

# African diaspora

[People](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The significance of the fact that Africans were in Britain during the Roman Occupation, that Vice Admiral Thomas Wyndham went to Benin in 1553 and found that the King of Benin was fluent in Portuguese and furthermore, that five Ghanaians visited London in 1555 was that slavery was not the only way that Africans made their way to these foreign lands.

Though most of this information is not recorded in most history books, it is a fact that Africans would travel to places outside Africa, and they were actually treated well and humanely in some of these incidences. In the case of the Ghanaians going to London, it is said that they have been doing so since the 16th century even though they are now only fifty years old. This shows that this happened way before slavery even began.

During this time, knowledge of the African people and their cultures was increasing but the white man had other plans in store for these Africans. They started taking in the myths that they had heard about Africans as lazy, carefree and cannibal Africans, and wove them into a racist ideology.

They did this so that they could feel no disgrace in buying or kidnapping them, shipping them to the new world, selling them and forcing them to work using a whip. 1

Black Liverpool was at one time an obscure seaport. It later on became one of the richest trading centers in Europe at the height of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This is because, once they involved themselves in slave trade, Liverpool used more than half the ships involved in slavery and by the mid 18th century, imported from Africa more than half of the slaves purchased by all the ships in Britain.

Its net proceeds from the African trade in 1783-93 were said to be £12, 294, 116. The profit was accrued on the basis of 878 voyages and the sale of 303, 737 slaves. This is what majorly propelled them to such great heights, making it one of the richest slaves trading centers. 2

London has always been involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. From its beginning, up to the time of its abolition, their involvement was evident, and the wealth and fates of the people of London and their merchants was based on it.

According to the article, *Breaking the Silence*, almost every aspect of London was as a result of their involvement with their trafficking of slaves from Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean. This included banks, insurance companies, schools, museums, libraries, universities and even its population.

The Royal Family and the country's aristocracy were central to the growth of Britain's slave trade and the slaving company known as the Royal Adventurers into Africa in 1660. They are the ones that issued financial backing to this trade. Later on, the Royal African Company was formed in 1672, making London the only English city that would benefit from the slave trade until 1698.

This monopoly that they were now enjoying over the slave traders and plantation holders made them very powerful. . They had 15 Lord Mayors of London, 25 sheriffs and 38 aldermen of the City of London as shareholders in the Royal Africa Company from 1660-1690. They also had access to gold which they got from the African Coast in large supply, a factor that also made them thrive financially. 3

The Abolition movement happened in the 1800's to end slavery. The majority of abolitionists' activity happened in the USA and Britain. Most of the well known abolitionists came from New England and women were also a part of this movement.

Two people that played an active role in the abolition of slave trade were Olaudah Equiano and Quobna Ottobah Cugoana. Olaudah Equiano had been captured from Africa and made a slave as a young man and he therefore used his experiences of slavery to campaign for and persuade others to stop this inhumane trade towards the African people.

Before going to London to get himself involved in the abolitionist movement, he worked as a seaman, merchant and explorer in the Caribbean, Britain, Arctic and the American colonies. In the year 1789, he published his autobiography, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African."

It is said to be one of the earliest books published by a black African writer and apart from making him a wealthy man, it also helped influence the British parliament to abolish the trade through the Slave Trade Act of 1807.

Quobna Ottobah Cugoana was a Fanti from Ghana and a friend of Olaudah Equiano. He was kidnapped and sold into slavery at the age of 13. He was deported to the island of Grenada and later to England. He was a leader of the free black community in London and like his friend, also wrote a book called, "Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery" in 1787.

This book is said to have been a great and impressive assertion of the Africans' right to freedom and dignity. In England also, he began writing

letters to newspapers calling for the end of slavery. He was familiar with abolitionists Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson.

African presence in Britain can be traced back to the times of the Roman Occupation to the time of the abolition of slavery in Britain. This is because in regard to the times of the Roman Occupation, older texts and folklore of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales often mention the arrival of Africans and a distinct African presence, not just as visitors but as the original inhabitants.

However, this fact has been omitted from most history books. Later on, more of them were brought to Britain as a result of the slave trade. While some of them went back to their homelands after being freed, most remained behind to start life on a clean slate.

Some of the things that slaves did in order to gain back their freedom were: Firstly, some of them took part in slave rebellions, and in other incidences, black slaves in Britain went to court to get their freedom. By the early 1800s, most judges did set them free.

Black Liverpool was at one time an obscure seaport. It later on became one of the richest trading centers in Europe. With time, it became a center for the education of early black students and the home of a free black community which was made up of people from various other places.

The black community of Liverpool was there even before the American War of Independence and this is what led to Black Loyalists settling in London and by extension, what led to the growth of the township of Liverpool. Early settlers in Liverpool ranged from freed slaves and black servants to the

African rulers sons and daughters who were students, who had visited the port from at least the 1730s.

Black Liverpool had connections with Black America, and this is seen in the way people like Ida B. Wells could go to Black Liverpool to raise awareness on some of the issues that were affecting the Black people. This changed their culture because they were able to interact and see for themselves the ills that were taking place in the other lands.

This also affected them socio-politically as it is as a result of these tours that people were able to see the true impact that some of the issues such as segregations and lynching's were having on the Black community.

After World War 11, Afro-immigrants went back home to find that life was different. It had become harder than before they left for the war. Jobs were not easy to come by, and the standards of living were much lower than what they had gotten used to while in Britain.

On realizing this, they began to go back to Britain to try their luck at having the good life. This was not difficult as there were no restrictions on their entry into Britain as their passports were proof that they were citizens of the " United Kingdom and Colonies." When they got there however, they started facing problems such as racism and segregation.

According to Grace Hale (1992), the white people created a culture of segregation mainly to counter black success, and to stop them from achieving their potential. They knew that if they frustrated the Africans then they would have the upper hand, and thus they started doing such things as lynching and maltreatment at any chance that they got.

This, according to Selvon is what brought about the formation of ghetto “colonies”. This was a defensive and corporate response. In his words, he says that “ it involved the Black community turning in upon itself in the face of public racism that rapidly developed through the 1960’s. This meant the growth of internal cultural cohesiveness and solidarity within the Black populous.

The connection between Black America and Black Britain is indeed not new. There were instances when Ida B. Wells would go to Black Britain to sensitize the people living there on the social ills that were affecting the Black community.

We see that this had an impact as people actually took time to listen to her, and it made the people living there both black and white to really understand the extent to which the Black people were suffering at the hands of their white counterparts. This is one of the things that impacted the abolitionists’ movement and made it successful.