

6: Purchased Lives

A. Abolition

1. Class title 1 (Morland: *The Slave Trade*, 1791)
2. Print after Morland: *The Slave Trade*, 1791, with inscription

This class is on the slave trade and its repercussions. My usual disclaimer about teaching cultural rather than political history applies with a vengeance here, in that my emphasis on artifacts may appear to trivialize a vast subject that has caused so much misery and strife; I can only apologize in advance. So why do I start with a picture whose homely details and doggerel inscription seem the very essence of triviality? One simple answer: because it is **British** and nominally set in Africa—the artist is **George Morland** (1763–1804). And although we think of slavery over here as an American issue, much of the original blame lies with Britain, whose ships dominated the slave trade for over a century. On the other hand, the first great steps in the Abolition movement were also taken in Britain, beginning in the middle of the Eighteenth Century, and culminating in the **Slave Trade Act of 1807** which banned trading in slaves. So the focus of my first section, ABOLITION, is largely British, starting with the man shown in my next slide, **William Wilberforce** (1759–1833). I will go from there to look at Abolitionism in America, and the final three sections of the class—INSPIRATION, EMANCIPATION, and RECONSTRUCTION—are inevitably American.

3. Section title A (Abolition, Wilberforce)

Where to start? Perhaps with a comparison of two British pictures, both titled *The Black Boy*. Unfortunately, I can't show them larger, and the comparison is not a very subtle one. But still, what would you guess about the dates of each? Does the difference in the two pictures reflect changes that have taken place in the intervening time?

4. **COMPARISON 1: *The Black Boy*, paintings by Jones (1770) and Windus (1844)**
5. — the same, with titles

The one at the top right is by an artist called **William Jones**, who was working in Bath in the 1770s; little else is known about him. The one at the bottom left is by a minor Pre-Raphaelite, **William Lindsay Windus** (1822–1907), a bit better known, but not by much. The boy in Bath is clearly a servant, dressed in old-fashioned uniform to make him look more exotic. The art gallery where the picture hangs calls him a slave, but slavery was banned in Britain itself since the middle of the century; perhaps he is an indentured servant. We know almost nothing of the Windus boy, except that he is not in livery, and is presumably free; actually, it is a rather attractive portrait. By this time (1844), Britain had not only **abolished the slave trade (in 1807)**, but also any remnants of **slavery in its colonies (1833)**. Let's look at how this came about. Starting with a well-known song...

6. John Newton: *Amazing Grace*, 1772, first verse (Joan Collins)

The singer was **Joan Collins**. The hymn *Amazing Grace* was written in 1772 by a man called **John Newton** (1725–1807); the familiar tune, however, was written by in 1834 by an American composer, **William Walker** (1809–75), so it is much later than the words. Newton was originally a man of no great religious faith. After being pressed into the Royal Navy as a young man, he stayed with the sea, and became a captain and then owner of a fleet of slave ships. When wrecked off the coast of Ireland (not in a slave ship), his desperate prayer was answered, and he began a spiritual change, devoting himself to God, giving up the slave trade, and studying for the priesthood. I don't know if this is accurate, but the film *Amazing Grace* that I shall show you in a moment suggests that he crossed paths with the young **William Wilberforce** at around this time.

7. Lawrence: *Wilberforce*, with Romney: *Pitt*

I showed this picture of **William Pitt the Younger** before. He was close friends with **William Wilberforce**, both born in the same year (1759), and both beginning their political careers in their early twenties as firebrands in Parliament. Wilberforce was the more brilliant orator, Pitt the more wily politician. In this 2006 film, Pitt is on the verge of becoming Prime Minister and wants Wilberforce for his cabinet. But Wilber feels that he ought to be out in the world instead, doing good works. So Pitt, who shares Wilber's abolitionist sympathies but cannot openly promote them, invites a group of activists to dinner to persuade him that he can do both.

