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MA Equity & Diversity in Society

Module Code: ECED7002 – The Social (Re) Production of Inequality

Assignment Title: Choose 2 images (one positive and one negative) of ONE group in society and compare and contrast how such a group is portrayed and potentially misrepresented in society.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine two images a group of individuals and compare and contrast how society has portrayed them and potentially misrepresented them. The paper specifically will look at the group as identified as slave masters in the 17th Century defined as ‘class-conscious wealthy landowning white men endowed with extensive political and cultural power ‘ (Aje, Armstrong, & Plath, 2017) and their slave ‘who is someone forbidden to quit their service for an enslaver, and who is treated by the enslaver as their property’ (Allian, 2012) or others argue that slavery was ‘ the invaluable extraction of cheap labour through the commoditized human life’ (Attia, 2016) .

The paper will examine the argument that the use of statues and monuments from the 17th century ‘generally marginalize the experience of enslaved Africans in favour of a self-congratulatory and nationally defensive political agenda’ (Dresser, *Set in Stone Statues and Slavery*, 2007) and this is the reason why across the globe there has been a debate around once previously accepted physical historical commemorations of ‘slave traders’ (Aje, Armstrong, & Plath, 2017) is now being challenged. This includes acts of protest and potential violence such as the protest act upon the Edward Colston statue in Bristol which was ‘violently toppled and rolled into the Bristol Docks’ (Dresser, *Monumental folly – what Colston’s statue says about Victorian Bristol*, 2020). Furthermore, the paper will discuss how through the images it can be argued that in the past society accepted these individuals because of the wealth they brought to towns and cities whereas today is perhaps accepting that there needs to be a revaluation of individuals commemorated through the means of a statue and that society needs to understand how that wealth was derived.

The methodology that will be used in this paper will be predominantly a ‘narrative inquiry’ as defined as ‘the acceptance of stories as valuable sources of data’ (Bell & Waters, 2018) but the paper will also adopt an approach which is defined as ‘social constructivism’ which is described as an objective where the paper will ‘ seek understanding of the world in which they live and work’ (Cresswel, 2013)

First image to compare and contrast : Group of Slave Traders in England

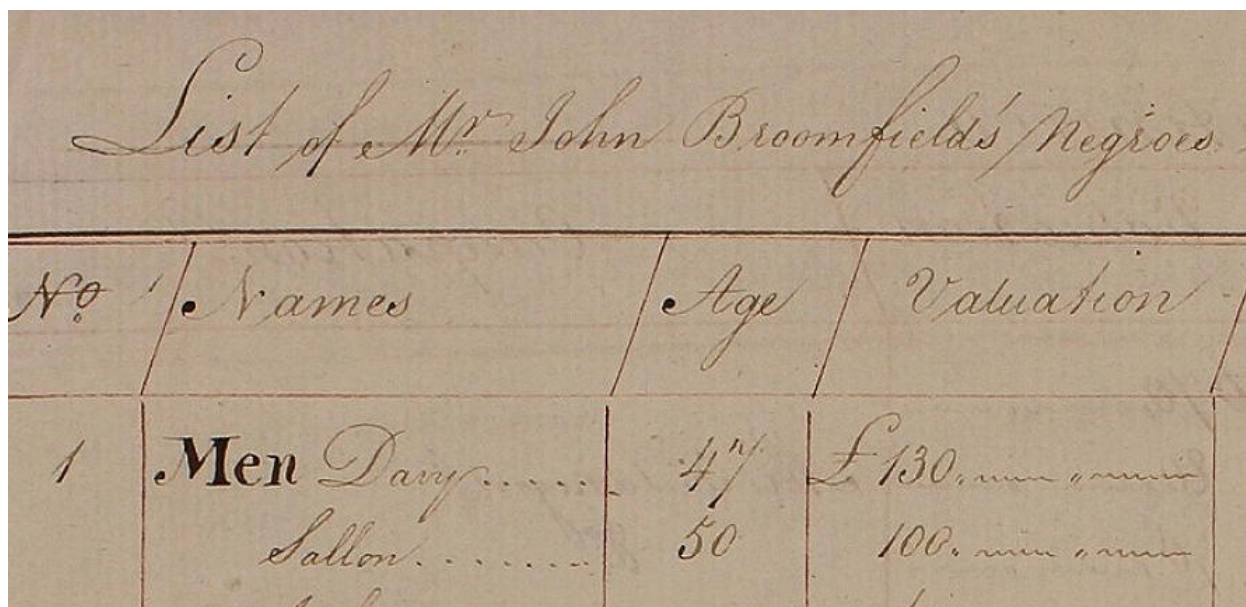
Image 1: 17th Century Slave Trader Statues (Drewett, 2020)



