

Interview 1/2:

Laurence Westgaph

Trint File:

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Tags:

Liverpool, Black people—Britain, Elder Dempster Shipping Line, Liverpool slave trade, the Congo, slave labor, bananas and the slave trade, British diet, Gorée island, impacts of slavery

Summary:

In his first interview, Laurence provides knowledge on Liverpool's history with the slave trade, linking this history with Britain's continued profiting off West African trade. There is, at the beginning of this interview, an informal conversation between Laurence and Prof. Bogues; a dialogue filled with impassioned insights on reclaiming the forgotten stories of seminal Black British figures.

- Laurence notes that there is a street in Liverpool named after Gorée island, a location central to Liverpool's direct involvement with the slave trade. He uses this as a starting point to provide context on the specificities of this direct involvement.
- Laurence goes into detail on the relation between the Elder Dempster shipping line (owned by Liverpool based merchants) and the extraction of African resources through forced labor, itself occurring after Liverpool's "direct" involvement with the slave trade had ended.
- Drawing attention to the manner in which the legacy of slavery is still visible today, Laurence points towards the banana becoming a central fruit in the British diet, itself a remnant of Liverpool's trade with West Africa.

Main Themes:

Liverpool's Engagement With Slavery: Throughout the interview, Laurence provides an account of the manner in which Liverpool has engaged with the slave trade.

Slavery's Visibility Today: Laurence highlights numerous ways in which the afterlives of slavery can be seen and felt in our current day and age.

Quotes From Interview:

- [~0:40] Laurence talks about the significance of the forgotten stories of Black people in Britain, emphasizing their importance in shifting stereotypes of British Black people. This moment comes with impassioned delivery from Laurence, making it extremely visually and sonically engaging.

- Some of the stories that I've found you just wouldn't believe, you know, and it's forgotten. It's been totally forgotten. Black people who've played really important roles, not just in the city, but more broadly. It would help to challenge a lot of the stereotypes that people associate with black people in Britain. And these stories have been forgotten. You know, real key individuals and just working class people who contribute in an everyday way.

- [~1:11] Here, Laurence talks about Liverpool's engagement with the slave trade through the city's merchants in Gorée island. He notes that a street in Liverpool is named after this island, emphasizing the continued visibility of the legacy of slavery within the city.
 - So here in Liverpool we have a street called Goree, and it's named after Gorée Island. Now Gorée was a French colony primarily, but during the seven years War the British occupied the island, and immediately upon the British getting control of the island, the Liverpool merchants were in there. They established themselves on that island. And in doing so they realized that this was an important place for the embarkation of enslaved people to take them off to the Americas. So back in Liverpool they named a street after that island.... The street first appears on a Liverpool map in 1765, and from that time on we have a street in Liverpool named after this island where enslaved people were taken by the Liverpool merchants.

- [~3:31] Laurence talks about Liverpool's continued involvement in slavery (after the end of its "direct" involvement) through the Elder Dempster shipping line.
 - So Elder Dempster had the monopoly of shipping from the Congo up to Antwerp, up to Belgium. And in doing that, Elder Dempster, Alfred Lewis Jones did not want to upset King Leopold. Now one of the men who worked for him here in Liverpool was a man called Edmund Morel and Morel was a clerk for the Elder Dempster Shipping Line and from time to time he would have to go to Antwerp to do stock checks. And he noticed when he went out to the—to do these checks, he noticed that lots of ships were coming back from the Congo laden with lots of really valuable goods, things like rubber, ivory, valuable hardwood timbers, etc. But, he didn't see anything going out to exchange. The only thing that was going down to Congo was soldiers and guns. And he was able to put two and two together and realized that there was no trade going on; it was forced labor.

- [~5:13] Laurence discusses how Liverpool has continued to benefit from its trade with West Africa (itself established through the slave trade), pointing towards the centrality of bananas in the British diet as an example.

