

Freedom and human rights



Model of a freed slave,
The Whitworth Art Gallery,
The University of Manchester



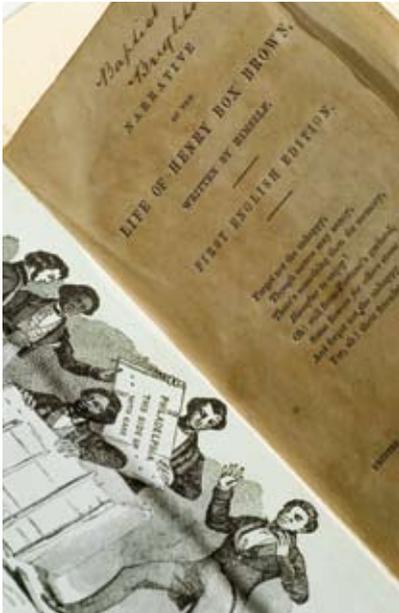
James Watkins,
Bolton Museum and
Archive Service



Uncle Tom and Little Eva,
Bolton Museum and
Archive Service



Slave whip,
People's History Museum



Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, 1851, in the collection of the John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester

Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, 1851

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Henry Brown was born enslaved in Virginia USA in 1815. In 1849 Brown's master refused to buy Brown's wife when she and their children were put up for sale. Henry Brown decided to escape to freedom by being posted in a box.

Brown was sent from Richmond, Virginia, to Philadelphia. The 350 mile journey took 27 hours. In Philadelphia the box was opened and Brown jumped out and declared 'Good morning, gentlemen!' as if he had arrived on a train.

The **engraving** of his rising from the box became an important image used to support the case for **abolition**. Brown became an overnight sensation changing his name to Henry 'Box' Brown.

As an escaped enslaved African, Brown could have been caught and returned to his owner.

He left the USA and arrived in Liverpool in 1850. He toured the north of England to tell his story and to help raise awareness for the **abolition** of slavery. He spent the next 14 years lecturing and re-enacting his escape. Brown spoke at venues in Manchester, where he made the contacts to enable him to publish his book 'Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown'.

His popularity and the publication of his book show the support for the **abolition** of slavery in Manchester and the surrounding cotton towns.

Brown married an English wife and had two children. The 1871 **census** lists the Browns in Cheetham, Manchester where they were doing well enough to employ a servant. In 1875, however, Brown decided to return to America, and the last record of him is in 1878 outside Boston.



Slave shackle, 1807 © People's History Museum

Slave shackle, 1807

People's History Museum

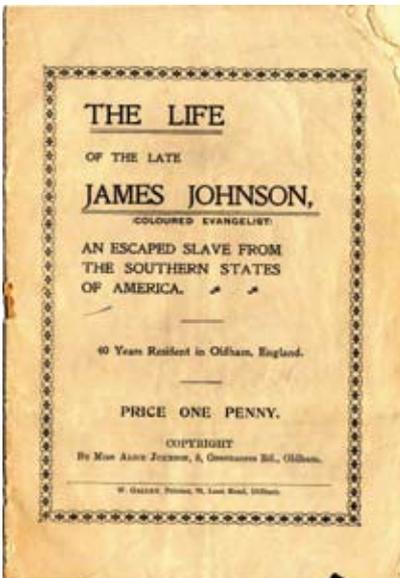
Shackles were used to control enslaved Africans when they were captured, marched to the coast and loaded in ships like cargo. Men remained chained in the holds of ships for journeys across the Atlantic of about six weeks.

Shackles were also used as a form of restraint and punishment on **plantations** in the Caribbean and America. Enslaved Africans often tried to escape and shackles, whips, guns and dogs were used to stop them.

This shackle was used in the French Caribbean **colony** of Saint-Domingue where there were many sugar, tobacco and indigo **plantations**, and Africans were treated very badly. The western part of the island was originally called Haiti.

Haiti is unique as the only nation which gained independence as the result of a rebellion by enslaved Africans. The **rebellion** was led by Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines. These two former enslaved Africans used their brilliant military and political leadership to defeat both the French and British armies. Independence was declared in 1804 and Saint-Domingue was once again called Haiti as the name for the new African-led nation.

The use of shackles and the brutal punishments for enslaved Africans were some of the most shocking aspects of slavery for **abolitionist** Europeans and Americans.



The Life of the Late James Johnson, 1914
© Gallery Oldham

The Life of the Late James Johnson, 1914 Gallery Oldham

James Johnson was born into slavery on 20 March 1847, at Smithfield, North Carolina in the USA. He escaped during the American Civil War by swimming out to a northern warship, the Stars and Stripes, anchored off the coast. Johnson made his way to New York, and worked his passage to Liverpool, arriving in December 1862. Over the next four years he travelled across England and settled in Oldham in 1866.

Johnson initially worked for Platt Brothers of Oldham, one of the largest companies making machines for the cotton industry. He then drew on his experiences of slavery to become a religious **preacher**. During his **sermons** Johnson talked about the evils of slavery which helped to establish

a strong anti-slavery movement in Oldham. **Abolitionists** formed a strong mass political movement and used **petitions** and sugar **boycotts** to try and bring an end to slavery.

The Slavery Abolition Act that finally ended slavery in British **colonies** was passed on 23 August 1833. On 1 August 1834, all those enslaved in the British **Empire** were set free. However, a period of **apprenticeship** kept many working in the same conditions as slavery until 1838.

Owners received massive amounts of **compensation** after **abolition**, whilst those who had been enslaved received nothing. Slavery did not end in the USA until after the American Civil War in 1865.

Questions

- 1 What is it to be free?
- 2 How and why were enslaved Africans treated so brutally?
- 3 What rights did enslaved Africans have?
- 4 Why did they try to escape slavery?
- 5 Who resisted slavery and campaigned for **abolition**?
- 6 Does slavery still exist today?