

The Scenes

Blood Sugar as a script for the community production at Queens House, Greenwich of the National Maritime Museum is best described as historical documentary theatre. All the scenes were based on historical sources. Where possible first person narratives were used either as speeches themselves, like Mary Prince's or as inserts into speeches like Bligh's. Equiano's and Harriet Jacobs' narratives were turned into two handed dramas. The Quaker women's abolition movement discussion is taken from an abolitionist pamphlet. Sometimes history is dramatized as conversation between friends as in the scene between Equiano and Sharp on the Sierra Leone Experiment. Always the attempt is to be true to the latest historical assessments whilst bringing them alive to modern audiences.

Here are some extracts from the script:

EXTRACT 1: HENRY VIII, HAWKINS, DRAKE AND ELIZABETH I

BENBOW

King Henry 8th I think it was, in his famous Maxim...

SAILOR

That'd be Maxim as in guiding principle would it Admiral Benbow? The cook is learning me me letters.

BENBOW

Reading gives curs like you ideas above their station! In his famous Maxim said something like who rules the waves rules trade and who rules trade rules the world . Then he opened Deptford Dockyard to see it done.

The sound of waves. A ghost ship on a timeless ocean. A baby cries.

SANCHO (cradling a new born baby)

Two hundred years later, one of the many women incarcerated below decks on slave ships over the centuries, as many had before her, gave birth to a child.

The mother died. He never knew his father.

...

A sixteenth century sea captain John Hawkins.

HAWKINS

[I'm his father. Metaphorically speaking.] John Hawkins the English Father of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Lived whilst in port at the Treasurer's House in Deptford Dockyard. My first slaving trip in 1562 took Gold from Lower Guinea and 300 slaves from Upper Guinea. Before your time young stowaway.

[A woman takes over the child.] Elizabeth 1st appears.

ELIZABETH 1st

Captain Hawkins next voyage was supported by her majesty Queen Elizabeth 1st.

DIRECTOR

First Hawkins then Queen Elizabeth the very important persons doing very important things theory of history. [What about the child?] We'll have Francis Drake next.

HAWKINS

On my next voyage I was accompanied by Francis Drake

DIRECTOR

I'm saying nothing but he'll never defeat the Armada without a storm in the Channel.

HAWKINS

Who was just learning the slaving trade. Stick to your own century mate... As I noted in my diary, 'The men of the fleet were kept busy going ashore every day to capture the negroes and spoiling their towns and many were taken...By the 21st December, the raiding parties had taken all the negroes they could find and had also carried on board as much fruit...

ELIZABETH 1st

Not without loss of life amongst his raiding parties.

SAILOR

There was loss of life amongst his raiding parties and we returned back, somewhat discomfited, though the Captain looked very cheerful outwardly as though he did little weigh the death of his men, nor yet the great hurt of the rest. On his third trip 1567 Sir John, accompanied by Francis Drake, noted in his diary...

HAWKINS

Diary!

The sailor looks vacant

HAWKINS

Look sharp man this is supposed to be primary source material...

The sailor hands him his diary.

SAILOR

Your diary Sir John

HAWKINS

"Now had we obtained between four and five hundred Negroes, wherewith we thought it somewhat reasonable to seek the coast of the West Indies; and there for our Negroes, and other our merchandise, we hoped to obtain



In which Elizabeth I and Capt. Hawkins establish the British Slave Trade

whereof to diligence, furnished our watering, took fuel and departed the coast of Guinea the third of February.”

QUEEN ELIZABETH 1st

Arise Sir John.

(The Queen knights the father of the English Slave Trade)

SAILOR

Queen Elizabeth 1st knighted the Captain.

HAWKINS

Sir John Hawkins, Father of the English Slave Trade. [I think that makes me the boy's spiritual father.]

