

The Zong Project, 2020 and beyond

Background

In 2007 a replica slave ship, 'The Zong', was moored alongside the Tower of London to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade. The ship attracted thousands of visitors during the three week period that it was open to the public, with many visitors being clearly moved by the experience. The short period that the ship was moored at Tower Pier in 2007 provided an insight into the reaction of different sections of the public and laid the foundations for the Zong Project with a focus on community reconciliation.

The legacy of colonial slavery affects us all

- Descendants of the original slaves, who continue to be discriminated against; who are over-represented in our prisons and mental hospitals and under-represented in our universities, to give just three examples.
- Descendants of those living in Britain at the time: not just those who made fortunes out of the misery of others, but all of us who still benefit today from a national economy that grew massively through the Industrial Revolution. An economy built to a large extent on the sweat of slaves abroad and the newly created working classes at home.

We believe that this cost and its ongoing legacy has been largely hidden and it is time to bring it to the light. The Zong Project aims to do this.

The Zong Project, 2020 and beyond

When MJR was established in 2014, one of the charity's key visions was to establish a centre which not only provides an educational resource about the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade but also focuses on addressing issues relating to its legacy.

The Zong Project aims to work in partnership with local community organisations to establish a centre which would provide a forum for community reconciliation, as well as training opportunities for those affected by legacy. It is envisaged that a focal point of the centre would be a replica slave ship permanently moored and open to the public, together with a community-led legacy centre.

The centre would be unique in that it combines a presentation of the historical facts with a programme of community action to address the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. There are many exhibitions about this period of history and its legacy, but none which address legacy related issues through a programme of community reconciliation.

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The original 'Zong' was infamous for the owners claiming on their insurance for the loss of 'property' after 133 slaves were thrown overboard when the ship had apparently got into difficulties.

Phase 1: Voyage around Britain

In the summer of 2020 it is planned to sail a replica slave ship around the British coast calling at a variety of ports associated with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The aim of this initial voyage will be to highlight the injustices and legacy of this period in British history; and to set in motion a wider project to effect community change. The voyage is being planned in conjunction with local museums, churches and community groups.

The key purpose of the voyage is to:

- Raise awareness of Britain's leading role in the transatlantic slave trade.
- Stimulate and collate research into local involvement in this trade, and the legacy of the both the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and industrial exploitation in Britain.
- Provide encouragement to existing and a catalyst for new local community-led projects seeking to address the issues identified.
- Create a greater national collective understanding and sharing of information and ideas to address legacy issues
- Assess levels of interest in establishing a permanent centre in a particular area.

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."
Marcus Garvey

Phase 2: Triangular voyage

A further step towards the long term aim could involve sailing the ship on a longer sea voyage to the West African slave forts and across the Atlantic to recreate the 'Triangular Voyage' of the original Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The feasibility of such a voyage, possibly taking place in 2022, is still being investigated. Please contact us if you are interested in sponsoring this venture or if you would be able to assist MJR in some other way.

Phase 3: Permanent Centre.

The long term aim of the project is to encourage the establishment of a permanent centre which seeks to address some of the legacy issues identified in earlier phases. To further this aim MJR will seek to develop a partnership, or provide support to a local organisation (or group of organisations) in one of the areas visited in Phase 1 of the project. The aims of the centre would be to:

- Provide an educational resource to raise awareness of this part of history and Britain's leading role in it.
- Provide a base for community-led projects which seek to address the legacy of slavery.
- Provide a forum for reconciliation, reaffirmation and training opportunities for disaffected young people facing long-term unemployment.

A wide range of social research has shown that colonial slavery has left a legacy of far reaching social and economic problems. The Zong Project aims to provide a forum for discussion, reconciliation and reaffirmation; to contribute to community transformation; to change institutionalised attitudes; and to strengthen community identity and belongingness.



The Zong in London on the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade April 2007

We believe that this work will make a considerable contribution to improving community relationships in inner-city areas of Britain where the double legacy of colonial slavery and industrial exploitation are in evidence.



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