

SMALLTALK WITH STEPHEN SMALL: REPARATIONS FOR LIVERPOOL IMPERIALISM AND WEST AFRICA

POLITICIANS AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

WOW WRITING
ON THE WALL



STEPHEN SMALL

British politicians were at the forefront of the invasion of Africa and the creation of colonies there.

They were at the forefront of the capture, transportation, and enslavement of millions of Africans in the West Indies. It was politicians in Great Britain who abolished the slave trade and slavery in the West Indies, even against the wishes of many plantation owners. British politicians were also at the forefront of British imperialism. They provided the political influence, legal mandate, and military support to capture and expand territories across Africa and to expand the British Empire around the globe. They wanted economic benefits and political influence for Great Britain. And they wanted to prevent France and Germany from controlling more territories and achieving a better position than Britain. It's true that they expected private businesses to pay for a great deal of this and made them do so. But private businesses, families and individuals could never have subjugated or exploited as many people as they did without the political, legal, and military support of politicians.

Liverpool politicians were right there with them. This included city councillors and mayors like Arthur and William Forwood, and MPs like William Huskisson, George Canning, and John Gladstone. Just as Huskisson and Canning spoke in favour of

prolonging slavery and against abolition, so did imperial politicians speak in favour of wars and battles to capture African territory. The Liverpool 8 community made it clear what they think of having a statue of William Huskisson in the heart of the neighbourhood when several community activists pulled it down in July 1982. There's an empty plinth there now, and a plaque with information about Huskisson's role in supporting slavery. Although it did not get the publicity of the Colston statue in Bristol in 2020, this removal took place almost 40 years earlier than the Colston statue.



The Huskisson Plinth

Most of what politicians did during imperialism was entirely legal because they wrote the laws, established formal commissions, and provided military and financial support to achieve their goals.

They also facilitated business and financial deals and set up administrative systems. Racial segregation in West Africa was legal. A great deal of what they did was also entirely illegal. But breaking the law didn't matter if it produced results – making Britain richer, wealthier and more powerful. In West Africa, Africans were denied the rights and the protection of law and denied any opportunity to supervise whites even if they were more qualified. You may not know about these activities under imperialism, but you can get a good idea of how lies are told, and laws are broken just by looking at what's going on with Boris Johnson and his cronies at the present time. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

Racial segregation in West Africa was legal

Politics and economics were a circular process for the rich and powerful, with each stage building on the previous one. Wealth gave access to political power which gave access to more wealth and further political power. John Gladstone is a prime example. He became rich from slavery, got into politics, and, drawing on both, he created immense opportunities for education and networks for his children. Several of his children got into politics and they in turn became rich and helped later generations. His son, William, became Prime Minister four times. You may remember that in the 1960s, the local lads from Liverpool sang that money can't buy you love. But it can buy you a lot of political power.

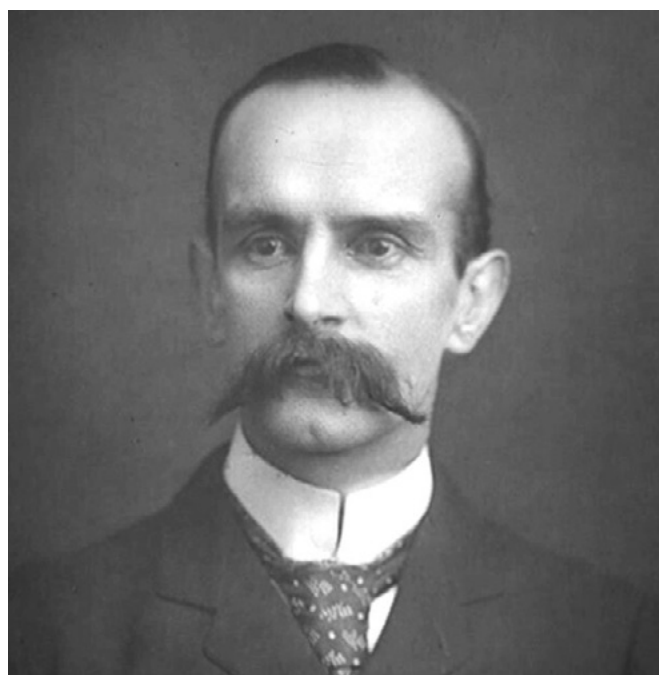
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An excellent example of local and national politics and business working together during imperialism is the relationship between Alfred Jones and Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Chamberlain). As I mentioned in Article No. 1, West Africa was a minor concern for the British government because it got far more spoils from India and southern Africa. So, imperialists in Liverpool needed political allies who would swim against this imperial tide, and Chamberlain was the perfect ally. He believed deeply in the manifest mission of the British and the inferiority of Africans. For example, he believed that before the British went to Egypt, there was barbarism, and government that

was 'inept, inefficient, and ignorant', as well as 'arbitrary, cruel, and oppressive'. The British then brought 'great beneficence' to Egypt. He regarded the whole of Africa as 'a blank map' but one that the British – and Europeans more generally – would fill in with enormous market possibilities. Britain just wanted its fair share – a fair piece of the pie.

