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Exhibited at the Wilberforce House Museum, in Hull, this painting is known as *The Kneeling Slave*, “Am I not a Man and a Brother?” It was created by the English School, circa 1800. Josiah Wedgwood produced a medallion with a similar image to help abolitionists convince the British public that slave-trading was wrong.

People who made their living in the slave-trade business faced huge economic losses if the industry became illegal. They had every reason to keep things as they were.

It would not be an easy task to abolish a pillar of Britain’s incredible economic strength. But abolitionists believed if people really knew what was happening in the slave-trade world, they would pressure Parliament to overturn the law.

Slave-trade opponents continued their search for evidence. Some, including Wilberforce, received death threats. Undeterred, they mounted a brilliant public-relations campaign at the national level.

Josiah Wedgwood created a slogan - “AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER” - of a slave in chains. It was used in medallions, brooches and other items.

John Newton, now a minister instead of a slave-trader, became a pastor in Olney. Collaborating with the poet, William Cowper, he created a book of songs called Olney Hymns which were published in 1779.

Newton convinced Cowper to write anti-slave-trade ballads for the abolition committee. They could be set to music and sung in the streets. A few verses, from two examples, convey the power of Cowper’s words. The first is from the African’s perspective:

The Negro's Complaint

*Forc'd from home and all its pleasures,
Afric's coast I left forlorn;
To increase a stranger's treasures,
O'er the raging billows borne;
Men from England bought and sold me,
Paid my price in paltry gold;
But though theirs they have enroll'd me
Minds are never to be sold.*

*Still in thought as free as ever,
What are England's rights, I ask,
Me from my delights to sever,
Me to torture, me to task?
Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.*

...

*Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
Is there one who reigns on high?
Has he bid you buy and sell us,
Speaking from his throne, the sky?
Ask him, if your knotted scourges,
Fetters, blood-extorting screws,
Are the means that duty urges
Agents of his will to use?*

...

*Deem our nation brutes no longer
Till some reason ye shall find
Worthier of regard and stronger
Than the colour of our kind.
Slaves of gold! whose sordid dealings
Tarnish all your boasted pow'rs,
Prove that you have human feelings,
Ere you proudly question ours.*

The second example is from the British perspective:

Pity for Poor Africans

*I own I am shock'd at the purchase of slaves,
And fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves;
What I hear of their hardships, their tortures, and groans
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.*

*I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?
Especially sugar, so needful we see?
What? give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea!*

*Besides, if we do, the French, Dutch, and Danes,
Will heartily thank us, no doubt, for our pains;
If we do not buy the poor creatures, they will,
And tortures and groans will be multiplied still.*

*If foreigners likewise would give up the trade,
Much more in behalf of your wish might be said;
But while they get riches by purchasing blacks,
Pray tell me why we may not also go snacks?*

...

Thomas Clarkson gathered petitions signed by ordinary citizens who believed slave-trading was wrong. The Abolition Committee mobilized grass-roots forces to change the mind (this is a BBC video clip) of an entire country.

Nearly every year, Wilberforce tried to get Parliament to overturn the slave-trade law. Every year he tried and failed ... until ... 1807.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CONVINCING-the-PUBLIC-Amazing-Grace>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CONVINCING-the-PUBLIC-Amazing-Grace>

Questions 2 Ponder

Is Convincing the Public the Key to Changing Laws?

People who made their living directly or indirectly by the slave trade faced huge economic losses if Wilberforce could get Parliament to change the slave-trading law.

Slave-trading, and all that flowed from it, was a pillar of Britain's economic strength. How did Wilberforce think he could topple such a pillar?

He, and his colleagues, mounted what today we would call a public-relations campaign. Their objective was to convince the public that slave-trading was wrong. The public could then put pressure on Members of Parliament to change the law.

To put the plan into effect, Thomas Clarkson gathered petitions signed by ordinary citizens who believed slave-trading was wrong. The Abolition Committee mobilized grass-roots forces to change the mind of an entire country.

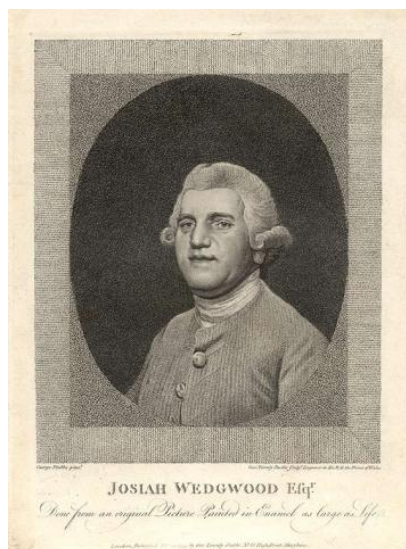
Song writers composed lyrics and tunes to help people understand the evils of slavery, and to get them to change their own minds (if they supported it).

Select one 21st-century issue and compare the efforts of Wilberforce and his colleagues to mind-changing events and public-relations campaigns of today. How are the efforts the same? How are they different?

Do you think issues which polarize people today are similar to the slave-trading issues of the 18th and 19th centuries? Explain your answer.

Do polarizing issues often have an economic component about which people worry if the laws are changed? Should such an issue matter? Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Josiah Wedgwood

Image online, courtesy the [National Portrait Gallery](http://www.nationalportraitgallery.gov.uk/) website.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Josiah-Wedgwood>



A Slave in Chains - Official Medallion

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Map of Olney

Image online, courtesy the olney.org.uk website.

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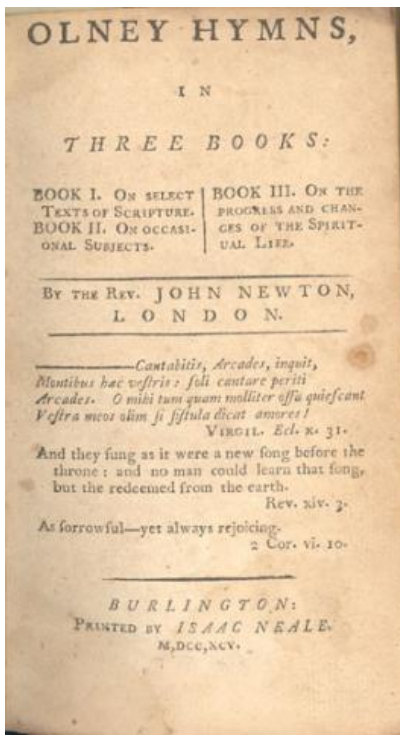


William Cowper

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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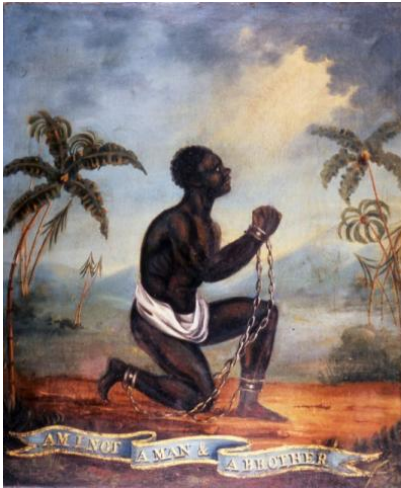


Olney Hymns

Image online, courtesy the Prebyterian Historical Society website.

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CONVINCING the PUBLIC

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