- Now, Alfred Louis Jones, as well as commanding this trade with the Congo, he was also instrumental in developing the palm oil trade with Nigeria. Liverpool, off the back of the slave trade, becomes the center of the palm oil trade throughout the 19th century. And that only continues long past the period that Britain has abolished the slave trade. He would also be key in the development of the banana becoming a central fruit in the British diet. He was the one who set up the banana boats, and in order to get people interested in the eating of the banana, he would give bananas away free on the streets of Liverpool. This is how Liverpool continues to benefit directly with its trade with West Africa, that was predicated by the trade during the slave trade period.

Interview 2/2:

Laurence Westgaph

Trint File:

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Tags:

Slave trade, West African trade, Liverpool, Liverpool shipbuilding, Black people—Liverpool, Liverpool slave merchants, anti-abolition—Liverpool, Underground Railroad, Liverpool Town Hall, West Indian merchants, impacts of slavery

Summary:

In his longer interview, Laurence details the many ways Liverpool engaged in the slave trade and its afterlives. He points towards some of the effects on the city's population that came as a result of this engagement, highlighting the prominence of Black people's presence. Much of the interview is spent discussing maritime trade and travel, which could be useful for NMAAHC's motif of water.

- Laurence contextualizes Liverpool's central role in the slave trade, emphasizing both the city's proximity to manufactured goods useful for the trade, as well as its positioning as a shipbuilding hub.
- Laurence names a number of Liverpool's merchant families who had prominent roles in the development of the slave trade.
- Emphasizing the presence of Black people in Liverpool since before it was a major city, Laurence highlights Black people's central role in the development of the city into what it is today.
- Laurence maps out Liverpool's conflicted relationship with abolition, noting both its strong anti-abolition sentiments and its later activity in the abolition of slavery in the United States.

Main Themes:

Liverpool's Engagement With Slavery: Laurence provides context on the many ways in which Liverpool actively engaged with, and benefited from, the slave trade. He also notes the city's later activity in the abolition of slavery in the United States.

Liverpool's Black Presence: Laurence details the prominent Black presence within Liverpool from the 18th century to today.

Slavery's Modern Visibility: Throughout the interview, Laurence mentions Liverpool's prominent figures within the slave trade, highlighting their current visibility through statues, portraits, etc.

Quotes From Interview:

- [~1:36] Asked to explain why Liverpool became so central to the slave trade, Laurence emphasizes the city's proximity to manufactured goods useful for the trade, as well as the city's role as a shipbuilding hub. His details on the city's prominent role as a main shipbuilding location could be useful for the NMAAHC's focus on the motif of water.
 - Primarily because of our proximity to the places that manufactured the goods that were wanted in West Africa. We also had a very extensive trade in iron goods and other materials that were useful for the trade. Obviously you needed manacles, etc.. Liverpool developed quite a burgeoning shipbuilding industry during the 18th century. By the end of the slave trade, two out of every five slave ships that were used by the British was built here in Liverpool. There's a range of different factors, but there are some of them.
- [~3:47] Laurence names some Liverpool merchant families who played prominent roles in the development of the slave trade. He quantifies the gruesome extent of their atrocities.
 - So in Liverpool, there's a number of merchants who are very instrumental in the development of the trade, and some of them were important over generations. So we had slave trading dynasties in Liverpool. We had the Earle family, we had the Aspinall family, we had the Heywood family, and a number of others. These were merchants who, over multiple generations, were engaged in the slave trade, and some families were involved in almost 200 slaving voyages, which means that they were responsible in some cases for the enslavement and premature death of about 80,000 people per family. Now, Liverpool's population in the year 1800 was only 80,000 people. That was just seven years before the slave trade was abolished. And this means that some of these families were responsible for transporting the equivalent of the population of the town in the year 1800 into slavery.
- [~6:04] Here, Laurence details the long-standing presence of Black people in Liverpool, noting their prominent role in building Liverpool into the city that it has become today.
 - So there's lots of evidence of a black presence throughout that period and it only grows. The more Liverpool gets involved in trade with West Africa and the Americas, the more you see black people appearing in our parish records particularly, but also the newspapers. From that time, right up until the present day, there's always been a black population. What's significant about that is because Liverpool was not a very popular place prior to the beginning of the 18th century, it means there's been a black presence in Liverpool since the population of the town was less than 10,000 people. We are very much a part of the development of this city, just as black people in the Americas are very much a part of the development of the multicultural societies that we see over there. If

you think about how long black people have been in what is now the United States or in the Caribbean and also South America, it's pretty much the same for Liverpool. Once Liverpool begins to grow, we start to see a black presence and that clearly shows these links between the growth of Liverpool and the enslavement of African people, and the role that merchants in this town played in that phenomena.