EXTRACT 2

AFRICA BEFORE ITS BUSINESS WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

PRINCE

[He never knew his name.] In Africa your name is your history. An old African proverb states “until lions have their own historians, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” East Africans were producing steel in carbon furnaces many centuries before Europe. In the West of Africa the kingdom of Ghana generated great

wealth from its trade in gold, salt and copper. In 1300 Ibn Battuta the Moroccan medieval traveler described Malians as ‘seldom unjust and they have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. Their Sultan shows no mercy to anyone who is found guilty of the least act of it. Neither traveler nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence. They do not confiscate the property of any white man who dies in their country, even if it can be uncounted wealth. On the contrary they give it into the charge of some trustworthy person among the whites until the rightful heir takes possession of it.’ The sixteenth century Portuguese trader Duarte Barbosa described the East African city of Kilwa as having ‘many fair houses of stone and mortar, well arranged streets. Around it were streams and orchards with many channels of sweet water’. [Africa is both his mother and father]

. . .

PRINCE

Something happened after the Slave Trade. It cut savagely across many strands of commerce which centuries had woven in Africa between myriad ports and peoples and wrecked the whole fabric. Leaving behind little but ruin and disruption. Don't take my word for this if you don't want to. Walter Rodney the Guyanese academic and Basil Davidson would say the same. In fact they have.

EXTRACT 3:

ESTABLISHING COLONIES AND SUGAR PLANTATIONS

DIRECTOR

The next scene takes place beneath a painting of The Cathedral of Havana Cuba which records the British capture of the Spanish City of Havana in 1762. Imperial rivalries with the Spanish were the spur of Britain's colonial acquisitions...



An African Prince describes Africa before the Slave Trade

BENBOW

Vice Admiral John Benbow naval commander. Property owner Hughes Fields Deptford. Lived for a time at John Evelyn's manor house. Sayes Court. Lost a leg at Port Royal in the battle for Jamaica. I told them I'd rather lose the other than any man not do his duty. Didn't work. Deserted the flag when their country most needed them. I died from my wounds. "One of the most painful and disgraceful episodes in the history of the British Navy". I came out of it alright. There's a monument in Jamaica. "Here lyeth the body of...a true pattern of English courage who lost his life in defense of his Queen and country..."



Slaves on the Plantation cutting sugar

Got another one in St Nicholas's Church Deptford. Cromwell called it his western design. General Monk advised on it. The fleet was under General Penn. Ships stocked up with goods from the Red House Stores where the Pepys Estate, named for some reason after the secretary to the Admiralty, now stands. "The design in general is to gain an interest in that part of the West Indies in the possession of the Spaniard". Jamaica became a sugar producing colony in 1664. Sugar needed slaves by the field full. Evelyn took the oath to the newly constituted Council for Foreign Plantations. Advising the new King Charles 2nd. Wouldn't have been

any if it hadn't been for the Navy. Whatever government was in Whitehall. Monk served both the Commonwealth and the King. They occupied San Jago de la Vega or Kings Town as we now know it in 1666. He had shares in the Bahamas. His son became Governor General of Jamaica. Died there in 1688. 13 years before I did. Still trying to take the island....[Make a good little marlinspike of you won't we lad? A few years a 'fore the mast'll be the making of him.]

EXTRACT 4: BLIGH AND BREADFRUIT

SLAVE

Slavery was linked to the rise of plantation slavery in the West Indies and the need for cheap labour. Only after trying white labourers, did they settle on Africans. Indians or Chinese might have been used...

SLAVE

But they were too far away...

They arrive at a gallery with paintings of Tahiti on the walls...

DIRECTOR

But other items were close at hand. Local pottery historians have discovered remains of a pottery on Deptford Creek. Pots would have been used to ferry perishables, plants and foodstuffs on voyages.

BLIGH

William Bligh. Mutiny on the Bounty, you might as well say it. Go on. Its written all over your faces. Rigid disciplinarian, yes, yes, drove good men to mutiny. Yes, Yes. Rationing water in the doldrums. Applying the cat for stealing a drink. Sticking blindly to the course when any sympathetic Captain would have made for port. I've heard it all before. I'm not deaf to the whispers of history. My defense, not that any of you will listen, I know, I'm guilty as charged in the court of public

opinion, is this!

He produces a breadfruit.



