Slavery and the Law

As Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield presided over cases concerning commercial interests in the slave trade, and the legal status of slaves in England. By the 1760s, Britain's slave trade was at its height, with great wealth built upon the labour of enslaved Africans in her Caribbean and American colonies. With profits at stake, slavery in the distant colonies was easy to ignore for many people in England.

Slavery on the streets of London



Public opinion in England had been turning slowly against the inhumane trade in people as property, known as 'chattel slavery'. Mansfield's own conduct, 1846. Conditions during the opinions and rulings suggest a man in two Middle Passage', were brutal. was another matter, but legal protection minds, torn between revulsion against National Maritime Museum, London for black people here was uncertain. slavery, and yet a deep reluctance to set

View of the Deck of the Slave Ship Albanoz, by Lieutenant Francis Meynell,

Mansfield's Legacy The Case of James Somerset

congratulated themselves upon the recovery principle of whether a person could be of the rights of human nature and their made into property in England. happy lot that permitted them to breathe Mansfield let the trial drag on over five the free air of England'

Newspaper account of the reaction of black spectators at the Somerset trial, 1772

The James Somerset trial was Lord 1772, it sent shockwaves through and Mansfield's most famous case, and the beyond the courtroom. England prior to the abolition of the slave in question. What Mansfield said more Mansfield went much further than any the subject of debate. He described judge before in undermining the legality slavery as 'odious', but did not clearly of slavery.

James Somerset was for twenty years him saying: an enslaved servant to customs officer Charles Stewart. Eventually brought to England, Somerset ran for freedom in 1771. He was soon recaptured and imprisoned on a ship bound for Jamaica. because he absented himself from his Somerset appealed to Granville Sharp, service or for any other cause. No author renowned anti-slavery activist, who employed lawyers for him. Sharp saw the country and therefore we are all of the

On Monday near 200 Blacks, with their Lalies, had an Entertainment at a Public-houfe in Weftminfter, to celebrate the, Triumph which their Brother Somerfet had obtained over Mr. Stuart his Mafter. Lord Mansfield's dealth was echoed round the Room, and the ening was concluded with a Ball. The lickets for Admittance to this black Affembly vere 5s. each.

shaking each other by the hand [they] best opportunity in years to test the

months. Perhaps this indicated a personal struggle between his caution as a law lord and his closeness to Dido. When he finally delivered his verdict, on 22 June

most important legal test of slavery in That Mansfield freed Somerset is not trade. Despite an ambiguous summing up, generally about slavery in summing up is declare it illegal. One version has 'Slavery is so odious that it must be allowed here to send his servant abroad

construed strictly. No master was e can be found for it in the laws of this opinion that James Somerset must

An account of a ball held to celebrate Somerset' release, from the Public Advertiser, 27 June 1772 The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford



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ville Sharp, leading y activist

Pendant by Josiah Wedgwood, depicting an enslaved man in chains and bearing the words, 'Am I not a Man and Brother'. The iconic image of a passive slave begging for help suited the propaganda needs of the abolition cause and became its symbol. In fact, enslaved people were often very active in demanding and pursuing their own freedom. English Heritage, Kenwood

> Mansfield later insisted he was simply limiting the rights of slave-owners to remove slaves from England by force. Yet, willingly or not, he had crossed a great boundary. Whatever his exact words, as far as many were concerned he had outlawed slavery in England.

The Somerset Case was a legal landmark. Outside the courts, however, the kidnappings and the slave trade across the Atlantic continued. In his will, Mansfield wrote, 'I confirm to Dido Elizabeth Belle her freedom'. No-one was more aware than the Lord Chief Justice of the need legally to protect Dido – a privileged, free, but black woman – from the threat of enslavement.

It was not until 1807 that the British slave trade across the Atlantic was officially abolished by parliament, whilst it took a further long campaign before *ait Gallery, London* an act for the abolition of slavery itself was passed in 1833. During that time, Mansfield's Somerset ruling, however phrased or intended, had been a beacon (London, 1992) of hope to many seeking freedom and justice.

REM TIME, or The Sampers ALL ALIVE in WESTMINSTER HALL.

