

# The impact of colonialism on the South\* - seen through the lens of the cotton industry

We know that the development of the cotton industry in Lancashire in the 18th and 19th centuries became the centrepiece of Britain's Industrial Revolution. This resource examines the impact of this major development on the peoples and countries that were colonised in the process, and which were forced to supply the cotton.

## A view of history

History is often presented as a neat, linear progression of events relating one objective truth. Southern Voices takes a different approach. We see history as organic, interactive, involving huge movements of people, forced or voluntary, with profound and permanent effects on people, demography and society. It is about relationship and the quality of the relationship. This means that there are different perspectives. It is these little heard narratives in which we are interested here.

For instance it is less well known that, prior to British expansion in those parts of the world that became known as the British Empire, India was the centre of the world cotton industry and had, for instance, a flourishing trade with China. Again history can be one-dimensional or distorted. 'Abolition' of the slave trade is presented almost entirely in terms of a parliamentary Act rather than a movement supported and driven by a popular aversion to the pernicious trade. In other words it was a movement driven by resistance in the plantations and islands and by solidarity in England.

The effect of this expansion did not end when the British Empire dissolved. Many of the structures of power and influence and patterns of thinking and attitude continue to shape the present. For example, it can and has been argued that the South's indebtedness and the North's control of trade rules stem from this created impoverishment of colonial countries. Also attitudes of Western superiority in relation to 'development' are still prevalent.

## Southern Voices (Manchester)

Southern Voices is a community group which aims to promote Southern perspectives on development issues. This resource is produced as part of a Southern Voices project, 'Textile Heritage: Weaving Stories'.

**The resource** is designed to complement the school curriculum, and to support pupil class visits to the project's exhibition at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester (MOSI). Workshops will be led by people from West Africa, the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent providing an opportunity to explore with them their perspectives on the history of the cotton industry.

Suitable for Key Stage 2 and 3 History and Citizenship.

Includes photocopiable classroom materials.



Mohandas Gandhi visits Darwen, Lancashire

\* In this teaching resource we use 'South' as a preferred term to refer to those countries categorised as 'Third World' or 'developing countries'.

***'Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.'***

A saying of the Yoruba people, one of the largest West African ethnic groups

### **India\* was the centre of the world's cotton industry before British colonisation.**

Indian textile manufacture can be dated back to at least 2,300 BC. From here it spread west to Egypt and Turkey. The Romans and Greeks knew cotton as a luxury import from India via camel caravans. Vasco de Gama opened up the sea route to India in 1497-98 allowing heavier loads to be transported.

In the 17th century, with India's cotton industry at its height, large quantities of cloth were exported to China, south-east Asia and to Europe.

#### **Cotton - a global crop**

Textile manufacture using cotton originates from at least two different regions of the world – the Indus Valley in what is now Pakistan, and the Pacific coast of Chile and Peru. It is a truly global crop, being grown now in 80 countries. And of course it clothes the world.

The process of British colonisation had started with the arrival of the East India Company. They were merchants who wanted India's fine silks, cotton cloth and spices. By 1664, the East India Company was importing a quarter of a million pieces of calico and chintz into England alone.

**India's cotton industry was destroyed by Britain to help the Industrial Revolution take off.** The Lancashire textile mills were the engine of the British Industrial Revolution. Richard Arkwright created the first factory system using water powered spinning and weaving technology. By the 1790s James Watt's invention of steam power was being successfully applied to textile production. Manchester got the nickname 'cottonopolis', due to its

eventual role at the heart of the global cotton trade. But to achieve this, increasing quantities of raw cotton were required as well as a market to sell the cotton cloth produced.

#### **Colonialism and famine**

Colonialism in India involved plunder and the forcible growing of raw materials for export at the expense of producing food. As a result there were recurring famines throughout the British occupation. Even a few years before independence, between 3-5 million people died in the Bengal Famine from 1943-46.