William Bligh with breadfruit

it's called a breadfruit. An unprepossessing vegetable. Much like myself but this humble plant I contend shall be my salvation before the damning judgement of a world that has, in my opinion, gone soft. May I submit my diary entry 16th August 1787. "The King having been graciously pleased to comply with a request from the planters interested in his Majesty's West India possessions, that the bread fruit tree might be introduced into those islands, a vessel proper for the undertaking, was brought, and taken into dock at Deptford, to be provided with the necessary fixtures and preparations for executing the object of the voyage...The ship was named the Bounty: I was appointed to command her on the 16th August 1787" Well the world knows what happened to that purpose on that voyage but I was exonerated and in 1791 I set out again for the South Seas where this honest fruit grows and in March 1793 I arrived at Port Royal Jamaica and landed 347 breadfruit trees, in the planting season, before they rotted. The breadfruit prospered and became an essential of the staple diet of the enslaved Africans. Planters were keen that feeding slaves be done as cheaply as possible

understandably. Slaves were keen to grow their own food. Though not as popular as plantain or yam the breadfruit was considered a vital part of the plantation economy. [He'd live frugally but well with me but don't let him live with me. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy and I have enough of those. Fend for yourself young orphan. Better off alone than in service to Bligh.]

He cuts into and eats the fruit.

Perfectly digestible. Nutritious. And once you get used to it quite eatable...Once you get used to it...quite eatable, yes, yes mmm yes...

DIRECTOR

At last, bread fruit from the south seas, tea from India and China, slaves from Africa, sugar from the West Indies to make the tea palatable, Manufactured goods and guns to Africa, Rum from the West Indies to Africa to make them forget. Profits and markets priming the pumps and the making of the modern world is turned on a lathe of industry. This trade wasn't just a triangle it was the whole global orchestra.

SLAVE

It is as impossible for a man to make sugar without the assistance of negroes as to make bricks without straw.

BLIGH

Nevis Planter John Pinney.

EXTRACT 5: TRIANGULAR TRADE

A whistle is blown by the overseer. The slaves sit to drink.

WATER SLAVE (giving out water)

A slave was as much part of the cargo as the Sugar or the Rum that they gave their lives for. The sugar was unloaded at Deptford docks for the coffee and tea drinking that had become so popular with the chattering classes.

WATER SLAVE

Barrels of Rum sailed on to Africa, where with rifles and ammunition, cloths and jewellery it was used to barter for new slaves.

WATER SLAVE

British imports from Jamaica alone were worth five times more than those from the American Colonies. Imports from Grenada were worth eight times more than those from Canada.

WATER SLAVE

Britain was importing 100,000 Hogs Heads of sugar a year.

NARRATOR

Priming the pumps of an Empire!



Captain John Newton, Slaver, Abolitionist and composer of Amazing Grace

EXTRACT 6: MIDDLE PASSAGE

NARRATOR

The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now the whole ship's cargo were confined together it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocate us.



Ignatius Sancho, ex slave and author who was one of the first to condemn the Slave Trade

NARRATOR

This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers.

OLOUDAH

I lived it and then I wrote it. The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano or a name I was given by my first master, a ship's captain Gustavus Vassa the African.

NARRATOR

“The place allotted on board for the sick negroes is under the half deck, where they lie on bare planks. By this means, those who are emaciated, frequently have their skin, and even their flesh, entirely rubbed off, by the motion of the ship, from the prominent parts of the shoulders, elbows and hips, so as to render the bones in those parts quite bare...The utmost skill of the surgeon is here ineffectual...The surgeon, upon going between decks in the morning to examine the situation of the slaves frequently finds several dead; and among the men, sometimes a dead and living negroe fastened by their irons together”

NARRATOR Alexander Falconridge ships doctor.

**EXTRACT 7:
EXPERIENCE OF ENSLAVED AFRICANS ON PLANTATIONS**

The audience is ushered into the gallery. The actors are arranged as in a painting.

