war forcing whole populations to seek a new life in richer areas of the world. Meanwhile, hard, militarised borders, such as the Mediterranean, the English Channel and the Arizona desert, are claiming thousands of lives every year. Much of this migration is caused by the detrimental effects of climate change.

Under capitalism there is an international division of labour with a hierarchy in which the most developed capitalist countries exploit the rest through the medium of finance capital and industrial corporations, backed by superior weaponry and fire-power.

Presently, the Caribbean islands face one of the worst threats on the planet of flooding caused by sea-level rises and increasingly violent hurricanes. At the same time, Caribbean victims of climate change are denied the right to migrate out of the threatened region.

Descendants of enslaved Africans would not even be in the Caribbean if they had not been trafficked there by their enslavers.

Hard borders exist as much to prevent people leaving their country of origin as to prevent their arrival elsewhere. A cross-border, internationalist working-class movement is needed to fight for a world-wide minimum wage and limits on the maximum hours of work, for parity with the best available. Why should a Haitian or Jamaican worker be expected to have a standard of living so much lower than the norm in Europe?

From a working-class point of view, we should not be calling for restrictions on migration, but rather fighting to place the maximum restrictions on free movement of capital.

If the descendants of enslaved Africans wish to move to the countries of the former colonial powers, they should be free to do so. If they wish to move to Africa, funding should be provided to assist this.

The empty pedestal of the statue of Edward Colton in Bristol, the day after protesters felled the statue and rolled it into the harbour. The ground is covered with Black Lives Matter placards. [Caitlin Hobbs]

Indigenous Slavery and Genocide

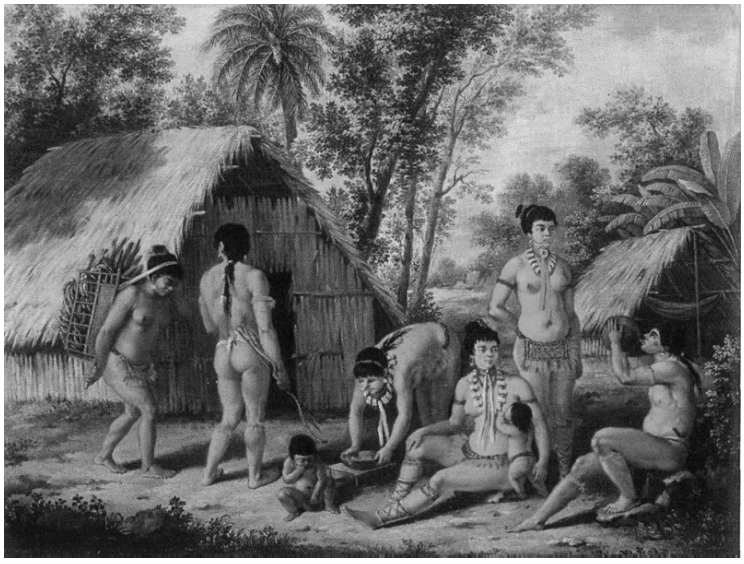
From 1670 to 1715, fifty thousand Native Americans were enslaved in Carolina. Most of them were sold away to Barbados, more than the number of Africans trafficked into British North America during the same period. This financed much of the early development of Carolina. The settlers adopted a policy of destroying the towns, villages and, most important, the cornfields and livestock of the indigenous people with whom they were at war. They formed companies of "rangers," gangs of murderous thugs who devastated Native settlements, who were paid for taking scalps and allowed to sell their captives into enslavement.

During the course of the eighteenth century, the priority of the colonial governments moved from enslavement of indigenous people to their extermination. This process of massacre and land grabbing, which started in the eastern colonies, moved westward, across the continent and accelerated after the formation of the United States, following the War of Independence. A similar story emerges in the British West Indies.

The native inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles, stretching from Guadeloupe to Tobago, were known as the Kalinago and their maritime civilisation resisted European colonisation, slowly retreating to their heartland in Saint Vincent and Dominica. But, through a combination of diplomacy and military action, they were able to seriously delay the development of the plantation economy on their islands.

However, a major British military expedition eventually suppressed the Kalinago opposition in 1797. The surviving Kalinago were deported from Saint Vincent to the island of Roatán, off the coast of present-day Honduras, where they became known as the Garifuna people. The main centers of Garifuna population today are Honduras, Belize, and New York City.

The demographic collapse that resulted in the widespread depopulation of the Americas is commonly blamed on epidemics unwittingly brought from Europe and Africa. These diseases certainly played a large part in the population decline in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but rangers and scalp hunters, land grabbers, and enslavers must also be held responsible for the deliberate genocide of the First Nations of North America and the Caribbean.



