

Introduction

This Newcastle Walk has been designed to demonstrate that Africans, as with many other diverse groups, not only lived, visited and contributed to our region but that their lives are embedded in the fabric of our region.

We are here in the stones of St Mary's Church in Gateshead, in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Newcastle, in homes, churches, meeting rooms and assembly halls across the region. African descendants contributed and continue to contribute (Prevatt Goldstein, 2021).

We believe these resources have the potential to stir curiosity and a sense of pride in Newcastle's rich and diverse past. In undertaking this walk many questions may arise from the participants and we hope this guide will assist in addressing some of these questions. We also encourage walk leaders to explore our [Reflective Prompts](#), which are intended to support critical thinking about the stories in the walks.

Why focus on those of African descent?

There are many plaques and monuments to those of white English descent such as Grey's Monument, Cowan Monument and the plaques on City Hall and the Nelson Street Music Hall. However, currently there is only one plaque in Newcastle City that acknowledges its renowned African residents and visitors (Frederick Douglass in Summerhill Square) and there are none in Newcastle City Centre. These walks challenge this limited representation. The focus on those of African descent arises from the rich material available as Africans have been present in Newcastle at least since the eighteenth century but can also prompt research on the lives of diverse others in Newcastle. Most significantly, revealing the long history and rich contribution of those of African descent challenges the racist marginalisation and exclusion of black people from Newcastle's story. It is thus essential to retain the focus on African lives, rather than white lives, throughout the walks.

Care with language

In these walks and accompanying information, 'black' is used to denote all those who are likely to experience colour-based racism. The term 'of African descent' is used to refer to a specific group within the broader 'black' category, i.e. those with current or historical links to the African continent.

We also use the words 'enslaved' and 'enslavement' rather than 'slave' or 'slavery' to denote that this is not any one's inherent condition. Rather they are enslaved for the benefit and profit of others. Nevertheless, the language in some of the source material may be inappropriate or offensive. It is important to explain to those on the walk, the reasons for avoiding words that were commonly used in other times and may still be carelessly used.

In these walks, we are talking specifically about 'chattel slavery' whereby those so enslaved were treated as objects to be possessed and traded. This is not to minimise other similar suffering as in bonded labour, indentureship or modern slavery. But the formal, legal removal of personhood and ensuing sanctioned atrocities makes the 'chattel slavery' forced on Africans by Europeans in the 16th-18th centuries a distinct form of enslavement.

Racism

Accepting the existence of racism now and in the past is essential in exploring these stories in their full depth. However, due to the way we have constructed our societies and the influence of our media and education systems, there may be some hurdles in doing justice to these stories.

Minimising or avoiding seeing racism

Strategies for minimising racism include: 'We are all the same; I don't see difference; I don't notice colour'. While we all belong to the one human race and are similar in many ways, we may also be different in some ways, have different life experiences and be treated differently. Recognising colour-based racism is recognising the evidence that groups who are excluded from whiteness have been treated inequitably in the past, as in enslavement and colonisation, and are being treated inequitably now (Byrne et al., 2020).

Potential barriers

Understanding racism as a distinct type of marginalisation can help to build a deeper understanding of the impact it had for characters in the walk, and still does have for black people today. There are different types and degrees of marginalisation. Consider whether bringing in comparisons, such as discrimination against both black and white disabled people, can add depth to our understanding. Also consider whether some comparisons such as 'Geordies don't like Machams' (Newcastle residents don't like Sunderland residents) could detract from understanding the impact of racism on the lives of the characters in the walks or of black people currently.

Suggesting that walk participants, or students in a classroom, imagine or do activities in which they must act as the characters from the walks, i.e 'hot seating' is also problematic. While this may appear to be a bridge in building empathy it can act as a barrier by giving white walk participants the impression that they can **fully** share the experience of the characters in the walks. There is thus a risk of diminishing or trivialising the racism experienced by black people and their resilience against racism. It may also be an uncomfortable experience for black walk participants whose experience of racism may be different not only to that of the white walk participants but also to the characters in the walks.

Emotional impact

Walk participants are likely to experience discomfort, pride, anger, shame, guilt, embarrassment, satisfaction, amongst other emotions, and express these openly or implicitly in silence or referred behaviour such as laughter or giggling. It is important that those engaging in, or leading a walk, accept their own emotional responses, assisted by the [Reflective Prompts](#).

It is important to prepare walk participants by stating that racism, enslavement and resilience (coping and achieving despite setbacks and oppression) is an intrinsic part of the walk. Extreme examples of racism such as in the North East Coast Exhibition in the Northern Walk (Stage 4) and in the lynching in the Ida B. Wells' story in the Central Walk (Stage 3) need to be approached with an awareness of their powerful impact and opportunities for both discussion and stunned or sorrowful silence or withdrawal.

Allowing time during the preparation, during the walk and subsequently, where possible, for both emotional responses and cognitive learning i.e. evidence of racism's past and current existence, its economic rationale and its consequences, both economically, and ideologically in its superiority/inferiority legacy, is essential.

The material on the walk is likely to have a different impact on both walk leaders and participants depending on their links with the African diaspora, experiences of past or current oppression, of bullying, of isolation or support, family history, familiarity with the material, current media content, amongst other factors. Walk leaders need to:

- Be honest on the facts in the material without minimising their significance to ease discomfort or anticipated guilt of white walk participants or over-emphasizing. Let the facts speak for themselves.
- Ensure that resilience and achievements of those of African descent are considered alongside racism and enslavement to correct myths of inferiority.
- Enable all to consider their opportunities to challenge racism and make a difference so the walk which leaves a positive emotional residue.

Building bridges

Conversations about racism can be uncomfortable and emotional both in groups of solely white participants and in groups with one or a few black participants. Avoiding the topic hinders learning and colludes with 'not seeing racism'. Speaking about racism and speaking out against racism gives a powerful message and supports those who experience racism. If you are unsure about engaging in conversations about race, we highly recommend reading '[Lift-the-flap, Questions and Answers About Racism](#)' by Dayes and Akpojaro before embarking on leading these walks.

Further Reading

Byrne, B., Alexander, C., Khan, O., Nazroo, J. and Shankley, W. *Ethnicity, Race And Inequality in the UK, State of the Nation* (2020) Bristol University Press

Dayes, K. and Akpojaró, J. (2022) *Lift the flap, First Questions and Answers, What is Racism*, Usborne Publishing Ltd

Guardian: Cotton Capital, How Slavery changed the Guardian, Britain and the World, 01.04.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cotton-capital>

Guardian: *Britain 'not close to being a racially just society-finds two year project*, 09.04.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/09/britain-not-close-to-being-a-racially-just-society-finds-two-year-research-project>

Prevatt Goldstein, B. (2021) *African Lives in Northern England*, New Writing North

Runnymede, NASUWT, (2017) *Act for Racial Justice , Invisible Minorities, Invisible Teachers*, [https://assets.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61c1effbe08c7403b0951689_Runnymede%20ReportNEW%20\(1\).pdf](https://assets.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61c1effbe08c7403b0951689_Runnymede%20ReportNEW%20(1).pdf)