A painter is at work at her easel. The scene she is painting is that of a gang of slaves in the West Indies at work in the sugar plantation. It is harvest. In the foreground an overseer looks out. The slaves snatch looks over their shoulders while working.

...

SLAVE

At four o'clock in the morning the plantation bell rings to call the slaves into the fields...About nine o'clock they have half an hour for breakfast which they take into the fields. Again they fall to work...until eleven o'clock or noon; the bell rings and the slaves are dispersed... to pick up natural grass and weeds for the horses and cattle and to prepare and eat their own lunch...At one, or in some plantations at two, the bell summons them to deliver in their grass and assemble for fieldwork...About half an hour before sunset they are again required to collect grass-about seven o'clock in the evening or later

according to season-and to deliver grass as before, then dismissed to return to their huts, picking up brushwood or dry cow dung to prepare supper and tomorrows breakfast. They go to sleep at about midnight.

NARRATOR

The Reverend James Ramsay recorded the plight of the enslaved Africans. The Planters were not best pleased.

RAMSAY

Accused of immorality and sedition I was forced to abandon the West Indies. Planters preferred their own version of the position of their enslaved Africans.

...

SLAVE

During the five month harvesting and processing season they slash at the base of the stalks with a heavy machete while clearing aside the cut canes with the other hand. You carried huge bundles of cane to the mill. You then fed through each bundle twice. Powerful vertical rollers squeezed out the juice. The juice flowed into large copper vats in the boiling house where it was simmered strained filtered and allowed to crystallize into sugar. During the harvest season mills ran all night. Slaves then had to work four to six hours on alternate nights in addition to their work in the fields.

...



Experiences of African Slaves

SLAVE

An Antigua Planter said his policy regarding slaves was to treat them “with little relaxation, hard fare, and hard usage, to wear them out before they become useless; and then to buy new ones, to fill up their places.”

SLAVE

When slavery ended in the West Indies of the two million enslaved Africans that had been imported only six hundred and seventy thousand survived. Clerks recorded slave deaths on the same pages as those of cattle, hogs and horses. Causes of death included...Ulcers...Flux...Shot by...Accident...Fever...Plague...Debilitated...Convulsed...Lepro sy...Suddenly

. . .

The Planter returns.

PLANTER

And how is my ‘Landscape with Negroes’ progressing. No shadows I trust?

The slaves sing another song ‘Steal Away’.

PAINTER

They are still singing.

RAMSAY

The salvation they sing about is not only of a heavenly kind. They dream of escape and freedom from slavery.

PLANTER

There he goes again. Seditioener!

RAMSAY

They made my position untenable.

PLANTER

He was forced to return to England.

RAMSAY

Where I was able thanks to my first hand knowledge to assist the Abolition Campaign in their researches and arguments. I shall see you on the third leg of the triangle. (He exits)

The song wells up and fades.

EXTRACT 8: EQUIANO

NARRATOR

Equianno Olloudah remembered later the first time he heard he was to be taken to the West Indies.

EQUIANNO

I was about to be set free in Deptford. I heard the ship weigh anchor just as the tide turned. Just as we got a little above Gravesend, we came alongside of a ship which was going away the next tide for the West Indies; her name was the Charming Sally, Captain James Doran; and my master went on board and agreed with him for me; and in a little time I was sent for into the cabin.

DORAN

Do you know me?

EQUIANO

I do not.

DORAN

Then you are now my slave.

EQUIANO

My master cannot sell me to you nor to anyone else.

DORAN

Why, did not your master buy you?

EQUIANO

He did but I have served him for many years and he has taken all my wages and prize money I was paid when I

fought for the British during the war. I only got sixpence during the war, besides I have been baptized and by the laws of the land no man has a right to sell you if you’ve been baptized. And I have heard a lawyer and other gentlemen tell my master so several times.

DORAN

The people who told you this rubbish were no friends of yours.

EQUIANO

Isn’t it extraordinary that you know the law better than a lawyer?

DORAN

You talk too much English and if you do not behave yourself and be quiet I have methods on board to make you. You have already been on one slave ship I believe. I have made you shudder I see.

