

WARM UP

1 What was the role of the USA and the UK in the slave trade?

THE SLAVE TRADE

The Atlantic Slave trade, where slaves were bought in Africa and carried on ships to the Americas to be sold, took place from the 15th to 19th centuries. At the peak of the slave trade in the second half of the 18th century, Britain was one of the dominant nations with its ships carrying nearly half the slaves across the Atlantic, particularly to the Caribbean. It is estimated that 11 million Africans, mainly from central and west Africa, were taken to the Americas on slave ships, with 1.4 million dying during the horrific journey. Even if they survived the crossing, life expectancy was not always long due to the hard work, terrible conditions and brutal treatment the slaves had to endure.

By the late 18th century there was a growing movement in both the UK and USA to abolish the slave trade and slavery. The slave trade was abolished in the British Empire in 1807 and slavery itself in 1834. While the slave trade had also been abolished in the USA by 1808, slavery and the internal movement of slaves between states continued in the USA. This was concentrated primarily in the southern states given that, around the turn of the century, the northern states had gradually introduced provisions to abolish slavery. The south, meanwhile, continued to consider slavery fundamental for agricultural production like tobacco and cotton. Slavery was however woven into the national economy as many industries in the north had economic interests in slavery and also relied on the resources of the south produced with slave labour. In 1861 there were an estimated 4 million slaves.

Opposition to slavery came in various forms, such as those who thought slaves should be allowed to return to Africa, but the strongest support came from abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, who campaigned for the immediate, unconditional end to slavery. Garrison published an antislavery newspaper and organised the American Anti-Slavery Society. Support also came from free blacks and escaped slaves, such as Frederick Douglass who wrote an autobiography about his life as a slave. The complete end to slavery in the US did not happen until after the Civil War when the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution was approved and adopted in 1865.

READING COMPREHENSION

2 **PET** Read the text and decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F).

- 1 Britain was the only nation which took slaves across the Atlantic.
- 2 Slaves were mostly taken from the central and western areas of Africa.
- 3 Not all slaves survived the crossing of the Atlantic.
- 4 The slave trade was abolished at the same time in the UK and the USA.
- 5 Slave labour was used in agriculture in the southern states.
- 6 Garrison believed that slaves should be freed and returned to Africa.
- 7 Frederick Douglass imagined what life was like as a slave in his book.
- 8 All slaves in the USA were freed in 1865.

T	F
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SPEAKING

3 Discuss this question in small groups.

What forms of slavery do you think still exist today?

WRITING

4 Choose one of these people and find out about his/her role in the abolition of slavery in the USA. Write a short presentation.

Abraham Lincoln • William Lloyd Garrison • Nat Turner • Frederick Douglass • John Quincy Adams • Harriet Beecher Stowe