

The London Docklands Zong Centre Proposal

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. Many visitors were clearly moved by the experience, saying that it was either 'sad' or 'distressing'. A 'before-and-after' survey conducted as visitors arrived and disembarked showed that 97% of all visitors rated the experience either "good" or "excellent". Only 8% of white visitors and 25% of Caribbeans claimed to know a lot about colonial slavery on arrival. On departure 91% of white visitors and 84% of Caribbeans said that they had learned a lot and more than 5000 signed a petition calling for the exhibition to be a permanent feature in London.



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

The Movement for Justice and Reconciliation is now seeking to establish a permanent Living History Cultural Centre in London's Docklands.

The Zong Centre will aim to:

1. Provide an educational resource for the general public, schools and other educational establishments where visitors experience the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by walking through the replica slave ship and accompanying sight and sound exhibition.
2. Provide a base for community-led projects which seek to address the legacy of slavery. A locally led group will be established to run the Centre and initiate projects to develop the capacity and skills of those affected by the legacy of slavery, enabling them to participate more fully in society.

Educational and Community Benefits

The Zong Living History exhibition will be open to the public, schools and other educational institutions. It will provide an educational resource; with the aim of running workshops and lectures for the benefit of local schools and universities in London and farther afield.

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The 2007 Zong Project in the Pool of London has given a base from which much has been learnt that can be built upon in this project. The objective is not merely to offer a unique educational experience, but to contribute to community transformation; to change institutionalised attitudes and to strengthen community identity and belongingness.

Legacy of Slavery Community Development Programme

Invaluable information was gained from the Zong project in 2007. The short period that The Zong was moored at Tower Pier has shown the effectiveness of this kind of facility. It also provided an insight into the reaction of different sections of the public and laid the foundations for community reconciliation projects. Visitors who come from a Caribbean background usually found the presentation led them to an emotional experience of either anger or deep sorrow. This is the deep felt legacy of the slave trade, a legacy that has never been sufficiently acknowledged or addressed.

A wide range of social research has shown that the slave trade has left a legacy of far reaching social and economic problems. The Centre will aim to provide a forum for reconciliation, reaffirmation and training opportunities for disaffected young people with challenging educational needs or facing long-term unemployment.

The Zong Living History Exhibition

The replica slave ship and accompanying exhibition will include the following zones:

Zone A: **Africa before the slave trade:** A reconstruction of a typical African city, using various eyewitness accounts from the 16th and 17th centuries, and showing that although there were many warring tribal factions, much of Africa had a complex and well developed civilisation prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

Zone B: **Captured!** The visitor is guided through a series of long dark passages showing how ordinary Africans were snatched from their village families and forcibly taken to the coast for transportation to the Caribbean and the Americas.

Zone C: **Transit Station:** A replica slave fort where the visitors are held before being taken onto the slave ship.

Zone D: **The 'Zong' replica slave ship:** Visitors experience the horrors of the 'middle passage' as the ship crosses the Atlantic Ocean.

Zone E: **The Market Place:** After disembarking, the visitor is taken to a replica slave market to see the indignity of slaves being herded and sold like cattle.

Zone F: **The Plantation:** A reconstruction of life on a sugar plantation, including slave huts, cane fields and the heat and danger of the sugar refining process.

Zone G: **Aftermath**

- Slave Stories: recordings of eyewitness accounts of life on a plantation.
- The Fight for Freedom: the route to Abolition both through the British Parliament and through slave revolts in the Caribbean, including accounts of black and white abolitionists.
- The Legacy of Slavery: an exploration of the long term effects of slavery.

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

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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