

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

THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL
AND HIGHER EDUCATION



STEPHEN SMALL

In summer 2020 the Liverpool Black History Research Group (LBHRG), made up of voluntary researchers and based at the Kuumba Imani Centre in Liverpool 8, launched a website entitled 'Enslavement Enabling Education'

lbhrg.com/enslavement-enabling-education/.

The website provides detailed information about how the University of Liverpool (UoL) received substantial funds as well as political and social support from some of Liverpool's biggest slave traders. The website documents how almost 70% of shareholders of the Royal Institution, the predecessor to UoL, 'had business interests, or close family connection to the slave economy'. This included families such as the Earles, Gladstones, Heywoods, Tinnes, Sandbachs and Tobins.



LBHRG's work also highlights the role of Liverpool imperialists. This is necessary given that UoL did not officially begin until the 1880s, fifty years after the British legally abolished slavery. And it provides a solid basis for any demands for reparations, reparatory justice, and decolonising knowledge and education from the University of Liverpool. At the time of writing, Spring 2022, LBHRG continues its research, is in conversation with UoL and Liverpool City Council, and has several research projects underway.

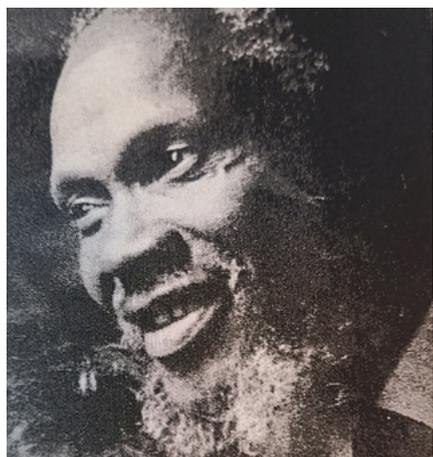
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These findings were not news to members of the LBHRG or to many people in the Black community in Liverpool. We've been protesting for years, decades, and even generations about UoL and other educational institutions. Many Black people in the city long suspected that UoL was founded with money from slavery and was guilty of institutional racism. Many of us also knew about the racist nonsense published by Rachel Fleming and Muriel Fletcher, thanks in large part to writings by Mark Christian <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2008.00336.x>.

And we knew about UoL's support for the despicable Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children. Racism was widespread in Great Britain at that time, and it had a particular manifestation in Liverpool around dating and marriage between white women and Black men, especially African men. Community elders like Mr. Joey Joel Senior, Sandra Antigua, Jimmy Rogers, Angus Chukwuemeka, and Wally Brown had told us about this history. Concrete evidence on these issues from UoL's own researchers – like Tony Lane, Gideon Ben Tovim, Barny Rooney, Dianne Frost, Ray Costello, and Mike Boyle – had also been published. Alongside work done in collaboration with the Black community, like the Liverpool Black Caucus.

All white men in Liverpool, it seems, were against interracial sexual relationships. Working-class white men expressed their opposition in verbal and physical abuse. Elite white men expressed theirs in pseudo-scientific condemnations and hallucinations about what they called the natural order of things. Overall, their views were really about white masculine insecurity and attempts to control white women's and Black men's sexuality. We know that Fleming, Fletcher – and many others at the university too – were influenced by the British Eugenics Society. Including its secretary, Mrs. C B S Hodson, who advocated sterilisation of so-called inferior races, like Africans and Chinese. We had also heard stories of Ramsey Muir's nonsense about an allegedly benign British empire, too. The Gifford Inquiry, published in 1989, with its documentation of the 'uniquely horrific racism' in the city, chastised UoL for its inaction about rejecting this nonsense.

And we knew of the sustained campaigns for justice and fairness, most notably in the African Churches Mission, which was opened in 1931 by Pastor Daniels Ekarte. He fought tooth and nail to help the community



Pastor Daniels Ekarte

and to provide protection and support for children of mixed relationships. But Liverpool and national politicians – and public notables – persecuted him for his efforts. The man died in poverty and was buried in a public grave in Allerton Cemetery in 1964. Which is a crying shame.

In what ways exactly is UoL implicated in Liverpool imperialism, West Africa, and racism? First of all, it received vast sums of money from people directly involved in slavery, and from descendants of Liverpool slavers, too. This includes Liverpool imperialists trading with slaving nations like the United States, Cuba, and Brazil, long after the British abolished slavery. And even greater sums of money from Liverpool imperialists actively engaged in subjugating and exploiting Africans across Africa, especially in West Africa. For example, shipowners and businessmen like Alfred Jones, William Lever, Henry Tate, Alfred Holt, George Holt, William Hartley, and many others.