A Kalinago Family (1770)

What's in a name?

The terms we use to describe situations are important, the images that certain words conjure up in our minds affect the way we analyse the world. For example, when talking about the original inhabitants of North America, "Indian Tribes" makes them sound primitive, "First Nations" respects their complex civilisations.

Using the word "Slave" to describe someone can imply an unalterable situation that they have accepted. "Enslaved labourer" or "Enslaved African" makes it clearer that their enslavement was forced upon them against their will.

Similarly "Slave trade" makes it sound like a normal business operation and dehumanises enslaved people. The term "trafficking", given its current usage as the capture of women and young children for the purpose of sexual and other exploitation, gives a much clearer mental image of what happened to enslaved Africans.

Kidnapping is a crime that everyone understands. Using this term to describe what happened to so many men, women and children in West Africa brings their fate home to people today. Similarly, using the word "torture" to describe the techniques used to extract more productivity from the enslaved Africans makes the listener think about the horror of the whole process. The "Transatlantic Slave Trade" might be perhaps better described as the "Great Kidnapping".

The National Archives website contains the following recommendation:

> *Enslaved person* is the preferred term for an individual. *Enslaved persons* and *enslaved people* are preferred terms to refer to groups of people. *Enslaved* can be used as a modifier instead of slave before a person's name, role, or profession, or the modifier slave can be removed and not replaced in that instance, especially if the description elsewhere provides context related to enslaved people or slavery.
>
> Do not remove all uses of slave; the term should be retained when used as a modifier related to economic systems.

Joseph Inikori uses the term "The Business of Slavery" to make clear that the responsibility lies not only with the kidnappers, traffickers and enslavers, but also with the businessmen who stood behind them, financing their operations and extracting profit at one remove from the dirty business of enslavement.

The term "working class in Britain" is more useful than "British working class," as it recognises the importance of immigrant workers in the workforce and as activists in organised labour, including considerable numbers of the descendants of enslaved Africans as well as other victims of British imperialism.

The use of the pronouns "we" and "our," unless used to describe a group of people physically present, presumes a common identity that may not have any validity. At best it

can cause confusion, and at worst, can deliberately be used to draw the reader/listener into a presumed grouping, such as race or nation, in an inappropriate manner.

During the "days of slavery" in the Caribbean and the Americas, written records show that enslaved and freed people rarely employed the term "reparation" in association with enslavement. Instead they evoked it by using synonyms such as redress, compensation, indemnification, atonement, repayment, and restitution. The term "compensation" evokes the idea of a directly calculable sum of money paid to an individual to compensate for a quantifiable loss. Also the word is tarnished in this context as it was used to describe the payments made to enslavers for the loss of their human property. Reparations has become the currently accepted term as it implies repairing a broken society, with both material and moral elements. It is a collective demand on behalf of a whole community and the response must be equally collective, uplifting the social conditions of all the descendants of the enslaved.

The Campaign for Reparations

CARICOM, the Caribbean Community, is an intergovernmental organisation that is a political and economic union of 15 member states and five associated members throughout the Americas, the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean.

The CARICOM Reparations Commission is a regional body created to Establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of Reparations by the Governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community for the Crimes against Humanity of Native Genocide, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and a racialized system of chattel Slavery.

CARICOM 10 Point Reparation Plan

1. Full Formal Apology
2. Indigenous Peoples Development Program
3. Funding For Repatriation To Africa
4. The Establishment Of Cultural Institutions And The Return Of Cultural Heritage
5. Assistance in Remedying the Public Health Crisis
6. Education Programmes
7. The Enhancement of Historical and Cultural Knowledge Exchanges
8. Psychological Rehabilitation as a Result of the Transmission of Trauma
9. The Right to Development through the Use of Technology
10. Debt Cancellation and Monetary Compensation

CARICOM is pursuing this claim by legal and diplomatic means at interstate level. If they are to be successful there will also need to be a mass campaign to demand Reparations. The success of the campaign to abolish African enslavement in the early 19th century was largely due to resistance by the enslaved workers in the Caribbean and a widespread popular movement in Britain. If we are to achieve justice for the descendants of the enslaved Africans, we shall need to recreate that alliance.

To this end, we call upon all trade union, political, community and church organisations to actively support the campaign for Reparations for African Enslavement.