When Britain extended its imperial power through the East India Company in the 1750s, it plundered Bengal\* and imposed rents and taxes on the people. In 1770, 10 million people died in a famine in Bengal and Bihar. From being an exporter of textiles, India was reduced to a supplier of raw cotton for Lancashire's factories. The methods Britain used to destroy India's cotton industry were brutal. Colonial governors ordered the thumbs and index fingers of India's best spinners and weavers be chopped off. Weavers, craftsmen and skilled tradesmen were forced out of the towns and back to the land. Many became destitute. High tariff barriers were imposed on Indian cotton goods to protect the Lancashire textile industry. The tax system that Britain introduced encouraged cotton growing over that of food, which sometimes contributed to famine. India was thus de-industrialised and forced to grow cotton for British mills and to buy cotton clothing from Britain.

### **Enslaved Africans were forced to work on cotton plantations in the Caribbean and the American 'South' to provide Britain's industry with cheap raw cotton.**

The histories of cotton and slavery are closely intertwined. Between 1500 and 1800, 4 million people from West Africa were enslaved and taken to the Caribbean and 427,000 to North America. There were prosperous and sophisticated West African kingdoms during this period including Songhay, Asante (Ashanti) and Benin. But much of the region was devastated by the trauma of loss and violence. In the Caribbean, slaves were forced mainly to work in sugar plantations and later in cotton. A triangular trade took enslaved people west, sugar and cotton back to Europe, and manufactured goods south to Africa.

Initially, the West Indies provided the bulk of raw cotton for Britain's rapidly growing new textile industry. However, when emancipation came to the Caribbean in 1838, cotton production there collapsed. Freed people moved away from the cotton plantations and into subsistence farming. By the 1840s, India alone was not capable of supplying the vast quantities of raw cotton needed by Britain's factories. British traders bought increasingly the superior American species (longer, stronger fibres) from plantations in the United States. This cotton was also much cheaper as it was produced by slaves.

In the United States, the 'Indian Removal' between the early 1800s and 1844 had cleared the land for white occupancy between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. These land grabs, together with Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793, laid the basis for the cotton kingdom, which was the slave plantation. By 1860, a million tons of cotton were produced and 4 million slaves worked in the plantations. Before Whitney's invention, a slave could pull free one pound of cotton lint in a day by hand; the gin enabled her to separate out

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\* 'India' before colonisation and Partition, included what are now the countries of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

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\* Bengal was split twice, once by the colonialists to break its power, and again during Partition between India and what is now Bangladesh.

50 lbs of raw fibre. Britain got nearly 80% of its cotton from here by 1860.

**Resistance movements against slavery and against British colonialism were eventually successful.**

In terms of output and profits, the cotton industry in Lancashire was incredibly successful. But it was based on the exploitation, impoverishment and cruelty of people, both here and in other countries, on a massive scale. We know that the protests and strikes of the mill workers, the efforts of liberal reformers and later trade unions, eventually transformed the appalling conditions in Manchester's cotton mills. But in spite of the Act of Abolition of the slave trade being passed in Britain in 1807, slavery continued to flourish in the Caribbean and American South and

### **Mohandas Gandhi**

For India to rid herself of British rule, *'it is the patriotic duty of every Indian to spin his own cotton and weave his own cloth'*.

Mohandas Gandhi was a pioneer of Satyagraha – resistance through mass civil disobedience based on ahimsa (non-violence). His spiritual methods underpinned the freedom struggle. He challenged the British stranglehold on cotton goods by spinning his own cotton and urging Indians to boycott imported cotton. In 1942, he and Nehru launched the 'Quit India' campaign. India became independent in 1947.

Gandhi was in Britain in 1931 to argue with the government for India's independence. He visited Darwen, Lancashire, to see for himself the affects that India's boycott was having on the workers there.

to provide cheap cotton for Lancashire's mills. Slave revolts, the abolitionists and the American Civil War eventually led to the end of slavery.

