

DOCUMENT #1

Slavery in the West Indies

It is calculated that in the British West India Colonies, there are, at least, Eight Hundred Thousand SLAVES.

These unhappy persons, whether old or young; whether adults or infants; whether male or female; are the absolute property of their masters, and are bought and sold like dumb cattle, or lifeless goods and chattels.

Every enlightened Christian will allow, that to keep our fellow-creatures in so degraded and painful a condition, is inconsistent with those principles of charity and true liberty, which distinguish the Gospel; — and it will probably be admitted by most persons, that man cannot, under any possible circumstances, be possessed, of a *right* to trade in his fellow-creatures, and to retain them in bondage *as his property*.

But were it possible that such a right could exist, one thing is certain and indisputable — that no such right is possessed by the holders of slaves in the West Indies. For how were these slaves obtained? Not by any gentle or lawful means; not even under any colourable pretext; but by the most undisguised rapine, or the most atrocious fraud. Torn from their peaceful homes; violently separated from their husbands, wives, parents, children, or friends; barbarously manacled; driven, like herds of oxen, to the sea-shore; and afterwards horribly pressed together in pestilential holds. It is thus that these miserable creatures, or their ancestors (from a property in whom, the property in slaves bred on the islands, is alone pretended to be derived,) were brought into a state of slavery; it is thus that they became subject to the cruel and never-ceasing liability to be *bought* and *sold*.

England has abolished her Slave-trade, (i.e. the importation of fresh negroes from America,) but She has not emancipated her slaves. She has performed one-half of her work: the other remains not only not effected, but not attempted. She has washed one of her hands from this pollution of iniquity; the other is immersed in it as deeply as ever. It is her unquestionable duty; it is her unquestionable interest; it is an obligation which rests upon her, with the utmost clearness, and with unspeakable weight to *emancipate her slaves* — to unloose her heavy burthen — to cleave asunder the iron yoke — and to bid her captives go free.

It is better for all the parties concerned, that this work should be effected *gradually*. Prudence must dwell with wisdom in its execution. But it ought to be begun: it ought to be carried forward. It *may* be begun; it *may* be carried forward (as has already been the case in the Spanish colonies,) to the joy and happiness, and restoration of the negro, and without the slightest injury to his master, or to the public.



But let not the work be delayed. Let it remembered, that the country which has the means to prevent, and *does not* prevent the continuance of slavery; the country which takes not a single step towards such prevention; the country which, by means of protecting duties, affords, in point of fact, a *premium for its maintenance*; is guilty — deeply and dangerously guilty — of all the barbarities and abominations which appertain to the slave system.

An undated anti-slavery poster, probably edited in the 1750s