Joseph Chamberlain believed deeply in the manifest mission of the British and the inferiority of Africans.

When he became Colonial Secretary in 1895, Chamberlain invested a great deal of time in achieving this potential in Africa, and with their common interests, Jones and Chamberlain developed a close relationship. They worked together on politics and practices for shipping, businesses, banking, and a range of other areas. And they worked together to establish the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) in 1898, just as Chamberlain was establishing the London School of Tropical Medicine in London (see Article No. 4). Chamberlain diverted government money to West Africa to build roads and railroads. He created the racially segregated West African Frontier Force, with Hausa and Yoruba troops on the bottom and British officers on top. He made Frederick Lugard the head of this force. Lugard was a soldier and mercenary who later, in 1912, became governor of the two protectorates that became Nigeria (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Lugard,_1st_Baron_Lugard).



Frederick Lugard

William Lever engaged in multiple conversations on multiple occasions over multiple years with multiple politicians, many of whom were friends or acquaintances. These included conversations with Chamberlain. Lever tried to negotiate access to territories in West Africa and he secured special privileges and trade support. When he became an MP himself, he had far greater access to political power. One can only imagine how they cooked the books over a glass of sherry in the House of Commons, or a glass of gin in the House of Lords. Much as Boris and his cronies are doing today.

The Tobin, Horsfall, and Forwood families were at the forefront of political and economic networks in imperial Liverpool. During slavery, John Tobin had close personal links with George Canning and the Gladstone family. He was elected to the city council and later became mayor of Liverpool, in 1819. He was knighted in 1820. Charles Horsfall became mayor in 1832. Charles' son, Thomas B. Horsfall, became mayor in 1847. Another slave trader, J. Aspinall, became mayor in 1834. Still others were elected to the city council. Thomas B. Horsfall was Conservative MP for the borough of Liverpool between 1857 and 1868 after becoming the first president of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce in 1850. Several of this group (like James Tobin) sat on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board after 1857. Others became members of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, the African Association, and the British Cotton Growers Association.

And look at brothers Arthur and William Forwood, merchants who prospered tremendously from imperial trade, as I mentioned in Article No. 1. Arthur Forwood became a city councillor in 1871, Lord Mayor of Liverpool in 1878–79, and a Conservative MP. During that time, he became a baronet. He was a staunch and unwavering champion of the British Empire. There is a statue of him in St. John's Gardens, Liverpool, behind St. George's Hall (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Forwood); and he is buried in All Saints' Church, Childwall. Someone called Lord Derby unveiled the statue and proclaimed that Forwood was 'one of the greatest men that Liverpool ever produced'. William Forwood was also a merchant, shipowner, and politician. He was mayor of Liverpool twice and became president of the American Chamber of Commerce and of its Liverpool equivalent, as well as holding the presidency of the Liverpool Cotton Association. He was a director of the Cunard Lines and also Deputy Chairman, as well as Director and

Chairman of the Bank of Liverpool, and President of the Seaman's Orphanage. He played a key role raising money for Liverpool Overhead Railway and Liverpool Cathedral. He was also Chairman of Liverpool's Libraries, Museums and Arts Committee from 1890 to 1909. No surprise that he, too, was knighted. The Lairds were regularly in conversation with politicians, and so was Henry Tate. And Liverpool merchants often contacted politicians in Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds to discuss mutual interests.



Arthur Forwood statue

Beyond that, Liverpool's imperial politicians – and their friends, family members, and colleagues in Parliament – worked to appoint friends, family members, and colleagues to important diplomatic posts abroad, including governorships and judicial appointments in West Africa. That's probably what happened when Chamberlain appointed Lugard as military commander of the West African Frontier Force. That's probably what happened when Liverpool-born Harry Rawson was appointed leader of the 1897 Punitive Expedition to Benin (see Article No. 6). That's probably what happened when Robert Baden-Powell (remember him?) fought in the fourth Ashanti War. And that's probably what happened with so many other appointments. Probably certainly what happened. More research will tell us the truth, research that I am doing over the rest of the year.

How many children and grandchildren of prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and other politicians got into power themselves? How many other family members and friends got into power as well? For example, Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone was the son of MP John Gladstone, and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was the son of Joseph Chamberlain. And the list goes on. Reminds me of that old joke that Eton and Oxbridge are just short periods of time these elite men have to endure on their way to the powerful corridors of Parliament.