8. Unknown painter: *Portrait of an African* (possibly Olaudah Equiano), c.1790

Among these guests is this man [possibly], **Olaudah Equiano**, a freed slave whose memoir, published in 1789, was a powerful force in disseminating the Abolitionist cause. In the film, Wilberforce is torn, and goes to see his old mentor, **John Newton**, the writer of *Amazing Grace*. I'll follow this clip immediately with one of Wilberforce's many attempts to get his bill passed in the House of Commons. **Ioan Gruffudd** is Wilberforce, **Albert Finney** is Newton, and in Parliament you will see **Benedict Cumberbatch** as Pitt, **Michael Gambon** as the veteran politician Charles Fox, and **Ciaran Hinds** as their adversary Lord Tarleton. I strongly recommend renting it and watching the whole thing.

9. Movie: *Amazing Grace*, Wilberforce and Newton

10. Movie: *Amazing Grace*, Wilberforce in parliament

11. The Wedgwood, Turner, and Crowe images below

Although I put them all on one slide, this is not intended as a comparison for discussion, merely a reminder that Abolitionism in Great Britain was supported by its artists as well as its politicians and poets. A few brief words about each...

12. Josiah Wedgwood: *Am I Not a Man and Brother?* (1787)

The pottery maker **Josiah Wedgwood** (1730–95) was an ardent supporter of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, for whom he produced (at his own expense) these medallions and plates.

13. Turner: *The Slave Ship* (1840, Boston MFA)

The Slave Ship by **JMW Turner** (1775–1851) comes much later, at the apex of his career. Britain had already abolished the slave trade, but some other countries still supported it. The painting coincided with an International Convention in 1840, attended by **Prince Albert**, which resulted in a multi-national treaty in the following year. But slavery was *not* yet outlawed in America.

14. Eyre Crowe: *Slaves Waiting for Sale, Richmond VA* (1853)

This last one is especially interesting. As you can see from the rather later picture at the bottom, the English painter **Eyre Crowe** (1824–1910), made a good living painting society scenes. But in 1852 and 1853, he accompanied the novelist **William Makepeace Thackeray** on a visit to America as his secretary, and made sketches of slave auctions in Richmond and elsewhere, that he later worked up into pictures. I must say I find it rather obscene that he could go on to paint such trivia as *Forfeits* (bottom left) after doing such things. Thackeray himself disliked slavery; at the same time, he wrote that he saw slaves better treated in America than some supposedly free working men and women in England. **Dickens**, whom we met last week, was nowhere near as equivocal. He devotes an entire chapter of *American Notes* to giving evidence of the abhorrent nature of slavery in the US. He did, however, feel compelled to add a postscript to editions published after his second American visit in 1868, in which he said that conditions had changed markedly for the better.

15. COMPARISON 2: Abolitionist books for children

There was **Abolitionist literature for children** too. Take a look at these; they are 20 years apart, one produced in England, the other in America. Do you have any way of telling which is which? Which is likely to be the more effective, or do they cater to different ages of children?

16. Amelia Opie: *The Black Man's Lament, or How to Make Sugar* (1826)

17. Hannah and Mary Townsend: *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet* (1846)

The one with the pictures is a page opening from *The Black Man's Lament, or How to Make Sugar*, published in 1826 by the British writer **Amelia Opie** (1769–1853). She was a successful novelist and playwright, so she by no means confined herself to works for children, but in this case her aim was to make young people think before taking sugar in their tea. The *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* was published in 1846 by the **Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society**; it is the work of the Quaker entomologist **Mary Townsend** (1814–51) and her sister **Hannah**. Quakers were prominent in the Abolition movement on both sides of the Atlantic, as were Methodists and Unitarians.

18. COMPARISON 3: Jennings: *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*, sketch

19. Jennings: *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*, final version

Here is a picture painted for the new Library in Philadelphia (founded by **Benjamin Franklin**) by the London-based American artist **Samuel Jennings** (1755–1834). I am showing you the sketch, which is in the Met, followed by the final version in Philly. What is going on? What do the symbols mean? The picture has two titles; what do you think these might be? Other than the final version picture having a higher degree of finish, do you see any significant differences between the two? The principal title is *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*, but there is also a subtitle, *The Genius of America Encouraging*

the Emancipation of the Blacks. The main difference I can see is in the background; the inland scene of the sketch has now become an inlet of the sea, I suppose as a reminder that slaves would not be in this country unless they had been brought in by sea.