All of the above are recognised as individuals who were ‘slave traders’ (Aje, Armstrong, & Plath, 2017) and as a result of this trader brought substantial wealth and prosperity to the cities in which they lived and to the United Kingdom economy in the 17th Century. Whilst we only have four statues in this image – they are part of a wider extensive group of wealthy men who were involved in the migration and sale of slave labour – in particular from Africa to the Caribbean. The images represent statues erected globally where society in the 17th Century recognised with gratitude the wealth creation that this group provided. However, it

could be argued that whilst acknowledging the benefits of the wealth that society either voluntarily or through ignorance chose to ignore the source of the wealth and the impact on millions on black slaves.

Image 2 : ‘Detail from a list of the names, ages and prices of slaves bought by British plantation owner William Philip Perrin from John Broomfield in 1796’. (St Johns College, Cambridge, 2015)



No.	Names	Age	Valuation
1	Men Dary.....	47	£130.
	Sallon.....	50	100.

(St Johns College, Cambridge, 2015)

Image 2 is an extract from a list of names created by one of the group of slave traders -- William Perrins who was a plantation owner and was involved in the slave trade and ‘What these letters reveal, apart from a total lack of empathy for their human commodities, is the sheer amount of money involved’ (McKee, 2015) – the amount would equate to around £500,000 today (St Johns College, Cambridge, 2015). It is therefore unsurprising therefore as a group of individuals collectively the UK economy benefited to the tune of millions of

pounds. This resulted in generous donations to build schools, roads, civic buildings and it could be argued the general wealth of the UK economy which ultimately funded the industrial revolution and the wealth of the UK compared to other countries. However, others argued this was to the detriment of other countries from where slaves were extracted and that ‘the trans-Atlantic slave trade had an immediate, detrimental, economic, demographic, political, and social impact on African societies and cultures and continues to do so well into the twenty-first century’ (Murphy, 2008)

What is interesting is that whilst it was readily known and recorded by society how the wealth was sourced this was ignored and the money accepted and recognised using statues which stood remaining for 300 years without challenge. It can be further argued that society also continued to name buildings and streets even after the abolition of slave trade and despite knowledge of the historical evidence of the slave trade continued to recognise this group. An example being Colston Hall, Bristol in Image 3 below – a modern 20th Century building that was named after Edward Colston – another member of the group of slave traders which arguably is recognising the wealth Colston brought to the city without acknowledging the source of this wealth through slave trade.

(Philipps, 2020)

Second image to compare and contrast : the removal of the Group of Slave Trader statues

Image 4: Statues removed and social protest against them



(Thomas, 2020)

For the purpose of this part of the paper the image that will be used to contrast to Image 1 is the removal – often violently - of statues across the UK as evidenced in image 4. This image above is used to illustrate the removal of the group of slave trader statues and how actions forced ‘Statues of Colonial Figures come down in UK and Belgium’ (Art Forum, 2020). It further demonstrates that the group of slave traders was a global issue and not just confined to the United Kingdom as ‘protests quickly evolved into a worldwide push to reassess and remove global monuments to slave traders’ (McEvoy, 15th June, 2020)