George Holt Jr. gave tens of thousands of pounds to University College Liverpool (a predecessor of UoL), while his wife and daughter (Elizabeth and Emma) gave tens of thousands of pounds more. Holt and others donated hundreds of pounds for the engineering building. Henry Tate gave tens of thousands of pounds towards the construction of UoL's most prized building, the Victoria Building, and for the purchase of books. Thomas Harrison gave £10,000 for the permanent endowment of a chair of engineering. There were also donations from Lord Derby, E. K. Muspratt, and many others. This money also went towards salaries, equipment, and maintenance.

These men and their families, in turn, got prestige from having buildings, memorials, professorships, and lectures named after them. There is a George Holt Building on campus, home of the department of computer science. The original library in the Victoria Building is named after Henry Tate. Gerald Henry Rendell, the first principal of University College, held the Gladstone Chair of Classics and Ancient History. The Gladstone Chair of Greek was one of the original endowments at the founding of the university in 1881. It continued until 1983, when it was held by Professor Anthony Long in 1973-1983. Then it remained vacant until 2017, when it was revived. In January 2022, the UoL department website listed that professorship as being occupied by Professor Christopher Tuplin. Warrington Yorke studied medicine at UoL and later taught there, including as the 'Alfred Jones Professor of Tropical Medicine' from 1929 through 1943 (when

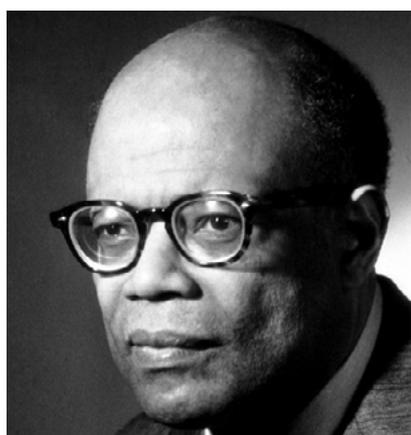
he died). W. A. Herdman held the first Derby Chair of Natural History, while Francis Gotch became the first Holt Professor of Physiology.

Gladstone Hall of Residence for students existed until as recently as 2021, when it was renamed Dorothy Kuya Hall (<https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2021/04/27/winner-of-vote-announced-for-renamed-hall-of-residence/>). It's about time, too. That renaming came after years of protest. At present – Spring 2022 – all buildings, memorials, statues, lecture halls, professorships, and lectures are being documented and reviewed by a UoL committee set up in Summer 2020 (of which I am a member, by the way).

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Forwood was leader of the Conservative Party in the city council, and he presided over an early meeting. He made a fortune from slavery and supported slavery and the U.S. Confederacy. Robert Gladstone, second cousin to William Ewart Gladstone, was involved in early committee discussions to establish University College and became its first treasurer. And Lord Derby became the first Chancellor of the University of Liverpool. (His father was Prime Minister three times, and his grandfather made some of the most significant donations to Liverpool Museum. See Article 6.)



Arthur Lewis – Nobel prize winner

UoL's top personnel also networked with personnel in museums, public exhibitions, menageries, and zoos, many of whom produced and disseminated racist knowledge. Professor Herdman spent a period of time on Liverpool Town Council's museums committee. Henry Oggs Forbes, director of the Liverpool Museum from 1894-1910, became a senior academic at UoL in 1904. Collaborations included working with museum personnel that organized exhibits with animals, including gorillas, in a context in which the gorilla was discussed as a missing link between Europeans and Africans. UoL also used gallery and laboratory space at Liverpool Museum for some of its projects – for example, for the Institute of Commercial Research in the Tropics (in existence from 1905 to 1908). There were also connections with Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM). Richard Caton became Professor of Physiology at UoL. He was Vice-Chairman of LSTM when it was founded in 1899, and later became Lord Mayor of Liverpool, 1907-1908.

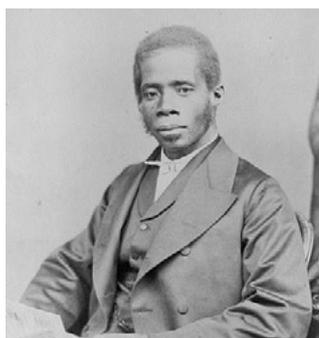
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Third, professors, lecturers, and researchers at the university wrote books and articles professing the magnanimity of British and Liverpool imperialism and showering accolades upon imperialists (and the slavers who ran Liverpool before them). Amongst the most well-known writers was Professor Ramsey Muir. He insisted that the British brought civilization to savage and barbaric races, including in Africa. He argued that Britain's politics and practices were mainly benign, especially in comparison with French and Spanish imperialism. A great example of pointing the finger! The British, he wrote, only used violence when it was deserved. Jolly decent of them, eh?

