When the slaves were freed, most had no money or property and no access to schooling, job training or healthcare. Everywhere in the British Caribbean there was a big gap in wealth and living standards between the Europeans and people of largely European descent (the ‘whites’ and ‘fair coloureds’) and the very poor freed slaves (the ‘blacks’).

Many people would argue that this divide has not been overcome even today, and that people’s prospects in the former slaving colonies are still affected by the colour of their skin.

**Things to do**

There are four photographs below. The first two show sugarcane workers in Trinidad (12A) and tobacco workers in Jamaica (12B) at the beginning of the 20th century.

1. Start with these two photos (12A and 12B). Calculate how many years after the ending of slavery these photographs were taken. (Use 1834 as the date that slavery ended.)

2. Now look at each photo and write down a list of words and phrases that describe the workers and their living conditions. Describe what you see, but also describe what you think they might have been feeling. For example, your list might include things such as *hot* or *exhausted*.

3. Look at your list. What *hasn’t* changed much, do you think, since the end of slavery? In what ways do these workers have similar lives to the slaves before them?

4. What do you think *has* changed since the ending of slavery? How are these people’s lives different to what it was like for the slaves?

Now look at the next two photos. The third one (12C) shows a group of women sugarcane workers in Jamaica in 1900. The fourth one (12D) shows a young Scottish woman packing herrings in Suffolk in about 1910.

5. Compare the Jamaican women and the Scottish woman. What things do they seem to have in common and what things are different? Include, for example, the sort of work they do, where they do it, the style of their clothing.

6. There is a European man on a horse in the Trinidad photo (12A). Do you think the herring packer has more in common with him, or with the Jamaican women working in the cane fields?
Resource 12A  Sugar harvest in Trinidad, 1908

From a postcard titled 'Cane Cutting. Trinidad', 1908.
Resource 12B Tobacco workers at home in Jamaica, 1900

Workers at their cottages on a tobacco plantation, Jamaica, c.1900. (Library of Congress)
Resource 12C  Sugarcane workers in Jamaica, 1900

From a stereograph titled ‘Sugar Cane field hands, Montego bay, Jamaica’, 1900.
A North East Story - Scotland, Africa and Slavery in the Caribbean

Resource 12D  A Scottish herring packer, 1900

For centuries, British slave traders and owners had justified holding Africans in slavery by saying that Africans were not as civilised as Europeans. Some also said that Africans were too lazy to work without being controlled by someone else. Others also argued that Africans were only good at physical labour, not intellectual tasks.

These were very strongly held beliefs in Britain. They did not vanish as soon as slavery ended.

**Things to do**

There are two full-page advertisements for soap pictured below. The first one (**13A**) dates from 1887 and was published in *The Graphic*. The second one (**13B**) was published in *The Sphere* in 1901. Both *The Graphic* and *The Sphere* were popular illustrated magazines in Britain.

1. Study both advertisements and work through the following activities and questions. **Tip.** Some of the issues raised here are good for discussion. If you are working in a group, encourage everyone to have their say and see if you can reach an agreement on particular questions.

2. Write a short description of the storyline or central idea that appears in each of the advertisements.

3. What are the advertisements saying or suggesting about the colour or tone of African peoples’ skin?

4. Do you think there is any significance in how the children are sitting or standing in each of the images? What is the relationship between the African and the European children?

5. How do you think the advertisers expected people to respond to these images? Were the advertisements meant to be taken seriously? Were they intended to be funny?

6. What do you feel about the advertisements? What is your reaction to them?

7. Do you prefer one advertisement to the other? If so, why?

8. How long had slavery been banned in British territories when each of the advertisements was published?

9. Do you think Britain’s history of enslaving Africans influenced the attitudes revealed in the advertisements? If you agree, state why you agree. If you disagree, state why you disagree.

10. Do you feel that we can still see legacies of slavery in British society today? If so, where and how?
Resource 13A  Pears’ Soap magazine advertisement, 1884

From *The Graphic*, Christmas Number, 1884.
Resource 13B  Pears’ Soap magazine advertisement, 1901

From The Sphere, 15 June 1901.
In 2007 there were many events in Britain to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Government agencies, churches, museums, television companies, charities, schools and community groups all hosted activities.

These activities were controversial. Some critics argued that Britain should focus on positive stories from its past and that highlighting the history of slavery stopped people from being proud of their country.

Other critics argued the reverse. They said that British people were using the anniversary to congratulate themselves for ending the slave trade, and that they were not paying enough attention to Britain’s long history as a slave-trading and slave-owning nation.

Things to do

There are four commemorative items from the anniversary pictured below (14A), which are also available as objects in the handling box.

If you are working in a group, split up into twos or threes and focus on one item each. Work through the first three questions below, and then shift on to a new item. When everyone has worked through all the items, bring the whole group back together and compare your findings and opinions.

Questions for each item

1. Do any of the images seem familiar? If so, identify the sources for those that you recognise.
2. What themes and visual ideas seem most important?
3. How are Africans represented in the commemoratives?

Questions for group discussion

4. Two of the commemoratives were produced by government agencies and two by private companies. Are you able to tell which is which? If so, do you think there is any difference in their approach?
5. Do you think anniversaries such as the abolition of the slave trade should be commemorated? Or are they just an excuse for interest groups to get money from the government for exhibitions, websites, conferences, etc.?
6. Should we remember the history of slavery at all? Would it not be better to leave it in the past and concentrate on the world’s current problems?
7. If you disagree with the above, why do you disagree? What do you think the history of slavery can teach us today? Why do you think it is still important?
8. Some critics argued that the 2007 commemoration events were designed to make white people in Britain feel guilty and that this was not fair because not everyone in Britain was a slave trader and a lot of people actively opposed slavery. Do you agree with this criticism? If so, why? If not, why not?
Commemorative badge issued by the Great North Badge Company Ltd, 2007.
First day cover published by the Royal Mail, 22 March 2007.
Presentation folder with a commemorative £2 coin produced by the Royal Mint, 2007.