20. Jennings: *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences, with commission*

Jennings, who was a Philadelphian, wrote to his father offering to paint a picture free of charge; it was up to the **Library Company** directors to say what they wanted; this was their charge. As you see, Jennings has followed it pretty closely in his final version of 1792.

21. Jennings: *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences, final version (repeat)*

22. Jennings: *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences, copy for engraving*

He made one other version of the picture, though, a year or so later; this was made specifically to be turned into an engraving. So it is a little sharper, with the details more clearly defined. But he also added one thing; can you see what it is? It is the **shield of Britannia**, which implies that Jennings was aware of the growing Abolitionist movement in Britain to which he could appeal. My emphasis on British Abolitionism is merely because it was the first to succeed. But there were Abolitionists in America too. They even had a song—which, like the songs we heard in the first class, was sung to a borrowed tune.

23. William Lloyd Garrison: *Abolitionist Song (1841)*

This was written in 1841 by the journalist **William Lloyd Garrison** (1805–79), founder of the widely-read anti-slavery newspaper in the country, *The Liberator*, published in Boston from 1831.

24. Curry: *The Tragic Prelude (1939, Kansas State Capital)*

The most famous American Abolitionist is probably **John Brown** (1800–59), seen here in a much later mural by **John Steuart Curry** (1897–1946). Brown, an army veteran, believed in action rather than talk, and led successful raids to free slaves in the then-Western states. But he was caught when leading a failed assault on the Armory at Harper’s Ferry to capture weapons for what he hoped would be a national slave revolt; he had even drafted a new Constitution. Here is his speech at his trial, some days before he was hanged; the actor is **David Strathairn**.

25. John Brown’s speech at his trial (David Strathairn)

B. Inspiration

26. Section title B (Inspiration, Stowe)

The second section of the class will be devoted to a single work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852, and a single woman, its author **Harriet Beecher Stowe** (1811–96). Let me introduce it with a PBS video.

27. Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (PBS *American Experience*) [5:17]

28. Harriet Beecher Stowe, with title page and painting of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Uncle Tom's Cabin, as you heard, has been described as the most important American novel published in the Nineteenth Century; it was certainly widely read and hugely influential in drawing adherents to the Abolitionist cause. It has also been decried as sentimental and for perpetrating stereotyped versions of Black characters. You saw something of the stereotypes in the theatrical scenes in this last clip; I will be saying a little more about it after the break. And you see the sentiment more in some of the earliest illustrations such as they two shown here; both of these are by British artists, incidentally.

29. Illustrations by Edwin Longsden Long and Louise Corbaux

And here is a slide with the famous (but undocumented) remark by **President Lincoln** when introduced to Stowe, followed by three British views. I think I agree most with the last one, **George Orwell**. Much the same thing might also be said of **Dickens**.

30. Critiques of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

31. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* jigsaw, with Tom and Eva figurine

The popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be judged by the number of spin-off products, such as this figurine and jigsaw. I'll use the latter as background for a very rapid bullet-point summary of the plot. Immediately after, I'll show the same scenes in excerpts from the television movie of the book made in 1987; some of the clips are too short to be very meaningful, but I didn't put the video together myself.

32. Summary of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

33. Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, excerpts from the 1987 movie.

34. Eliza on the ice

For some reason, the 1987 movie does not attempt one of the most iconic scenes of the novel, Eliza's escape by jumping from ice floe to ice floe on the frozen Ohio. Perhaps because their filming schedule did not run into winter, or because their budget did not allow them to fake it, or simply because they realized it was impossible. But **Harry Pollard's** silent movie version made fifty years earlier has no such qualms; aged though it is (it was the last silent feature ever made), it still packs a punch. So I will end the hour with it. But first, I want you to hear the scene in Stowe's own words; I do not know the reader.

35. Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Chapter VII, Eliza's escape

36. Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eliza's escape from the 1927 movie.

37. Class title 2 (Escape to Freedom)

C. Emancipation

38. Section title C (Lincoln, Emancipation)

There is no question about who should be the figure on my title slide for this section. It was **President Lincoln** who issued the **Emancipation Proclamation in 1863** and, as a permanent measure, pushed through the **Thirteenth Amendment in 1865**, shortly before he was assassinated.

39. Daniel Day-Lewis in Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012)

Steven Spielberg's 2012 film, *Lincoln*, is so magnificent that you almost feel you are experiencing a primary document rather than a latter-day artifact filtered through several interpretive minds (**Doris Kearns Goodwin**, author of the book *Team of Rivals*, on which the film is based; **Tony Kushner**, who wrote the script; and of course **Spielberg** himself). I'm going to play two clips back to back; in the first, exasperated by the endless delays, Lincoln (**Daniel Day-Lewis**) tells his advisers to get the votes by whatever means possible; in the second, he visits troops on the battlefield at Petersburg. I think you'll find both clips relevant; I'm just sorry the whole film is so dark.

40. Spielberg: *Lincoln*, cabinet scene

41. Spielberg: *Lincoln*, battlefield scene

42. COMPARISON 4: Two depictions of Pickett's Charge, Gettysburg 1863

43. Thure de Thulstrup: *The Battle of Gettysburg, Pickett's Charge* (1887)

44. Alfred Waud: *The Battle of Gettysburg, Pickett's Charge* (1863)

The soldiers were of course quoting **Lincoln's Address after the Battle of Gettysburg**. Which brings me to my next comparison: how the Civil War was represented. Here are two depictions of **Pickett's Charge** during the battle; both are prints, but one is made from a painting, and the other from a drawing. Which is more effective in illustrating the layout of the battle? Which best captures its feel? Do you think either artist was actually there? I can't imagine the answers are too hard. The Swedish American painter **Thure de Thulstrup** (1848–1930) did not emigrate to America until 1873. Working first as an illustrator for *Harper's Magazine* and later independently, he gained some fame as a military artist, mostly depicting battles of the recent past. The other is by an artist who emigrated from England, **Alfred Waud** (1828–91). He was very much there; in fact he covered just about every major battle in the war, working for the *New York Illustrated News*.

45. O'Sullivan: *Alfred Waud at Gettysburg, with Waud: Kennesaw's Bombardment*

In fact we know Waud was at Gettysburg, because we have a photograph of him sketching at Devil's Den. I have put it with one of his sketches from a later battle, at **Kennesaw Mountain** outside Atlanta, which shows the freedom of his style. The drawings he made for publication have to be turned into engravings, and so cannot be so impressionistic.

46. Timothy O'Sullivan: *Harvest of Death, Gettysburg 1863*

That photograph of Waud was taken by **Timothy O'Sullivan** (1840–82); he would have been in his early twenties, and working as part of a team headed by **Matthew Brady** (1824–96), whom we met in connection with his teacher **Samuel Morse**. We talk of Brady as the great photographer of the Civil War, but in fact he was a franchise; most of the photographs that come up when you Google his name are in fact by younger *protégés*. Photography at that stage required long exposures, so it couldn't capture the immediacy of battle. But it was superb for memorializing the aftermath, as in this O'Sullivan picture of fallen soldiers after the Battle of Gettysburg, commonly known as *Harvest of Death*.

47. O'Sullivan: *John Burns* (1863) and Lambdin: *At the Front* (1866)

Set against the impossibility for early photography to capture action, you have the superb suitability of the medium for **reflection**. But painting could do this also, as in this comparison I put on the website.