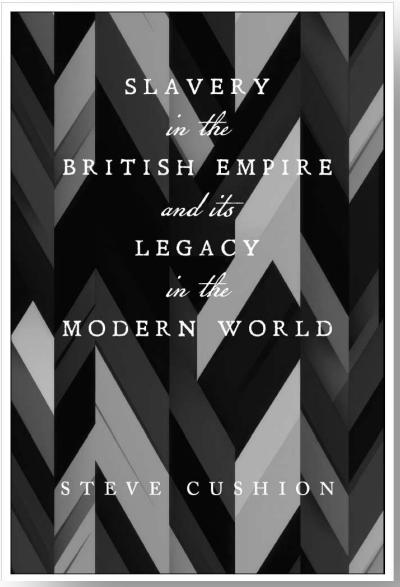
Reparations is a social justice issue. Coming to terms with the past can make a better future for us all.

Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.

But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation.

Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, Chapter 10

MR MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS



Slavery in the British Empire and its Legacy in the Modern World, by Stephen Cushion, situates the crime of enslavement within the business practices that place profit before people. The institution of slavery entailed a unique combination of exploitation and expropriation anchored in patterns of conspicuous consumption by the wealthy, and intertwined with the textile, food, agriculture, construction, transportation, infrastructure and insurance industries. It was floated by the same banking and commodity trading systems that still remain today.

The exploitation of enslaved labor stimulated capitalist expansion during and after the bloody reign of the British Empire—at the cost of war, inter-imperialist rivalry, Indigenous genocide, and the murderous suppression of the rights of the enslaved. And as Cushion argues, many of the direst problems still facing the world—from horrific economic inequality to rampant environmental decline—have their origins in the institution of slavery. Correcting these wrongs will cost money. Perversely, there is no shortage of funds in the coffers of the institutions which perpetrated them. Neither Anglo governments, nor businesses, have properly addressed their role. Ultimately, *Slavery in the British Empire and its Legacy in the Modern World* goes beyond cataloguing past wrongs, to engaging with the legacies of slavery—spotlighting, above all, the defiant response of those it wronged, as they call for reparations and more.

Slavery in the British Empire and its Legacy in the Modern World

By Steve Cushion

Pages: 240

Trim: 5.5" x 8.5"

US Paperback Price: $28

ISBN: 978-1-68590-102-8

Available: Summer, 2025

Steve Cushion is Senior Research Fellow at University College London, Institute of the Americas, and the author of "A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory."

PRAISE FOR:

Slavery in the British Empire and its Legacy in the Modern World

Skillfully links the histories of capitalists and workers in Britain and the Caribbean, tracing the dynamics of profit-seeking and exploitation, resistance and solidarity, on both sides of the Atlantic. —**Kate Quinn**, Associate Professor in Caribbean History, Institute of the Americas, University College London and Editor: *Black Power in the Caribbean*

Provides an important contribution to the current debate on reparations for slavery and even the issue of climate change. Cushion has courageously placed a Marxist analysis as central to understanding the construction of the British Empire. A must-read for anyone wishing not only to understand empire but to change it! —**Ozzi Warwick**, Chief Education and Research Officer of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, Trinidad and Tobago

Highly topical and an important contribution to the study of slavery in the British Empire as well as addressing its long-term effects. —**Gad Heuman**, Professor Emeritus, University of Warwick, and author: *The Killing Time*. Editor, *Slavery & Abolition Journal*

Possibly the closest we have to Eric Williams's classic work *Capitalism and Slavery,* re-loaded for anti-racists and anti-imperialists in the twenty-first century, and it deserves the widest possible readership.—**Christian Høgsbjerg**, Senior Lecturer in Critical History and Politics in the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Brighton, and author: *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*

Steve Cushion does not mince his words in this short, selective, and highly readable Marxist account. Documenting the history of some of slavery's promoters, defenders, benefactors, and critics, he leaves little room for doubt as to the centrality of slavery in forging and financing British capitalism and empire.—**Jean Stubbs,** Professor Emerita, London Metropolitan University, Co-Director of the *Commodities of Empire* British Academy Research Project

Progressive trade unions, political parties, movements and civil society organisations can use this book for political education programmes for working class people of the world—and a very good book for our struggles for Reparations. —**David McD Denny,** General Secretary, Caribbean Movement for Peace and Integration, Barbados

Britain's Industrial Revolution was, in large part, made possible by the capital accumulation generated by the "business of slavery," and the genesis of Britain's banking and insurance industries can be traced to this same "business".

The enclosure of common land in England was often financed by the profits from slavery.

The effects of slavery are still with us. Sugar, the foremost product of the Caribbean colonies, has left a world-wide legacy of ill-health. And the fossil-fuel based industry, which the profits of slavery helped create, has caused the current climate crisis which threatens us all.

Slavery, through deforestation and soil exhaustion, has deprived the former Caribbean colonies of reasonable possibilities of development, and for this, along with the unpaid wages of millions of slaves over centuries, reparations are both necessary and justified.