

The Zong Project

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. Many visitors were clearly moved by the experience. 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.

One of the key long term visions of MJR is to establish a centre which not only provides an educational resource about the slave trade but also provides a forum for community reconciliation, and training opportunities for those affected by its legacy. The focal point of the project will be a replica slave ship permanently moored and open to the public, together with a community-led legacy centre. But first we want to raise some awareness...

Stage One: A voyage around Britain

The first phase of this ambitious project is to sail the replica ship on a public awareness voyage around Britain visiting some of the ports that were involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In July 2019 the 'Zong' will visit Plymouth, Scilly Isles, Ilfracombe, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, Lancaster and Whitehaven (exact dates and itinerary subject to confirmation: see: www.mjr-uk.com for latest information).

This initial Zong Voyage aims to highlight the injustices and legacy of the slave trade; 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, and will provide an opportunity to:

- experience something of life on board a slave ship.
- visit the on-board exhibition about enslavement and its legacy down the generations.
- attend a programme of related events in the local area.

This is not about putting people through a challenging experience for the sake of it, or trying to lay a guilt trip on them. It is about realising that the legacy of colonial slavery affects all of us:

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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.

- the descendants of the original slaves, who continue to be discriminated against and be over-represented in our prisons and under-represented in our universities, to give just two examples.
- the descendants of the beneficiaries of the slave trade: not just those who made fortunes, but all of us who still benefit today from a national economy that grew massively through an Industrial Revolution built to a large extent on the sweat of slaves abroad and the new 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 aim of this voyage is to help make this happen, and lead to the establishment of a Zong Centre.

Stage Two: Establishing the Zong Centre

The aims of the Zong Centre will be to:

1. Provide an educational resource for the general public, schools and other educational establishments where visitors experience something of the realities and human cost 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, such as training opportunities for disaffected young people with challenging educational needs or facing long-term unemployment.

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

Educational and Community Benefits of the Zong Project

A wide range of social research has shown that the slave trade has left a legacy of far reaching social and economic problems. Both the Zong voyage and the Centre will aim to provide a forum for discussion, reconciliation and reaffirmation. Invaluable information was gained from the Zong project in 2007, which we hope to add to in 2019 as we build toward the Zong Centre. The short period that the ship was moored at Tower Pier demonstrated the effectiveness of this kind of facility, providing an insight into the reaction of different sections of the public and laying the foundations for community reconciliation projects.

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. It is our aim to attract visitors from all sections of our society as we believe there are issues here which we all need to address: from 10 Downing Street to 10 High Street.



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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