

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

WHITE WOMEN AND SEXISM
IN IMPERIAL LIVERPOOL



STEPHEN SMALL

You will have noticed in the articles so far that it's been men, men, men, men, men.

And the rest of the articles will mainly be men, men, men, men, men as well. The reason is simple – white men ruled the world during Liverpool imperialism. Just as they had ruled the world during Liverpool slavery. In Liverpool – and of course in Great Britain – between the 1830s and 1920s, white men were 100% of all voters; they held 100% of political offices – from prime minister and members of parliament to city mayors and councillors. They were 100% of officers in the navy and army; and they were 100% of owners, managers, and directors of shipping companies, businesses, banks, education, medicine, and the legal profession. They probably held 100% of senior positions in the church and among missionaries in West Africa. I could be wrong about that. But I'm probably right. Probably certainly right. More research will tell us the truth, research that I am doing over the rest of the year.

Men created the conditions that enabled them to control political, economic, and social power, and from those positions they made it illegal, illegitimate and socially stigmatised for women to compete with them. They prevented elite, educated and wealthy white women from competing with them – which

meant women who were their wives and daughters. Just as their mothers had been denied the same things. No doubt there were one or two (elite) exceptions to the rule. So, imagine what it was like for working class white women? And for Black women?

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Given this harsh reality, where do white women fit into the politics and profits of Liverpool imperialism and West Africa? Again, despite the rampant sexism of white men, it is a fact that white women benefited from Liverpool imperialism and West Africa. And many white women fully aligned themselves with men in believing in their own racial superiority over Africans. These were beliefs that they cultivated from family socialisation and conversations, as well as from reading and visiting exhibits, galleries, and museums. Elite and middle-class women benefited from the household income and wealth earned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. They were financed for education, etiquette, and social skills, and for performing charitable work.

They enjoyed extravagant homes and households in city and rural locations, with the best furnishings, furniture, and gardens. They enjoyed the best fashion of the day, including jewellery, expensive dresses, and shoes. They held lavish dinner parties.

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They enjoyed the very best food, and the very best health and hygiene, including the luxury soaps produced by William Lever's factories. They enjoyed elite social status – rich and wealthy and white, and if they were lucky, so to speak, became ennobled – with honours and titles too – along with their husbands. And they worked to document the so-called successes of their fathers, husbands, and sons in biographies, memoirs, and photographs. Elite women also ensured that their children succeeded, got the best education, met the best people, secured the best jobs, and enjoyed the most substantial inheritances. In Victorian Britain, having children, especially boys, and enabling their success was one of the most desired and revered roles for elite and middle-class women.

Excluded from politics and the professions elite women dedicated their energies to philanthropy and charity, working with the poor and needy. And they worked to protect treasured buildings and assist the victims of military battles. Some women became nurses or supported nursing – think Florence Nightingale!

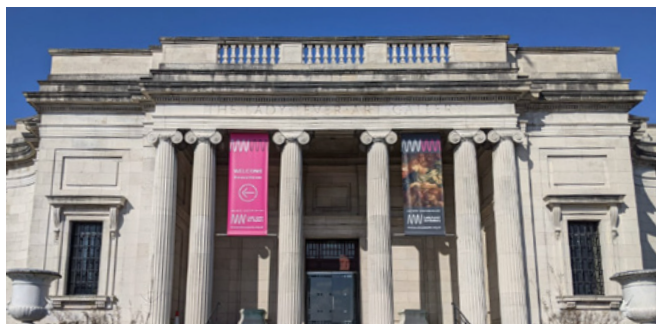
For example, John Gladstone's second wife was Anne Robertson, the daughter of a justice of the peace. They had six children together – two daughters and four sons, one of whom was William Ewart Gladstone, who became prime minister four times. William Ewart Gladstone married Catherine Glynne, and they remained married for more than 50 years. Her father was a baronet. Together, they had eight children, three girls and five boys. While he was prime minister, Gladstone created a senior role for one of his daughters (Mary) as his advisor and confidante, a role that gave her significant influence (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Gladstone). His second daughter, Helen, became a vice-principal at Newnham College, Cambridge University. As children, Mary and Helen had their own maid and lived a life of privilege.

With her friend, Octavia Hill, Helen co-founded the Women's University Settlement in London, of which she became warden. It helped the poor and needy and is now known as the Blackfriars Settlement. Octavia Hill was a social reformer with many accomplishments, one of them being co-founder of the National Trust (for Places of Historical Trust or Natural Beauty) (NT).



Mary Gladstone, daughter of William Ewart Gladstone

William Lever was married to Elizabeth Hume for almost 40 years. She became Lady Lever when he became a Viscount. The Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight is dedicated to her (<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/lady-lever-art-gallery>). It was opened in 1922 by Princess Beatrice, Queen Victoria's youngest daughter. You don't need to be a mathematician to figure out that this year, 2022, is the 100th anniversary of the museum. I understand big events are planned.



Lady Lever Gallery today, March 2022 – photograph by Terry Small

Arthur Forwood married Lucy Crosfield, whose father's family worked in groceries, sugar refining, and soap and candle production. William Forwood's first wife, Mary Moss, was the daughter of a Liverpool merchant and shipowner, William Moss. They had ten children. When she died, he married Elizabeth Hughes, the daughter of a major-general.