Resistance to enslavement was present from the beginning of the trade. For instance, there were nearly 500

rebellions on board Atlantic slave ships. Slaves led by Toussaint L'Ouverture won independence in 1804 in Haiti, and proclaimed the first black republic. This inspired a wave of uprisings across the Caribbean, including the fighting Maroons of Jamaica, a community of escaped slaves, who established their own society based on African traditions, in the Jamaican mountains. It eventually led to emancipation of  $\frac{3}{4}$  million slaves in the British West Indies in 1838. Freed people turned away from work on the cotton plantations. The American Civil War (1861-65) resulted in the liberation of 4 million slaves. After emancipation however, cotton remained a key crop in the economy.

Indians were opposed to British rule, which exploited India's natural resources and forced the country to be a market for British manufactured cloth. Farmers were forced to grow export cash-crops, such as cotton, indigo and tea. The result was food shortages, famines and riots. The Raj encouraged political activity as long as it was based on religion; a divided population was easier to rule. These religious divisions still play a major part in the history of the sub-continent. The first war of independence was fought in 1857 but it was a long struggle led by Gandhi that finally led to freedom in 1947.

The American Civil War provoked a raw material crisis in Lancashire as cotton exports from the American South came to a halt. Indian and Egyptian cotton production was increased under British colonists to make up for this. But after that war ended in 1865, Egyptian cotton was abandoned. This contributed to the country being bankrupted and eventually annexed by Britain in 1882. West Africa too became a new source of supply during the Civil War. Forced labour and taxation in the African colonies encouraged cotton cultivation to the neglect of food crops. An indigenous textile industry survived however, for instance that in Ghana's Ashanti country.

**This history contributes to current injustices in the cotton industry and trade against the South.**

The unequal relationships developed under colonialism and the Industrial Revolution still resonate today. Industrial production has moved over the years to the lower wage areas of India, Bangladesh, China and Latin America. But economic power has remained with the industrial North with big retail chains and brands dictating prices and terms. Nike, Marks and Spencer, Asda, Gap etc. use brand names to contract textile companies in the South, demanding textile cotton production of high quality and low cost. But there are issues about working conditions in the cotton fields and workshops.

In Egypt, up to a million children have to help each year with the cotton harvest (*Observer*, 8 June 2008). They miss schooling and are often in the charge of gang-masters. The cotton itself is drenched in pesticides. According to the World Health Organisation, 20,000 deaths occur each year from pesticide poisoning in the South, many of these from cotton farming. Egyptian cotton is used to make top quality sheets, towels and clothing sold in Marks and Spencer, John Lewis, Ikea etc.

Workers producing clothes in Bangladesh for some of the UK's biggest retailers are being forced to work up to 80 hours a week for as little as 7p an hour, according to a War on Want report (*Guardian*, 5 December 2008). All the UK retailers above say they are committed to fair conditions for the people who supply them.

After independence, much of West Africa was left with a dependence on cotton for export. The US government heavily subsidises their own cotton producers, making it difficult for Indian and African producers to compete. The latter have been pressing for fairer trade rules to reduce the US subsidies and the dumping of cheap US cotton in the South.



# Fact file

<b>Dates</b> 1660 - 1760	<b>India</b> Centre of the world cotton industry. Exports of chintz and calico to England. 1757 Battle of Plassey, British East India Company (BEIC) plunders Bengal.	<b>West Africa</b> Guns, cloth (from India), spirits exchanged by English seamen for West African people taken as slaves to Caribbean and North America.	<b>Caribbean</b> Africans forced to work as slaves on sugar plantations in British colonies. Sugar exported to England.	<b>USA</b> Africans brought to work as slaves in tobacco plantations. 1776 the USA becomes independent from Britain.	<b>Britain</b> Spinning and weaving at home on spinning wheels and handlooms. Imports of cloth from India.
1760 - 1820	BEIC takes control of India; widespread resistance. Major exporter of high quality cotton goods until 1800. Destruction of cotton industry due to British taxation and cruelty.	West Africans continue to be enslaved. This decreases from 1807 when Britain abolishes the slave trade.	Slave plantations producing sugar and cotton for export to England. Main supplier of raw cotton for a time. Slave rebellions.	From 1800 beginning of native American 'Indian Removal' to develop cotton plantations worked by slaves in the Southern states.	Development of the factory system - inventions and steam power. Cotton industry developing - raw cotton mainly from Caribbean and India.
1820 - 1860	Forced to grow raw cotton and indigo for export to England. War of Independence in 1857. Increase in famines. Cotton cloth imported from Britain.	Anglo-Ashanti wars for control of coastal trade. Ashanti was a powerful state.	Slave plantations producing cotton for export to England. Slave rebellions lead to emancipation in 1834. Indentured Indians brought to work in plantations.	Native American 'Indian Removal'. Expansion of plantations in the Southern States using slave labour. Cotton industry develops in New England.	Britain imposes taxes on Indian cloth; exports cloth to India. Cotton industry booming; exports to colonies. USA becomes main supplier.

