

# Voices

“Without the transatlantic slave trade, I would not exist. I wouldn’t be living in Devon. My parents would never have met, lived or been born in Jamaica.”

“For me, that connection with the transatlantic slave trade has always been there. People talked about it in the family.”

“As a child in secondary school, I was the only black/mixed heritage person as far as I was aware. My first introduction to the slave trade was a major shock. The teacher was talking about the Triangle Trade when I realised that the experiences of slaves, depicted in horrific conditions, were most probably experienced by my ancestors. I became aware I was alone in this realisation, as no one else in my class (or school) would be able to relate to this.”

“I’m descended from people who survived all of this.”

“There is a disconnect, a rupture in family history. I have experienced it to some degree through the loss of family connection, heritage and culture - my Jamaican Grandad joined the RAF and stayed in the UK. I cannot imagine the brutal fracture of families due to slavery.”

“I have always been proud of my [mixed] heritage but I became conscious [at a young age] of a very deeply upsetting element of my history. The fact I could be descended from both slaves

and slave owners became apparent to me, and was disorientating.”

“There's a lot of trauma with that history. There's also some amazing stories of human resilience, and knowing that I come from those people is empowering in a lot of ways.”

“My mum and dad came here to England in the ‘60s. Their resolve was to have a better life for their children. My mum became a nurse. My dad was the first black bus driver in Bristol. He attended marches [In the Bristol Bus Boycott of 1963, which fought for the bus company to hire black and Asian employees]. He spoke at rallies, at risk to himself and family. To stand for a principle.”

“In the UK, the black community is from across the diaspora, from the African continent, from Jamaica. And it's very interesting being able to connect those dots and talk about the connections.”

“Living here the majority of my life – I have lived here 35 years – and discovering Devon’s role within the slave trade – the establishment, the monetisation was established here in Devon – how do I feel? As a Devon resident, it’s a hidden history. For me, it’s not black history; it’s everyone’s history.”

“I know it happened a long time ago. I am not directly influenced on a daily basis, but in my core of being, I am.”

“Transatlantic slavery was first brought to focus in my life when a mini-series appeared on TV in the ‘70s called Roots, [based on the book] by Alex Hayley. There was no teaching of this history at school. I remember being bullied because of my colour, being called names of characters from the show, and learning of the atrocities which happened to my ancestors.”

“The past treatment of black people as a commodity - translating into the idea they are somehow less - lingers on today. Some people still think their skin colour denotes their worth and their right to treat people with a lack of respect and humanity.”

“People say it was a long time ago, but in the UK, we just finished paying off [in 2015] the [national debt from] compensation to the people who owned slaves in the colonies in America and in the UK. I paid some of the taxes towards it! So it's not that long ago.”

“If we had addressed it, and acknowledged at the time the value of those people and the value of their work - both from a humanitarian point of view and from an economic point of view – then we could have moved forward together in a prosperous way.”

“People sometimes talk about the transatlantic slave trade as if it's just sad. And it is sad and awful and despicable, but it was also the theft of labour. For hundreds of years, that labour was worth billions of pounds. But the wealth of that wasn't retained

by the people who were generating it. And as a result, some people are starting on the back foot, and some people are starting well ahead.”

“The slave trade laid the foundations for the current economic framework that we use now - the idea of using the cheapest possible labour they could possibly get to manufacture goods.”

“The way that stuff is produced is not fair now. We haven't fixed it.”

“I think that one of the reasons why it still feels so unresolved is because it's not resolved.”

“My ancestors built America, and enslaved Americans were instrumental in creating the industry of that time, the legacy and the foundations of that persist. But sometimes people don't acknowledge that contribution or the impact, and instead treat it as if it's something to be ashamed of.”

“It's stressful when people don't acknowledge it, or try to dismiss it. They say, ‘It was of its time.’ But if you look at the history, there were lots of people of the time who were saying, ‘This is awful. This is bad. This should stop.’ For both economic and for ethical reasons and moral reasons. I think everybody could see that it was awful but people carried on anyway.”

“People sometimes think about these things as if they're thought exercises, or as if they are hypothetical. But when you

see shackles, those were shackles that were actually used for actual people. And they're shackles that were used on actual human beings and that could have potentially been used on my ancestors. And that is stressful."

"To see the objects from the past doesn't necessarily directly traumatise me. But I do have some sort of visceral response to the pain that happened to my ancestors. I feel the energy and power locked into those objects."

"I feel a deep well of sadness. I don't dwell on it, but it is always there and objects like these trigger it and bring it to the surface. I hope that talking about it makes people think and empathise with the unspeakable treatment of the enslaved and the cost in human life. For what? Money and some sugar for your tea."

"The first time I went swimming in the sea - so far out that I couldn't touch the bottom - I was aware it was connected to the Atlantic. And I had this thought about the millions of people that were taken from Africa to the Americas. And you know when people got sick, they would throw bodies over the side of the boats. And so I've visualised there's literally a trail of bodies, from one place to another. Swimming at Exmouth, I found myself thinking about that. But it's also important to remember that my ancestors navigated those waters before that time and have done so since."

“The history of the past is now – that’s what I feel about it. How we’re all actually connected in that history. Whose narrative is being told depends on who’s looking at that object. In a way it connects us all.”

“If you’re a teacher, it’s important to think whose narrative is being told, who’s telling it, and why. Stories are a way of teaching and transmitting ideas. So you develop a way of telling narratives that foregrounds your own status...”

“Exhibiting these works is an opportunity to show how we’re all connected. An object from the late 18th century or the 19th century can still tell all our stories at the same time.”

“One of the reasons why I still study this history, even though there's a lot of trauma and ugliness in it, is because there are also incredible stories of resilience and resistance within it.”