EQUIANO

Since I cannot get my rights among men here I hope sincerely I get them when I get to heaven.

DORAN

Give me your coat you won’t need it where you are going. If your prize money had been £10,000 your master would have a right to it all and would have taken it anyway.

EQUIANO

My master concluded his business with the captain, came out of the cabin, and he and his people got into the boat and put off; I followed them with aching eyes as long as I could, and when they were out of sight I threw myself on the deck, with a heart ready to burst with sorrow and anguish...

EXTRACT 9: THE ZONG SCANDAL

IGNATIUS SANCHO (as Equiano enters reading a Newspaper)

Equiano read an anonymous letter in the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser...

PRESENTER

This was the first newspaper age!

EQUIANO

The insurers of the Zong contested the necessity of dictating the drowning of the blacks...

SANCHO

The details reported were enough the writer noted to...

EQUIANO

Enough to make every one present shudder...

SANCHO

The jury returned a verdict for the owners without leaving the chamber.

EQUIANO

Equiano took the story to Granville Sharp!

SHARP (entering)



Granville Sharp and Olandah Equiano discuss the Zong Case and the fight against slavery

Pamphleteer, pioneer anti slavery campaigner, musician and eccentric! Sharp used to organize concerts in which he and his family played classical music, from boats on the Thames! (he hears classical music) He took up the Zong case with gusto, firing off salvos of letters and pamphlets. The campaign he conducted excited the Counsel for the owners, Sir John...

LEE

Please, call me "Honest Jack".

SHARP

Lee.

LEE

If any man of them...

SHARP

He referred to his clients, the owners...

LEE

...was allowed to be tried at the Old Bailey for murder I cannot help thinking if that charge of murder was attempted to be sustained it would be folly and rashness to a degree of madness; and so far from the charge of murder lying against these people, there is not the least imputation. Of cruelty I will not say but of impropriety: not in the least!" The master has a perfect right to do as he thinks fit with his "goods and chattels". The issue was not whether making property of men was right or wrong; "whether right or wrong we have nothing to do with it"..."for the purpose in insurance they are goods and property".

SHARP

Sharp send letters to the Duke of Portland, bishops and archbishops and to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. It was he argued

"a necessity incumbent upon the whole kingdom to vindicate our national justice system by the prosecution and punishment of these murderers and once that was done to put an entire stop to the slave trade short of

which nothing would stay the avenging hand of God who has promised to destroy the destroyers of the earth!"

EQUIANO

They lost the case.(The classical music ends) but kick started the abolition campaign with the publicity the case attracted.

EXTRACT 10: ABOLITION MOVEMENT

CUGUONA

Revolts were frequent in the British colonies from 1730 on. In Jamaica, in Antigua, in Grenada...The cruel repressions that followed could not stifle the growing desire for freedom...

QW

The London Meeting of the Society of Friends condemned the slave trade and the owning of slaves. The Quakers were imbued by the radical social and religious zeal that had founded the Commonwealth. Christian evangelists like John Wesley preached in Deptford at Turner's Hall. The floor collapsed...

EQUIANO

Which either says a lot about the credibility of his arguments or the poor state of building repairs in Deptford.

CUGUONA

Writers like Montesquieu...Tom Paine became so hounded by press and parliament he had to lie low in Bromley after the Rights of Man began to inspire republicans in France and slaves in the Caribbean. Toussaint L'Overture heard about the ideas as he opened stable doors in Santa Dominica...

PLANTER

To discuss the Rights of Man before such people, what is it but to teach them that power dwells with strength and numbers?

EQUIANO

A run away French slave found in Jamaica gave his name as John Paine.

QW

Quakers had the national organization that could mount and sustain this first international human rights campaign of the modern world. They published "The Case of our Fellow Creatures the Oppressed Africans respectfully recommended to the serious consideration of the legislature of Great Britain" in the name of "The People called Quakers."

SANCHO

Locally one of the places they met at was Hatcham House

PRESENTER

Where Sainsbury's now stands behind New Cross Gate Station...