The social action and its spread across the country was documented in the ITV News broadcast ‘ Statues, buildings and streets across the UK that commemorate the slave trade’ – the full news report link below:

[Statues, buildings and streets across the UK that commemorate the slave trade | ITV News](#)

(ITV News, 2020)

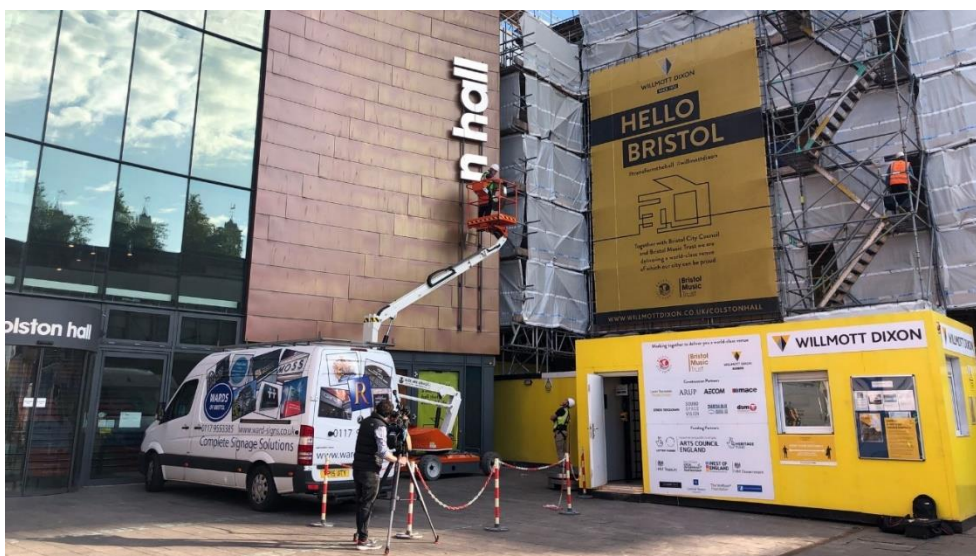
Largely the statues in Image one have remained in place without thought for 300 years or more. However, in the last two years society in general has questioned the historical background and links to the slave traded and some argue that ‘The Black Lives Matter’ campaign’ (Black Lives Matter, n.d.) has forced a critical reconsideration of the presence and significance of monuments that ‘commemorate historical figures in public spaces’ (Enslin, 2020). The Black Lives Matter campaign prompted action across the globe in the United Kingdom particular focus on statues which many argued that ‘Monuments are visible values. They portray the men and women who embodied the values that we want our community to share, that we want our children to learn. So, they have to go’ (Chotiner, 2020)

However not everyone agrees that these statues should be removed and argue that there is ‘*"no justification"* for the move’ (The Daily Telegraph, 2021).

The violent acts of protest were treated as such by the police as ‘illegally removing a statue’ (BBC News, 2021) but despite this apparent violent act and obvious damage to the statue the protestors were found not guilty by a jury and ‘cleared of criminal damage’ (De la Mare, 2022)

It wasn’t just statues that were removed. Compare Image 5 below to the previous image 3 of the Colston Hall which as a result of action and education around slave traders was renamed the Bristol Beacon as a way of ‘demonstrating the venue's intention for the future’ (Brock, 2020)

Image 5: the removal of Colston Hall name



(Brock, 2020)

Legal Status of Slavery and its abolition

In comparing Images 1 and 4 it is appropriate to look at how the law in the United Kingdom and internationally allowed slavery to exist and led to its abolition as well as how the legal system deals with attacks on the statues of the group of slave traders.