Term Time, or The Lawyers all Alive in Westminster Hall, 1785 by Robert Dighton. Mansfield presides (top, centre) in the Court of King's Bench, where the Somerset case was heard. The Honourable C.A. Lennox-Bovd

Further reading:

James Oldham, The Mansfield Manuscripts (North Carolina, 1992) Gretchen Gerzina, Black London: Life Before Emancipation (New Jersey, 1995) James Walvin, Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery Simon Schama, Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution (London, 2005)

Dido's Legacy

Lord Mansfield died in March 1793 leaving Dido an annual allowance. In Kenwood, John Davinier was a senior December that year, Dido married John servant, a gentleman's Steward, but with Davinier at St. George's Church, Hanover Dido's allowance from Lord Mansfield, Square. Davinier had arrived in England they could afford staff of their own. It about ten years earlier, but we do not seems they also paid for Charles to know where from, nor how and why he attend nearby Belgravia House School, had come here.

The couple lived in Ranelagh Street age of 43. She was buried at St George's (later renamed Ebury Street) in Pimlico, Church burial ground in Tyburn. The then on the edge of London's urban cemetery was redeveloped in the 1960s centre. They had twin boys, Charles and and the graves removed. John, in 1795 and another son, William Although Dido's memorial has been Thomas, in 1800.

Dido's domestic life must have been traced, revealing a family integrated into comfortable but not luxurious – a dif- London society, mainly living around

St. George's Hanover Square Church 1809 City of Westminster Archives Centre

Far right The marriage register signatures of Dido Elizabeth Belle and John Davinier, 1793 City of Westminster Archives Centre

ferent world from her upbringing at

erased, her descendants have now been

(1)DIDO ELIZABETH BELLE (1761–1804) = JOHN DAVINIERE	
 CHARLES (1795–1873) = HANNAH NASH (1815–1883)	J
ADA (1837–1837) LAVINIA HANNAH = JAMES DICKSON STEELE	СНА
CHARLES LINDSAY F. (LINDSAY) (1871–1956)= LILIAN RADDOCK MARION J (1873–1	
HAROLD CHARLES BERTRAM (1913–1975) = ELMA	

Sames Summersett an adult Nigro about 30 years of age Baldwins Gardens 12

d of Somerset's baptism as 'lames Summersett', 20 February 1771 at St. Andrew's, Holborn. Many enslaved people y believed that baptism as a Christian could guarantee their freedom. Guildhall Library, City of London, MS 6667/12

Dido died in July 1804, at the early

CHARLES GEORGE (1839–1899) = HELEN MARION PARKINSON

(MARY) (1876–1970) (1877–78) (1879–1904)



WILLIAM THOMAS (1800-1867) = FANNY GRAHAM

HELEN EMILY (1840-1870)

Lino Courabil

Notting Hill and Kensington. One of Dido's nine great-grandchildren was called Lindsay Daviniere, raising the intriguing possibility that he was named after Dido's father.

Lindsav Daviniere's son. Harold. became Dido's last descendant, born in South Africa, a former British slave colony. It is a final irony that he should die there in 1975 – white and free – in a racially segregated society, whose black population still struggled for justice.

Unartes I of John & Elizabeth Daimier John J. of John & Elizabeth Deimier

Above Record of the baptisms of Dido's twin sons, Charles and John, at George's Hanover Square Church, 8 May 1795

Below The Daviniere family tree BBC London Inside Out and Sarah K. Minney, Genealogist and Record Agent

RION JULIA EVA MAUDE FLORENCE HERBERT LIONEL PERCY ANGUS FLORENCE MADELINE GLADYSTEWIS = CHARLES CHARLES CRAWFORD (1880 - 1946)ANNETTE PLETTS (1884–1958) (1883–1953)

EDWARD

= (2)JANE HOLLAND

LAVINIA

(1886 - 1937)

With grateful thanks to BBC London Inside Out and Sarah K. Minney, Genealogist and Record Agent, for the research provided on Dido Elizabeth Belle and her descendants Slavery and Justice THE LEGACIES OF DIDO BELLE AND

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