

Commemorating the abolition of the Slave Trade
Consortium Of Black Groups (COBG) Position Statement & Recommendations

At a public meeting held at the Malcolm X Centre it was decided that the Consortium of Black Groups (COBG) should co-ordinate the BME response to the proposed celebration of the abolition of the slave trade.

The COBG does not support any celebration, actions or symbols that commemorate the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade via the Abolition of Slavery Trade Act, which entered the statute books on the 25th March 1807.

The slave trade was a holocaust committed against Afrikan peoples and we believe that this inhumane and wrongful act is still impacting on Afrikans in the Diaspora and continues to blight the lives of Afrikans on the continent today.

Bristol City Council has a track record of organising and planning events that promotes the wealth and development of the city without consultation and consideration for people of Afrikan descent. The Festivals of the Sea back in 1997 and the naming of 'Merchants Quarter' are examples of the lack of respect and sensitivity towards the Afrikan and Caribbean communities.

There is little doubt that the 2007 'Celebration/Commemoration' will go ahead because of the political backing, however people of Afrikan descent have a right to determine what aspects of this traumatic period in our history should be commemorated and in what way. The fight for freedom and our continued quest for justice in the education system, housing, employment and mental health and penal institutions, demonstrates that our situation has not changed to any great extent.

The Afrikan community views this whole episode, not just as being about history, but also current affairs. We also view it in political, economic and psychological terms. To this end we feel that the descendents and beneficiaries of the oppressor should not be defining the terms and conditions in which people they have and continue to oppress, acknowledge and respond to the nature of their oppression whether historical or present day.

We would not consider it appropriate for example, for Germans to be calling the shots, giving 'funding' or defining the parameters of any event in relation to the Jewish Holocaust, nor would we feel it is appropriate for men to be mobilising and organising and defining the terms of any anniversary celebration of the sex discrimination act 1975. How many of us feel it is appropriate for a woman who has experienced violence and sexual violation by a man to then be told that you must conduct your journey of healing as defined by men?

The community feels that the 2007 'events' is nothing more than a PR exercise where local authorities and the government will again generate wealth and

credibility by exploiting the descendents of enslaved Afrikans 200 years on from the alleged abolition. In the same way that the Sex discrimination act 1975 did not end discrimination against women, the Race relation act 1976 did not end racism and discrimination against Black people. 1807 was the date a law was passed, not a date where we witnessed a change in practice, attitudes, values or the cessation of the generation of wealth from this activity, the wealth which is evident in the city today. The very fact that it is considered something to 'celebrate' commemorate or acknowledge (with or without consultation with Afrikan Caribbean people) demonstrates that the city council totally lacks understanding and sensitivity about the depth of offence that this has caused. We are not asking to sit around the table on this one, we are saying that the effects of the enslavement of our Ancestors is still with us and the passing of a law has no relevance in this respect.

Recommendations

We are therefore urging our people not to be seduced by promises of piecemeal funding, opportunities to raise individual profiles (media/self appointed community leaders) short term publicity, or opportunities to sing & dance in high profile places (including ships) as this will be seen as an endorsement of the city council's plan, which in short, are a psychological audacity.

If the City council chooses to go ahead with its plans for 2007, then so be it. We will not be participating. Our Ancestors have a track record of courage and resistance and so will we!