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The Slave Trade, c. 1830–1893: British Foreign Office Confidential Print falls under the broad themes of “Colonialism and Empire”, “Economics”, and “Slavery and Abolition”. You can explore related collections, such as *Antigua, Slavery, and Emancipation in the Records of a Sugar Plantation, 1689–1907*; *British Mercantile Trade Statistics, 1662–1809*; and *Slavery Through Time: from Enslavers to Abolitionists, 1675–1865*, by scanning the QR codes.



Colonialism and Empire



Slavery and Abolition



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The Slave Trade, c. 1830–1893: British Foreign Office Confidential Print

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Britain's role in the history of slavery is long and complex. **After decades of abolitionist campaigning, the passing of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807 ended Britain's involvement in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people.** It also marked the beginning of a new chapter of international anti-slavery diplomacy in the nineteenth century. This included the formation of a Royal Navy squadron to police the West African coast and to intercept ships hailing from nations that remained engaged in the slave trade. **There was also a concerted diplomatic endeavour to push other states and rulers—in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas—towards abolition.**

Comprising over 32,000 images from Foreign Office files at The National Archives (UK), this collection includes correspondence and reports sent between civil servants in London and British agents, diplomats, and naval officers working across the world.

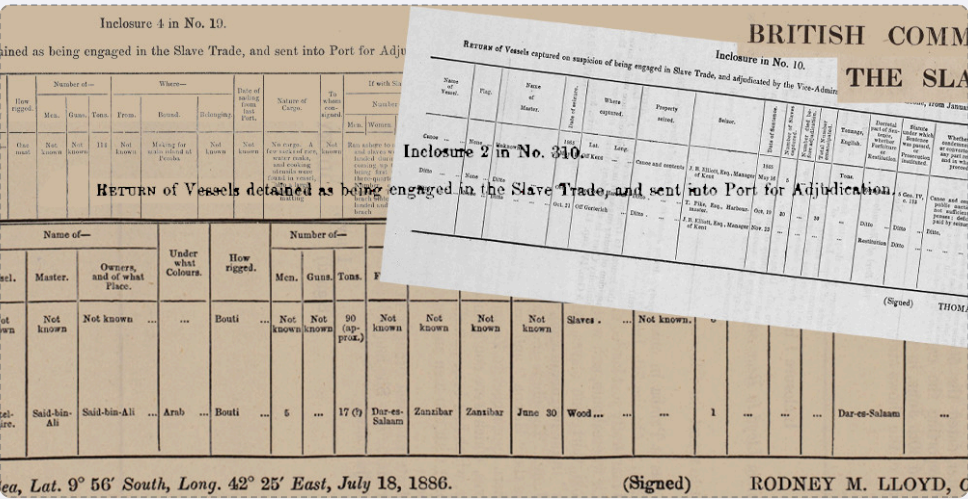
It offers unrivalled insights into official attitudes towards slavery and the formation of policies relating to formerly enslaved people. Significantly, **the sources illuminate the confluence, and contradictions, of political strategy, military strength, and moral mission, during the high imperial era.**

This collection will be of interest to **historians of slavery, abolition, empire, and diplomacy. It will also appeal to those situated within the fields of political science and economics.**

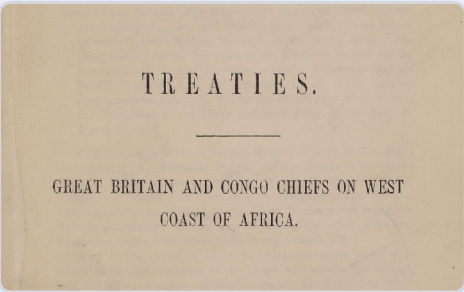


"[T]his House has learnt with deep regret [. . .] that the Traffic in Slaves still continues to be carried on [. . .] to an extent almost as great as at any former period of its existence, and attended with circumstances of additional cruelty and horror."

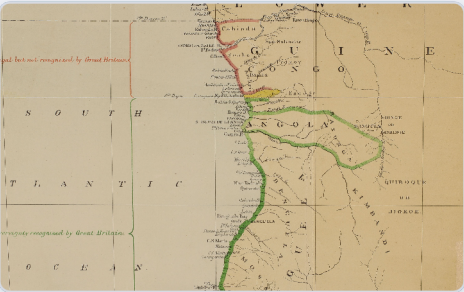
"Address of the House of Commons, To the King, on the Subject of Slave Trade", 19 May 1835, FO 541/51: Various Papers on the Slave Trade, 1662 to 1861, image 39.



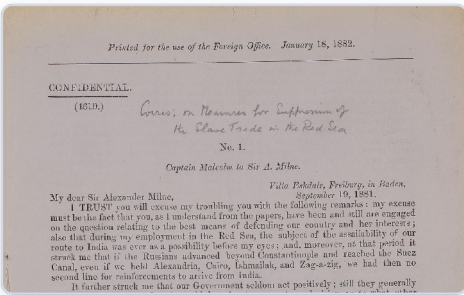
Decades of legislative reform brought an end to Britain's involvement in the slave trade. The Slave Trade Act of 1788 (Dolben's Act) regulated conditions on slave ships. Later, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 ended Britain's direct involvement. The Slave Trade Act of 1824 imposed stricter penalties for illegal trading. Slavery across most of the British empire was outlawed by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. This came into effect in 1834, although the implementation of an apprenticeship system delayed full emancipation until 1838.



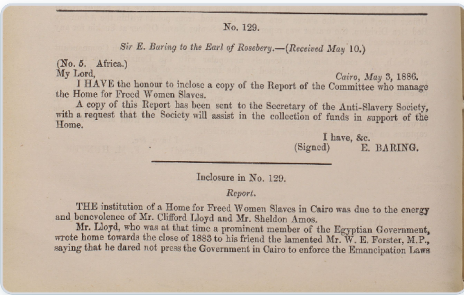
The collection details captured slave ships, the emancipation of enslaved people, related legal proceedings, and anti-slavery movements. It also surveys annual reports, international conventions, legislation, and treaties related to the slave trade.



This collection shows how British naval officers negotiated anti-slavery treaties with African leaders. In August 1876, for instance, Commodore Sir William Hewett negotiated treaties with rulers based along the Congo River.



The Red Sea slave trade was one of the longest-running maritime trafficking networks in history. Sources highlight Britain's efforts to suppress it while protecting its imperial interests, ports, and routes to India.



Philanthropic organisations supported anti-slavery efforts. For example, the Home for Freed Women Slaves, based in Cairo, offered care, shelter, and employment support for women who had escaped slavery.

This collection explores the complex meaning of freedom after abolition. Officially, people rescued from slave ships were referred to as "Liberated Africans", a term that is now deemed misleading because many people remained subject to forms of colonial control. Today, scholars often use "recaptives" or "recaptured Africans" to better reflect people's lived experiences. Although the Royal Navy freed more than 700,000 Africans from slave ships, many of these people found themselves in apprenticeships, indentured labour schemes, or in military service.

The West Africa Squadron was established by the Royal Navy to enforce the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807). Operating from 1818 to the 1860s, the squadron patrolled over 2,000 miles of the West African coast to capture slave ships involved in the transatlantic trade. Costing between 1–2% of the British government's annual expenditure, this campaign was a major financial and military commitment. The Admiralty pursued increasingly coercive strategies, including blockades of established slave trading ports and rivers along the West African coast.



Sources include: The National Archives (UK).