Others at UoL embraced and advocated social Darwinism and eugenics, and they targeted, in particular, children with white mothers and Black fathers. As with the nonsense published by Rachel Fleming and Muriel Fletcher. Liverpool University Press published many of the books that these people wrote. The campus also hosted seminars, conferences, and no doubt, a multitude of lectures on these issues. Through this, UoL added its stamp of approval to ideologies and belief systems that subjugated and oppressed Africans and

people of African descent – including Liverpool-born Blacks – and that vilified interracial dating and marriage. We are yet to fully identify the extent to which such teaching influenced the attitudes of people in the city, like the police, social workers, and schoolteachers. But I wouldn't be surprised if it was substantial.

Fourth, senior administrators at UoL – and almost certainly professors and staff – directly discriminated against Black applicants to the university. The most well-known case is economist Sir Arthur Lewis, from the West Indies, who earned a PhD from London School of Economics, yet was denied a teaching position at UoL despite being the most qualified candidate. Lewis was later awarded a Nobel Prize in Economics (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1979/lewis/biographical/>). Eric Williams, Trinidadian scholar and later prime minister, wrote his book – *Capitalism and Slavery* – in the 1940s. It documented the many ways in which Great Britain and Liverpool profited from slavery, and it rejected



Edward Wilmot Blyden



Kwame Nkrumah



Una Marson



Amy Ashwood Garvey



WEB Dubois

the argument that slavery ended mainly because of Liverpool (and other) philanthropists. Instead, he highlighted how economics was a major reason, as was resistance to slavery by the enslaved. Professor Sir Hilary Beckles recently reminded us that the book was boycotted by Liverpool and British scholars in a hypocritical and shameless way. No doubt many others who experienced racial discrimination are yet to be revealed.

And the list goes on, once again confirming that we are just scratching the surface. More evidence of UoL's chummy and profitable relationship with Liverpool imperialists will be revealed in months and years to come. I could be wrong about that. But I'm probably right, probably certainly right. Time will tell as I complete more research in the coming year.

As I was writing this article (Spring 2022), UoL announced it was committing £180,000 to an investigation into how it benefited from slavery. Again, it's about time too and the least they can do. Let's hope they do a good job. And by the way – full disclosure – I accepted an invitation from the university to join an Advisory Board for this initiative. The first meeting took place in March.

Professionally, I think this is not the best use of these funds when LBHRG has already demonstrated convincingly that UoL benefited from slavery. Money spent this way won't increase our knowledge of Black life in Liverpool. It won't increase our knowledge of the experiences of Black people who passed through the city for short or long periods during imperialism. Like Edward Wilmot Blyden, WEB Dubois, Marcus Garvey, Pastor Daniels Ekarte, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Amy Ashwood Garvey, and Una Marson. Not to mention Liverpool-born Black people like John Archer. And it won't help Black people in Liverpool today in any significant way.

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I believe it would be far better to devote a significant portion of the funds to the LBHRG so they can complete further research. LBHRG deserves to be supported and funded for the innovative work to date and for projects they have underway. And they are far more independent than UoL is likely to be, especially given how the university dragged its feet to examine

these issues, denied that they were true, and then only admitted it after LBHRG's irrefutable revelations. UoL can be forgiven for this, they are not beyond redemption, and they've already made some baby steps. But they better do a far better job going forward.

And UoL should consult extensively with the local Black community about what it would like to see.

UoL likes to compare its accomplishments with other UK universities, so it should take a lead from Glasgow University, which has committed £20 million to the University of the West Indies. UoL also likes to compare its accomplishments to those of American universities, so it should take a lead from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and from Harvard, which have both committed over \$100 million as reparations for their role in U.S. slavery. And UoL should consult extensively with the local Black community about what it would like to see. Funds should be devoted to initiatives like these, beyond research.

How else can UoL directly address issues of reparations, reparatory justice, and decolonising knowledge and education? We need more information about how Liverpool's top imperialists financed the university. We need to find out more

about the research UoL conducted and the racist assumptions upon which that research was based. We need to know about the memorials, buildings, statues, lecture halls, and professorships named after the university's racists. We need to know about the information being disseminated on the campus today. We need to know what policies and practices are under way to identify and prevent racial discrimination. And we need to know what resources have been invested in better curricula, better role models, a more diversified staff, better opportunities, and better access to resources.

Finally, we also need to know what other universities, colleges, and of course, schools are doing. What of Liverpool John Moores University, Hope University, and Edge Hill College? What of the training programmes for nurses, social workers, maritime trades, and mechanics? Some of these schools have their origins in imperial Liverpool, so they need to be investigated. These are just some of the ways that we can really begin to address reparations, reparatory justice, and decolonising knowledge production and education.

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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).