- [~8:14] Laurence highlights the cultural and political centrality of slavery within Liverpool prior to the trade's abolition.
 - There were very little activities against slavery and the slave trade in Liverpool because Liverpool was a city that was benefiting so much from the trade. To be against slavery in Liverpool was like being against slavery in South Carolina or in Jamaica. It was something that could get you into some trouble. We only had one MP who objected to it, a man called William Roscoe. And for the 20 years, in terms of local politics, for the 20 years from 1787 up until abolition in 1807, all 20 of Liverpool's mayors had connections to slavery and the slave trade. Liverpool never raised one petition during those 20 years in favor of abolition, but we raised more than 60 petitions against abolition. That's the equivalent of more than one every four months being sent to parliaments objecting to the abolition of the slave trade. The Liverpool merchants knew that the lifeblood of the city was the trade in enslaved Africans.
- [~11:40] Laurence quantifies the absurd amount of money spent on compensating slave owners after slavery's abolition.
 - In Britain, when slavery was abolished, the owners received £20 million in compensation, and that was the largest bailout by the British government right up until the banking bailout of 2008. The loans that were taken out in the 1830s to pay off that compensation were only finally paid off in 2015, 180 years later.
- [~19:40] Laurence details Liverpool's role in the campaign to abolish slavery in the United States, noting that the city acted as a location for fugitive slaves in the United States to flee to. He notably denotes the city as, "in some ways", being the "last stop on the Underground Railroad".
 - After the British abolished slavery, we were more active in the campaign to abolish slavery in the United States. Many fugitive slaves came to Liverpool fleeing—particular after 1850—fleeing the slave catchers after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law. Frederick Douglass came here on more than one occasion. Moses Roper came to Liverpool. James Watkins came to Liverpool. Alan Croft and her husband came to Liverpool. So this became a place where these enslaved—formerly enslaved people and fugitive enslaved people from the United States could come to, and actually consider, in some ways, Liverpool to be the last stop on the Underground Railroad, because there was one significant

location in Liverpool, great George's Congregational Church, where many enslaved people would go to to receive support. The reverend there was very supportive of the fugitive enslaved people from the United States who came to Liverpool, and they would go there to receive letters of introduction, which they could then use to find accommodation or to find work, not just in Liverpool, but all around the country within abolitionist circles. His name was Reverend Raffles.

- [~21:12] Having conducted his interview in the Liverpool Town Hall, Laurence, here, decides to explain why he views the building as “one of the greatest monuments to Liverpool’s involvement in slavery”. In so doing, he elucidates the manner in which history’s of atrocity can be erased from public viewing.
 - So the building that we're standing in now is Liverpool Town Hall. This is one of the most beautiful Georgian buildings built in Britain during the 18th century. It's a grade one listed building, and this is probably one of the greatest monuments to Liverpool's involvement in slavery, because the merchants who contributed to the building of this beautiful building were involved in the slave trade directly. Men like Brian Blondel, who's the founder of the Bluecoat School, one of Liverpool's most prestigious secondary schools, and also the Cunliffe family. The Cunliffes have a street named after them in the town. So this building to me is the great monument from the period of the 18th century when Liverpool celebrates its involvement in slavery. As you can see, when you look outside and you'll see the bust of an African woman carved on the exterior of the building. This beautiful building is also adorned by lots and lots of portraits. Many of them depict Liverpool slave traders. And then when you read the interpretation plaques, you would never know that because not one of them refers to them as being involved in the slave trade. The best you'll get is the euphemistic term a "West India trader." To you and I, that would be a slave plantation owner. But, you know, to the people of the times, that's what they refer to themselves as. These weren't slave owners, these were "West Indian merchants."