SANCHO

It was owned then by Joseph Hardcastle...

...

QW

The sugar boycott was the idea of groups of women making their first foray into politics who would have no truck with mere abolition of the trade. Women's groups demanded emancipation.

QW

"Men may propose only gradually to abolish the worst of crimes and only mitigate the most cruel bondage, but

why should we countenance such enormities? We must not talk of gradually abolishing murder, licentiousness, cruelty, tyranny...I trust no Ladies Association will ever be found with such words attached to it".

EQUIANO

Free black people in the cities and ports joined the campaign,

SHARP

Working peoples' organizations and the Reform Movement and then the French Revolution happened and progressive politics in Great Britain became tantamount to treachery...it was then Paine was forced to go undercover in Bromley...

EXTRACT 11: THE SIERRA LEONE EXPERIMENT

SANCHO

Equiano travelled the length and breadth of the country. With Granville Sharp he supported the Sierra Leone Experiment...

SHARP

Free black people, many of whom having been granted their freedom when they fought for the crown, were living in destitution on the streets of London in increasing in numbers.

EQUIANO

The experiment proposed that they might gain their own land.

SHARP

Be given passage and provisions to sail to and settle their own colony in Sierra Leone...to govern it according to the ancient Anglo Saxon Frankpledge system. A particular favourite of mine. I produced a pamphlet actually entitled "Memorandum on a late Proposal for a new settlement to be made on the coast of Africa; recommending to the author of that proposal, several



The Abolition Movement – Quaker Women meeting

alterations in his plan, and more especially the Adoption of the ancient mode of Government by Tithings or Decenaries and Hundreds, as being the most useful and effectual mode of Government for all nations and countries." I like my titles snappy don't you?

EQUIANO

The Atlantic, The Belisarius and The Vernon were moored off Deptford.

SHARP

The first settler to embark at Deptford was Richard Weaver. Do you remember Richard? Later selected as Chief in Command or Governor of Freetown. The navy needed a 'commissary'.

EQUIANO

A supervisor of stores and supplies for the expedition.

SHARP

Equiano became Commissary and 459 passengers boarded the ships at Deptford and set sail for Sierra Leone.

EQUIANO

I got off again at Portsmouth. The superintendent was pocketing the funds. There was a furious row.

SHARP

Equiano was sacked.

EXTRACT 12: ABOLITION

QW

Slavery was ended for the first time in the Caribbean in Haiti.

TOUSSAINT

I am Toussaint L' Ouverture. My name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken to avenge you. I want liberty and equality to reign throughout St Domingue. I am working towards that end. Come and join me brothers



Toussaint L'Ouverture, Quaker Women and Granville Sharp

and combat by our side for the same cause.

QW

The trade in slaves in the British Empire was abolished in 1807.

TOUSSAINT

We are fighting that liberty the most precious of all earthly possessions may not perish.

DIRECTOR

He slept only two hours a night.. You never knew what he was doing, if he was leaving, if he was staying, where he was going, where he was coming from. Often it was announced that he was at Cap Francois and he was at Port au Prince or at Saint Merc...he had the best and fastest horses...while racing across the colony on horseback at lightning speed while seeing everything for himself, he prepared his plans and thought things through while he galloped. Now Hollywood actor Danny Glover makes his plans, to make a movie of Toussaint with money from President Chavez of Venezuela. Toussaint having inspired and supported the liberation of Venezuela in the first place. Toussaint L 'Ouverture the stable slave who became a General will ride again!

EQUIANO

Not till fifty years later were slaves in Brazil and Cuba free.

QW

Slavery itself in 1838

CUGOANO

After a phased abolition and compensation to the planters.

SANCHO

By which time palm oil as lubrication for the wheels of the new machine age was more highly prized than sugar.

CUGUONA

It wasn't till after the Civil War that slaves in the US became free. Slaves in India were untouched by the abolition.

SHARP

Great Britain with markets throughout the biggest Empire the world had known was on its way to becoming the workshop of the world.



One hundred years later emancipation of the dispossessed was still a campaigning issue - Martin Luther King