George Holt Jr., born in 1825, was the son of George Holt Sr., a prominent cotton broker in Liverpool. George Jr. married Elizabeth Bright and one of their daughters was Emma. Elizabeth and Emma donated over £10,000 to the University of Liverpool for a building and later donated more than £30,000. They also donated paintings and furniture, as well as a lot of their time. Emma was nicknamed Liverpool University's "Fairy godmother" and she served on the council until 1934 (except for one year). A position that was highly unusual for a woman in Great Britain at that time.

Emma Holt was nicknamed Liverpool University's "Fairy godmother"



Emma Holt – known as University of Liverpool's "Fairy Godmother"

Alfred Holt – also a son of George Holt – married Catherine Long. Their daughter, Jane, married William Herdman, who was the first person appointed to the Derby Chair of Natural History at University College

Liverpool, a precursor to the University of Liverpool. When Alfred's wife died, he married Frances Long, and their son Alfred, born in 1877, became a Reader in Chemistry at the University of Liverpool. Alfred's brother George was owner of Sudley House in Aigburth, which is now part of National Museums Liverpool (<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/sudley-house>).

And the list goes on. Actually, it goes on and on, over decades, generations, and centuries, down to the present day. Similar stories – wealthy imperialist men marrying the daughters of other prominent imperialist men in business, politics, and the military, in medicine, education, and banking. Again, we're just scratching the surface of the complete landscape.

One more thing – throughout the 19th century, Queen Victoria enjoyed spectacular imperial fruits. She was the symbol of everything that imperial men did. As head of state, she benefited directly from imperialism (money, wealth, jewels, entertainment, monuments). She was the symbol of state power – generals and admirals won victories in her name, ships and honours were named after her, territories too, and her name remains on some of Britain's most important institutions – just think of the Victoria and Albert Museum. She was named Empress of India. Shortly after she died, the world's largest diamond was discovered – the Cullinan diamond in 1905 – and presented to her eldest son, King Edward VII in 1907. By the way, this diamond, still in the possession of Queen Elizabeth, was one of the first that MP Bernie Grant campaigned to have returned to South Africa when he established the Reparations UK movement in the 1990s (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernie_Grant).



Bernie Grant – Bernie Grant Archives

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As the 20th century unfolded and legal discrimination against women decreased, some women began holding senior positions – as lecturers or professors in universities and as curators in museums. Several were supporters, advocates, and disseminators of the racist ideologies of the time – including social Darwinism, eugenics, and phrenology. As Christians, many still drew on the Bible for their beliefs in racial hierarchies. This includes Rachel Fleming and Muriel Fletcher, both associated with the University of Liverpool, who were influenced by the work of Mrs. C. B. S. Hodson, the secretary of the British Eugenics Society. Others became members of business and legal councils. These women were enthusiastic allies and partners to their men's exploits, and they aligned themselves with the ideas and ideologies of white supremacy and African inferiority. And that's the truth, Ruth.

By the way, some elite and middle-class white women fought against institutional sexism and their subordination to elite men. They protested, organized campaigns, and were arrested. Many risked their lives, and some lost their lives, especially in the campaign for the right to vote. That is all true. And yet, it's also true that slogans like 'votes for women' really meant 'votes for white women'. Almost none of them were campaigning for votes or any other rights for Black women.

Working class white women benefited from Liverpool imperialism in West Africa, too. In at least two ways. First, they got jobs that were available as a result of West African trade. In Lancashire mills, Manchester factories, for example, and making soap, candles, and other products. And in a wide range of ancillary industries from Wigan and Warrington to Widnes and the Wirral. Yes, yes, I know that these women – and children too – were victims of class discrimination. And they were. But, at the same time, they had stridently opposed abolition of slavery, and they had jobs and work and income from imperial exploitation. Second, they profited ideologically and psychologically from imperialism – happily believing in the superiority of the white race and their position in it. As class analysts typically say, they were tricked into believing that their interests as white people, regardless of class, were

more important than their interests in common with Black people, even though both were the victims of class discrimination. That's an old song, and one which we still hear being sung today.

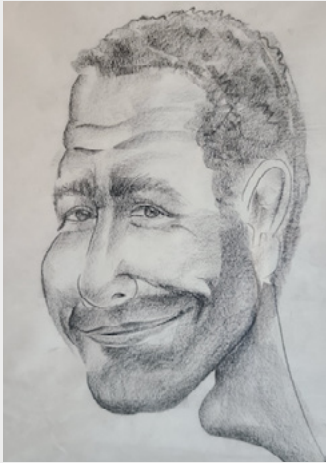


Women in factories

Many questions need to be asked about women of all class positions, and about reparations, reparatory justice, and decolonising knowledge and education. Any new knowledge and education on imperial Liverpool history must systematically analyse gender and the experiences of white women (compared with white men). What wealth, properties, jewels, and other valuables did they leave behind? What was inherited by their children and grandchildren? What mansions, halls, and houses, too? What statues, street names and buildings were named after them? What donations did they make to imperial museums and galleries, universities, and schools? Who among these families are still alive today? And more generally, how do their experiences compare with the subjugation, subordination, and exploitation of African women in West Africa?

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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).