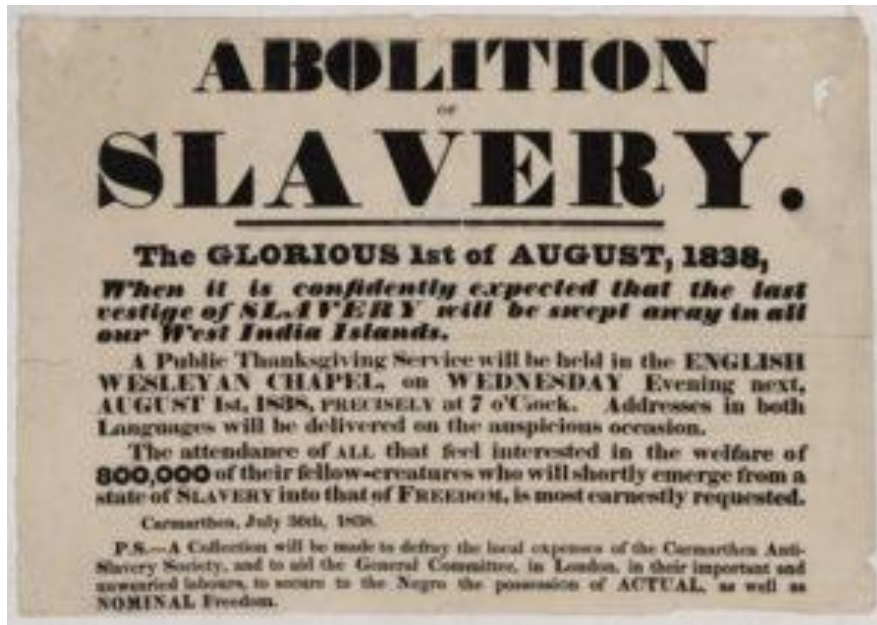
In the height of the slave trade in the 17th Century there was not any legal prevention to stop the trade in slaves. However, in the same way society in image 4 is seeking to remove the commemoration of the slave masters it was society and protests that led to the abolition of the slave trade and 'Between 1815 and 1957 around 300 international agreements were implemented' (BBC, 2014) including:

1807: The Act to Abolish the Transatlantic Slave Trade is passed in Parliament.

1815: The first international document against slavery was the 1815 Declaration Relative to the Universal Abolition of the Slave Trade

1833: Slavery Abolition Act. This act gives all enslaved people in the Caribbean their freedom However, ex-slaves in the Caribbean were forced to undertake a period of 'apprenticeship' (working for former masters for a low wage) which means that slavery is not fully abolished in practice until 1838 and was celebrated across the UK as can be seen in the poster from Carmarthen below in Image 5

Image 5: Poster from Carmarthen celebrating the end of slavery (Brain, 2019)



(Brain, 2019)

- 1948 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1) and that "no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms" (Article 4).
- 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says in Article 8:
 - No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited.
 - No one shall be held in servitude.
 - No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
- 2015 The Modern Slavery Act gives provides 'law enforcement the tools to fight modern slavery, ensure perpetrators can receive suitably severe punishments for

these appalling crimes and enhance support and protection for victims' (UK Government, 2018)

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Conclusion

It took over 300 years for society to take action to remove statues relating to slave labour including 'petitions, with almost 30,000 signatures, calls on the UK Government to remove all slave trader statues from around the UK' (Brown , 2020). It could be argued the reasons for the statues remaining was the source of wealth was lost in history and became a social or 'valid norm' (Weber, 1978) with people understanding only the wealth brought by individuals such as Edward Colston. Also interesting is comparing the society view on the legal action and lack of conviction of those who damaged the Colston statue and others across the globe.

In conclusion comparing these images this paper argues that the social shift from acceptance to non-acceptance of a permanent monument of a group of slave traders through to physical action is a form of social control defined as being 'acts of self-help' (Black, 1983) and therefore 'can be seen as a 'reaction' to perceived or real deviance' (Black, 1983) - in this case making criminal acts acceptable such as in Bristol above – which finally could be concluded is the same that could be said for erecting the statues in the first place i.e. making the eventual criminal act of slavery acceptable by the permanency of the statues.

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