48. Whitman and Melville

And for distilling a thoughtful reflection from a scene of action, no medium is as good as poetry. **Walt Whitman** (1819–92) worked as a volunteer nurse during the Civil War, so he saw it at first hand. I am going to play a section about the battlefield from his long 1865 poem *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, an elegy on the death of Lincoln. **Herman Melville** (1819–91) did not fight in the war, but he toured the battlefields in 1864 and published a set of short poetic reflections called *Battle Pieces* in 1866. I'll give you his poem on *Shiloh* directly after the Whitman excerpt; if time, we can compare them. The readers are **David Baillie** for the Whitman and **Jonathan Jones** for the Melville; one is South African, the other English—none of the American readers I found on YouTube quite capture the resonance. Only the second video is mine; the first, I fear, is over-produced.

49. **COMPARISON 5: Whitman: *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard* (David Baillie)**

50. **COMPARISON 5: Melville: *Shiloh* (Jonathan Jones)**

D. Reconstruction

51. Section title D (Reconstruction, Douglass)

I am not nearly a good enough historian to thread my way through Reconstruction and the history of Race in America after the Civil War. It is a sorry tale of retrenchment: rights gained only to be systematically nullified. So I shall confine myself strictly to the arts. But this is a tricky field. Much of what I show might seem offensive or patronizing now—the current term is **cultural appropriation**—but I'm asking: would it have seemed offensive *then*, in a different context?

52. **COMPARISON 6: The two Eastman Johnson paintings below**

53. Johnson: *Negro Life at the South* (1859, NY Historical Socy.)

54. Johnson: *Fiddling his Way* (1866, Chrysler Museum, Norfolk VA)

This comparison was also on the website, so you have had a chance to think about it. As I told you there, the paintings are both by a white American (a co-founder of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, incidentally), **Eastman Johnson** (1824–1906). They exactly straddle the Civil War, being dated 1859 and 1866. Does he portray the black characters with sympathy, or merely use them? What view of society does he intend to convey in each work?

55. **COMPARISON 7: Brooke and Tanner**

56. Brooke: *A Pastoral Visit* (1881, Washington NGA)

57. Tanner: *The Thankful Poor* (1895, Chrysler Museum, Norfolk VA)

Another comparison: two Black domestic interiors with a religious context. What might you guess about the race of each artist? Does this affect how you receive them? In fact, the artist of the upper picture (the one with the most figures) is white: **Richard Norris Brooke** (1847–1920). Brooke studied in Paris, and specialized in African American subjects on his return. This painting, which dates from 1881, is called *A Pastoral Visit*. He avoided caricature, writing that the “peculiar humor which is characteristic of the race, and varies with the individual, cannot be thus crudely conveyed. [...] It has been my aim to elevate it to a plane of sober and truthful treatment.” Personally, I think he has succeeded. The other artist is indeed African American, **Henry Ossawa Tanner** (1859–1937). Tanner not only studied in France, but made a considerable career there, being elected a *Chevalier* of the *Légion d’Honneur*. This painting dates from 1895, and is called *The Thankful Poor*. If it had been done by a White artist, I’d have said it was sentimental and possibly exploitative, but I don’t think this applies to a Black one. Here another of his paintings in a similar vein, but he also did many Biblical subjects with White figures.

58. Henry Ossawa Tanner: *The Banjo Lesson* (1893)

One favorite medium that nowadays is complete anathema was the **Minstrel Show**, which dates back to the first half of the century. Although it was to have a much more sinister application later, the term **Jim Crow** almost certainly comes from one of the most popular of these minstrel shows—a character played in blackface by the entertainer **Thomas Dartmouth Rice** (1808–60), who invented it around 1832, wrote the song *Jump Jim Crow*, and toured the whole country. Here is a video about it, produced by the Jim Crow Museum.

59. Video: *Jump Jim Crow*

60. *Jim Crow* illustration

Incredible though it may sound, my own first experience of going to the theater was to see a blackface minstrel show in Northern Ireland in about 1948. I don’t know if it was an American import or a misguided effort by a local amateur group. I could make very little of it, but I do recall the stilted routine, and all the other performers sitting on the sides of the stage as you saw there. My parents, who were both professional evangelists, clearly had no problem about taking me—though they lived in Northern Ireland, not the American South.

61. Posters for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

62. — detail of one of the above