## Egypt

During the American Civil War on 1861-65, the supply of raw cotton to Lancashire mills was cut off. To make up for this, Egypt grew more cotton to export to Britain. However, when the war was over, Britain returned to importing cheaper American cotton. This got Egypt into more debt. Britain and France forced her to declare bankruptcy in 1876. In 1882, Egypt and the Suez Canal came under the British sphere of influence.



Leonard Parkinson, a fighting Maroon

What do these words mean?  
What do they have in common?

**Dungaree**

**Gingham**

**Khaki**

**Madras**

**Pyjamas**

**Sash**

**Seersucker**

**Shawl**

# IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

## Activities

### 1 PP1 reading comprehension

Learning Objectives (LOs) 1-5

To introduce the topic's key ideas, use PP1 to do a reading comprehension. Due to the complexity of the material read and discuss the cartoon first. Possibly do a dictionary exercise as well.

### 2 PP2 photograph activity

LOs 1,2 and 4

In pairs or small groups pupils form questions about the photo using question words: Who? When? What? Where? Why? How? The photo could be stuck in the middle of a sheet of A3 and questions could be written around the edge. Pupils could give each photo a caption.

Then give the pupils some information about the photo and discuss as a class:

Caption: Women processing raw cotton for export (1926). What is happening? Who are the people? Who is in charge? Where was the picture taken? What was the connection between India and Britain?

Caption: Gandhi's visit to Darwen in Lancashire 1931. Who was Gandhi? Why did he visit in 1931? What was the connection between India and Lancashire?

### 3 PP3 speech bubbles

LOs 3 and 4

Use the speech bubbles as a basis for role plays or hotseating. Get one pupil to take on one of the characters and the other pupils to interview them as if on the news, or ask them questions about how they feel and what they want to do about their situation.

Research: pick one issue/aspect and write a news report on it. Research Harriet Tubman, the Maroons of Jamaica, Gandhi, working conditions of cotton pickers and factory workers

today and the responses of British retail stores. Link with the issue of Fair Trade.

### 4 PP4 follow-on loop

(LOs 1-5).

Use the follow-on loop question cards to help consolidate and reinforce learning. Each card has the answer to another card's question, as well as a question. The cards can be used as follows:

photocopy and cut out the cards and distribute them randomly, one to each pair of pupils. Ask the pupils with the START CARD to read out their question. Pupils have to listen carefully for the question that they have the answer to on their card;

pairs or small groups of pupils could be given a full set of the cards and asked to lay them out in the correct order. The questions on the cards could also be used as a quiz.

For Years 5 and 6, do a dictionary activity first.

### 5 Extension activities

**a** Use the image of Leonard Parkinson, an escaped slave who became one of the fighting Maroons of the 18th century, to discuss the influence of pictures. Those of kneeling slaves used by abolitionists are familiar. Images of resistance by plantation slaves are equally important but less common. They are part of the story which can easily be forgotten.

**b** Some people describe independence as being 'granted'. In reality it was a hard fought struggle, eventually resulting in legal freedom. Indians refer to the First War of Independence in 1857, but to the British, it was known as the Indian Mutiny. Discuss the different use of language to describe these events depending on whose perspective:

the Indian Mutiny (British perspective) or the First War of Independence (Indian perspective);

granting independence (British) or gaining independence through resistance (African and Asian).