Liverpool's imperial politicians made sure 'the right people' got awards, and gifts, and knighthoods or baronetcies. And, of course, statues, street names, monuments, and memorials. We already know a great deal about the naming of slavers across Liverpool, but we know far less about the naming of imperialists – across Liverpool and the entire region. Like the Lairds, the Hamiltons, the Forwoods, and the Horsfalls. And many of these people did so-called good deeds, piling up their individual and family prestige, by contributing to important landmarks like Liverpool Cathedral, St. George's Hall, and the Liverpool Philharmonic. Like the so-called Three Graces at the Pier Head, that is, the Cunard Building (1916), the Port of Liverpool Building (1907), and the Royal Liver Building (1911). Like St. George's Hall (1854) and the Philharmonic Hall (originally 1849, current building from 1939). And like the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas (1870), the Jewish Synagogue (1874), and Streatlam Tower (1870s) on Princes Road, in the heart of Liverpool 8, the city's multi-racial district.



The Three Graces

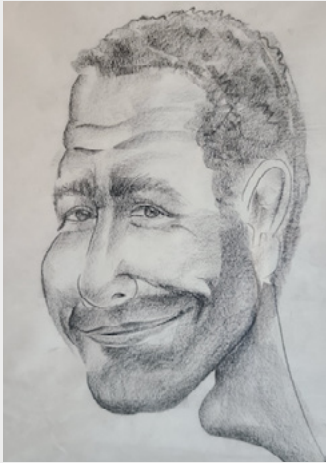
Political power allowed a lot of mischief, skulduggery, and outright corruption, as well. Like the Liverpool traders who bought Confederate cotton from the US South and gave them money and guns. And when some of them were caught red-handed, they were

pensioned off quietly. (For example, it was recently revealed that Prime Minister Lord Salisbury pensioned off some officers when he was informed of the brutality and rape during the Punitive Expedition to Benin in 1897. The details are revealed in a recent book about the Benin Bronzes – 'Blood and Bronze' by Paddy Docherty, published in 2021.) And after all was said and done, the rich and powerful retired to country mansions in bucolic pastures.

What issues must be addressed with regard to reparations, reparatory justice, and decolonising knowledge production and education when it comes to the rich and powerful? What roles did Liverpool politicians – local and national – play in these activities and exploits, especially with regard to West Africa? How far were they complicit in the racial subjugation, exploitation, and discrimination in West Africa? And in racial segregation? Which of these men – and, again, it was overwhelmingly men – received awards, prizes, and titles? How many of them now have statues and memorials, streets, mansions, parks, and gardens named after them? What compensation is owed to Africans who suffered or died in West Africa as a result of these actions and decisions? And how can our knowledge and education about what really happened be made more accurate and more comprehensive? In particular, what resources will be invested in carrying out research to correct these stories? And who will provide those resources?

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Jimi Jagne, Leona Vaughn, Deborah Freedman Lustig, Debra Primo, Terry Small and Patricia Wong for detailed feedback on all nine articles. And special thanks to Karl Smith, Gaila Sims and Adrian North for feedback on several of the articles.



Professor Stephen Small

**Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies,
University of California, Berkeley**

Stephen Small is a Professor in the Department of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies where he has taught since 1995; and he is Director of the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (since June 2020). He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley (1989); his M.Sc in Social Sciences from the University of Bristol (1983); and his B.A. (honours) in Economics and Sociology from the University of Kent at Canterbury (1979). He researches the history and sociology of Black people across the diaspora, including the United States, Western Europe, the Caribbean and Brazil. He has held visiting positions at universities in Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Brazil, Japan and Zimbabwe.

His most recent book is *20 Questions and Answers on Black Europe* published in January 2018. His next book is tentatively entitled: *Inside the Shadows of the Big House: 21st Century Antebellum Slave Cabins and Heritage Tourism in Louisiana*, to be published in 2022. He is currently writing a book on

Slavery, Imperialism and their legacies in Black Liverpool. As part of that project, he's investigating the voices and visions of Black men and women from across Africa and the diaspora in anti-colonial movements for self-determination. He is co-editor of *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, 2009.

Stephen is a child of the Windrush Generation, his dad having arrived in England from Jamaica in 1947. He was born and raised in Liverpool – the city with the nation's longest-standing Black population. He was a member of several Black and multi-racial organisations across England, and in the 1990s was research assistant to the Right Honourable Bernie Grant, MP, researching and lecturing on reparations and museums. He was a member of the Consortium of Black Organisations and the Federation of Black Liverpool Organisations, both in Liverpool, in the early 1990s. And he was a Guest Curator at the Atlantic Slave Trade Gallery at the Merseyside Maritime Museum (which became the International Slavery Museum in 2007).