

Consortium of Black Groups' (COBG) Position Statement on the bi-centenary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Maafa).

Introduction

Nationally a steering group has been formed to plan and co-ordinate events in 2007 which commemorates the two hundredth anniversary of the passing of the Abolition of Slavery Trade Act which entered the statute book on the 25th March 1807. Four cities are the focus of these commemorations planning, namely:

Bristol, Hull, Liverpool and London. Bristol City Council (BCC) though, has a track record of organising and planning events that promotes the wealth and development of the City without consideration for or involvement of people of Afrikan descent. Regrettably, it has taken exactly this insensitive approach to its emerging 2007 planning.

Bristol's Afrikan/Caribbean communities have a wealth of ideas for how this traumatic period in our history should be commemorated and in what ways.

Emerging from a number of public meetings since December 2005, with local BME communities, is agreement that the Consortium of Black Groups (COBG) is the appropriate vehicle to lead the 2007 agenda and articulate Afrikan/Caribbean people's aspiration and ambitions for and from 2007. From these meetings consensus was also reached to the effect that Afrikan an Afrikan Caribbean people would lead Bristol's contribution both to local and national actions throughout 2007.

The COBG's stance is that 2007 should be a catalyst to invigorate and give focus to an agenda for change that improves the socio-economic and political position of Afrikan/Caribbean people in Bristol.

This agenda would also influence national policy to improve the position of BME people, generally, in society.

The slave trade was a holocaust committed against Afrikan peoples and we believe that this inhumane and wrongful act is still impacting on Afrikans wherever they live in the Diaspora and continues to blight the lives of Afrikans on the continent today. The fight for freedom and our continued quest for social justice in the education system, housing, employment, health, and criminal justice systems, and arts, culture, and sports demonstrate that Black people's situation has not changed to any great extent. We have simply swapped one form of slavery for another.

The COBG does not, therefore, support any celebration, actions or symbols that commemorates the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade per se.

Notwithstanding this position, there is little doubt that 2007 'celebrations / commemorations' proposed by Bristol City Council will go ahead. However, we believe that they will be nothing more than public relations exercises since the Council lacks both the political will and commitment to work with the BME community to progress the agenda for change that COBG champions on behalf of Bristol's Black Communities.

We therefore urge our people to boycott any initiative that does not progress our agenda for social justice and make meaningful and lasting change to the position of Black people in Bristol.

Vision: Raise awareness of the abolition of the slave trade (Maafa), and seek to eradicate its legacy of racism and anti Afrikan sentiments rife in British culture whilst we promote social justice and reconciliation.

Purpose: Progress the agenda for change necessary to redress deep-seated disadvantage experienced by Bristol's Afrikan Caribbean Communities and actively campaign against any commemorative events themed around the actions of a eurocentric abolitionist movement.

Aims and Objectives

Education: To raise awareness amongst Afrikan Caribbean's in particular and Bristol in general, of the National commemoration acknowledging 200 years since the 1807 abolition of the enslavement of Afrikans known as the "slave trade"

Leadership: To develop Black leadership and encourage Afrikan Caribbean communities to act in unity in support of our mental liberation.

Legacy: To identify and explain the relationship between the historical enslavement of Afrikans and contemporary patterns of local, national and international racism, inequality and injustice.

Policy: To lobby and campaign for policy changes to redress socio-economic and political disparities facing Black people with respect to education, housing, criminal justice, and culture, arts and sports.

Networks & Reconciliation: To work with like-minded partners and when appropriate form alliances to ensure 2007 is a year of reconciliation where the City comes to terms with the fullness of its history and the fragility of its race relations. The alternative is that 2007 widens existing divisions.

Moral Integrity:

Using the history of the city as a platform, we will lead Bristol to stand against all forms of slavery wherever it occurs for example the developing world debt crisis and unfair trade, the international trafficking of women for the sex industry and exploitative child labour. Through all this we will remain true to our commitment to the COGB's principle of non-participation in any plans or programmes that do not meet the expectations, needs and aspirations of Afrikan Caribbean people.

COGB's outline plan for *Education & Awareness:*

National Curriculum: We will campaign and lobby for stronger emphasis in the National Curriculum in general and Bristol Schools in particular on the history and legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in Britain.

Bristol Schools: Lobby the LA and all schools in Bristol to teach about the local connections with and visible legacies of the slave trade.

Educational Resources: Develop exhibition material and school assembly and classroom based lesson educational resources that help to highlight and recognise the contribution that Afrikan people made and continue to make to the wealth and prosperity of Bristol and Bristolians today.

Public Education: A year long programme based on a series of 12 films, lectures and debates focusing past, present and future patterns of race relations and global development – including what came before slavery. For more information see:

www.operationtruth2007.co.uk

www.blackdeva.org.uk/resources.html or www.ligali.org