**c** The list of words on page 4 originates in India and all relate to textiles.

**d** Have a debate on modern day child labour in cotton growing and textile production.

**e** Find photos or pictures that tell the story about cotton and clothing.

## Curriculum links

### Primary

History: Victorian Britain and the wider world context.

Citizenship: to think about the lives of people in other places and times.

### Secondary

History: development of trade, colonisation, industrialisation and technology; the British Empire and its impact on different people; its legacy in the contemporary world.

Citizenship: take into account historical dimensions of different political problems and issues.

## Learning objectives

To understand that history can be represented and interpreted in different ways. To become more aware of the views and experiences of those who were colonised.

1 India was the centre of the world's cotton industry before Britain produced clothes in factories.

2 British colonialism in India and the Industrial Revolution put an end to India's cotton industry. Britain became richer, India poorer.

3 Enslaved Africans were forced to work on plantations in the Caribbean and the American 'South' to provide Britain's industry with cheap raw cotton.

4 People fought back against colonialism in India, slavery in West Africa the Caribbean and North America, and the terrible working conditions in Lancashire's mills.

5 Examine how this history still affects the cotton and the clothing industry.

## Useful resources

*The Integration of the Asian Cotton Textile Industry: Trade, Empire and British Exports of Raw Cotton from India to China during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries.* HV Bowen.

*Discovery of India.* J Nehru, OUP, India 1989

*The Blood That Never Dried: A people's history of the British Empire.*

John Newsinger, Bookmarks 2006

*Cotton: the biography of a Revolutionary Fiber.* Stephen Yafa, Penguin Books

*Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the Third World.*

Mike Davis, Verso 2001

*Cotton: the peril and the promise.*

New Internationalist, April 2007

*India fights colonialism.* Sarbjit Johal, Londec

*Colonialism, slavery and the Industrial Revolution: a case study, The Empire in South Yorkshire 1700-1860.* Development Education Centre, South Yorkshire

*Roots of Racism. Patterns of Racism.*

Institute of Race Relations

*Bangladesh: The strength to succeed.*

Jim Monan, Oxfam 1995

*The abominable traffic: Cumbria's connection to the history and legacy of the slave trade.* Arts Council, England, 2008.

*Slavery: an introduction to the African Holocaust.* Black History Resource Working Group, Liverpool

*Southern Perspectives on Development.*

A series of five photocopiable handbooks for KS 3. Development Education Project (DEP), Manchester

## Useful websites

[www.understandingslavery.com](http://www.understandingslavery.com)

[www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence](http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence)

[www.mkgandhi.org/bahurupi](http://www.mkgandhi.org/bahurupi)

[www.ligali.org.uk](http://www.ligali.org.uk)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/i/hi/world/americas/2166977.stm>

[www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

## Resource contacts

Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Castlefield, Manchester M3 4PF

0161 833 0027 [www.mosi.org.uk](http://www.mosi.org.uk)

Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, 01625 445896, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-quarrybankmillandstyleestate](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-quarrybankmillandstyleestate)

Liverpool: International Slavery Museum, 0151 478 4499, [www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/)

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust, 0161 275 2920 [www.racearchive.org.uk](http://www.racearchive.org.uk)

Development Education Project, 799 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M20 2RR, 0161 920 8020, [www.dep.org.uk](http://www.dep.org.uk)

AWAD International Network, 0161 484 5627, [www.awad.org.uk](http://www.awad.org.uk)

Broad African Representative Council, 34 Anson Road, Rusholme, Manchester M14 5BQ, 0161 257 3050

The Manchester Jamaica Society, c/o West Indian Centre, Carmoor Road, Longsight, Manchester M13 0NG, [www.jamaicasocietymanchester.org.uk/](http://www.jamaicasocietymanchester.org.uk/)

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*Women processing cotton*, British Library Board. All Rights Reserved 703(22)

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