

Introduction

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<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- The article that you can listen to in the podcast
- An optional vocabulary activity based on the article
- Links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (slavery).

Read the article

Slavery

by John Russell

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all its forms.

Article 4; Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (The United Nations)

What does slavery mean?

Slavery is the idea that a human is someone's property, that he/she can be bought, sold and owned; and forced to work without being paid. This concept has been around for thousands of years and all major civilizations used slaves at some point. They were used in many different positions, such as; labourers, soldiers, servants, farmers. Although the word slavery makes us think of the transatlantic slave trade (from Africa to the America's), slavery was not specific to one part of the world. The Romans, Russians, Aztecs and Egyptians all kept slaves; the word slave actually comes from 'slav' - many Slavic people from Eastern Europe were taken as slaves during conflicts. As well as being captured in wars, people could be born as slaves, sold into slavery, or sold to pay a debt.

Is it right to buy and sell people?

In the past there were different concepts about human-rights and what was moral or immoral. It is only in the last 300 years that these ideas have begun to change. Most people accepted that types of people were born to be slaves; or that if you won a war you could sell your captured enemies. The Koran and the Bible both mention slavery as a fact, without criticizing it.

The life of a slave, although difficult, was not always the end of a person's life. It was possible for a slave to buy his freedom, for a slave soldier to become a general, or for a freed slave to become an important member of society. The Transatlantic Slave Trade ended this possibility.

What was the Transatlantic Slave Trade?

Slavery was as common in Africa as in other countries; but in the 15th Century, traders began to export large numbers of slaves to the Middle-East. European countries followed this, exporting Africans to work on plantations in the Caribbean, North and South America. A massive number of people were needed, as demand for new products such as sugar, coffee and tobacco was very high. In 400 years, an estimated 12 million people were removed from Africa to work as slaves in the Americas or European colonies.

Slaves in this system had no opportunity for advancement or release; even if they were freed they had few legal rights. In the past owning slaves in many countries had been a status symbol, and owners were usually fair. In this new system, profit was the most important aspect. As a result, conditions of work and living were also very tough. Millions died because of mistreatment and difficult working conditions. Some African slave traders, learning of these conditions, started to oppose the trade.

When did people's ideas begin to change?

A number of African countries (such as the Congo) made the trade illegal not for moral but practical reasons – its population was being reduced greatly by the trade. But it was moral

reasons that forced a greater change. A movement in Britain led by the Quakers and the MP William Wilberforce pushed parliament to abolish slavery. In 1807 the slave trade was abolished and in 1833 slavery abolished in all British colonies.

In the USA on the other hand, there was great argument over slavery. Many industries in the South were dependant on slaves for production (such as cotton) and if freed, the number of slaves would be almost 50% of the population in some areas. Again, religious groups were pushing for change. Unfortunately, the civil war between the North and South came before political change. Slavery was an important issue in this conflict, and was abolished (through the 13th amendment to the Constitution) at the end of the Civil war in 1865.

What were the ideas behind abolition?

In the 19th Century, newer political ideals of freedom and equality were anti-slavery. It is ironic that the two countries at the time associated with freedom and equality; USA and France; still permitted slavery. France didn't abolish slavery until 1848, and there were still slaves working in the White House in the same year. The humanitarian ideal, the idea that all people are

brothers, was also important. As this idea was taken from Christianity, Christians; especially those from newer branches e.g. Quakers, Methodists; were at the centre of movements all over the world. Christian missionaries were often funded by anti-slavery groups.

Dr. David Livingstone was the most famous British missionary in Africa until 1873, and pushed for the end to the local slave trade. Unfortunately, he believed it could only be stopped by foreign countries taking control of African states – mass colonialism. This led to many other problems.

Does slavery still exist?

Legally, Nigeria was the last country to abolish slavery in 1936. However, in many parts of the world today, millions of people are working as slaves. Children fighting in the army, or working for no pay; women moved from their own countries to work in the sex industry, or in people's houses; people working for many years to pay back a small loan. These are all types of modern slavery. Groups such as the United Nations or Anti-Slavery International are fighting against this problem – but the world must first accept that there still is a problem.

Glossary

Abolish (v): to officially end something, especially a law or system

Advancement (n): progress

Capture (v): to catch someone and make them your prisoner

Colony (n): a country or area controlled in an official, political way by a more powerful country

Debt (n): an amount of money that you owe someone

Export (v): to send goods to another country in order to sell them there

Free (v): to allow someone to leave a prison or place where they have been kept

Immoral (adj): opposite of moral

Labourer (n): a worker who uses a lot of physical effort in their job

Missionaries (n): someone who travels to another country to teach people about the Christian religion

Mistreat (v): to treat a person or animal badly, cruelly or unfairly

Moral (adj): behaving in a way that most people think is correct and honest

Plantation (n): an area of land in a hot country where a crop is grown

Prohibit (v): to officially forbid something

Push (v): make someone do something that they do not want to do

Servitude (n): the state of being under the control of someone else and of having no freedom

Trader (n): a person who buys and sells things

Transatlantic (adj): crossing the Atlantic

Quaker (n): a member of a Christian group called the Society of Friends

After reading

Exercise 1

Put the words from the box into the sentences to complete the definitions.

abolish	children	freedom	immoral	missionary
Mistreatment	paid	production	pushing	slave

1. If you are a, you are someone's property.
2. As a slave you are not
3. In the past, slavery was not
4. It was possible for a slave to buy his/her
5. Many people worked in the of tobacco and sugar
6. and difficult working conditions were some of the problems.
7. People in many countries were for change.
8. Some countries took a long time to slavery
9. A teaches people about religion.
10. Today, working for no pay are slaves.

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More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of slavery at:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-slavery.htm>

- **Word game: 'Slave' words.** Match words and expressions related to slavery to their definitions.
- **Story: Uncle Tom's Cabin.** (Life Among the Lowly) This anti-slavery novel by American author Harriet Beecher Stowe was published in 1852, and had a profound effect on worldwide attitudes toward African Americans and slavery. In the United States, it is widely thought to have helped intensify the sectional conflict that led to civil war.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about slavery.
- There is also a slavery-related cartoon, and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to vocabulary activity: 1. *slave*; 2. *paid*; 3. *immoral*; 4. *freedom*; 5. *production*; 6. *Mistreatment*; 7. *pushing*; 8. *abolish*; 9. *missionary*; 10. *children*