

**“The Manchester Lit & Phil and the Transatlantic Slave Trade” –
A Response to the UCLan Report
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Preamble: As someone who is deeply committed to promoting social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, I have reflected on the research report on The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and its implications for our society today. In my response, I have sought to highlight some of the key findings and recommendations from the report, and to suggest some possible ways in which we can use this information to build a more just and equitable society.

I want to make it clear that this response is written in a personal capacity and reflects my own views and opinions. While I have drawn on the report's findings and recommendations, my interpretation and analysis are my own, and I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions.

My hope is that my response will be a starting point for further discussion and action, as we work towards greater understanding and reconciliation in our communities and institutions.

With regard to The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1780-1865. What sense do I get about the importance/centrality of the slave trade to Manchester’s industry, prosperity and identity?

The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society was a prominent intellectual society in Manchester during the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period, the slave trade was a significant and lucrative part of Manchester's economy.

It appears that the society's records reveal that many of its members were involved in the slave trade, either directly or indirectly. Manchester merchants were heavily invested in the transatlantic slave trade, owning ships that transported enslaved Africans to the Americas, and importing raw materials such as cotton and sugar produced by enslaved labour.

Moreover, Manchester's textile industry, which was the cornerstone of the city's prosperity, relied on the raw materials produced by the slave labour system. The city's mills processed cotton into cloth that was sold worldwide, and the profits generated by this industry were reinvested into the city's economy, including the construction of public buildings, such as libraries and museums, steam engines and mills.

Therefore, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society's records suggest that the slave trade was crucial to Manchester's economic and social identity. The wealth generated by the slave trade and the textile industry it supported allowed Manchester to develop into a significant cultural and intellectual centre. However, this prosperity came at a significant "human" cost, as the profits generated by the slave trade were built on the exploitation and enslavement of millions of Africans who were kidnapped from their homelands.

The report's sliding scale of Lit & Phil beneficiaries, ranging from indirect involvement to direct, active promotion of the transatlantic slave trade, suggests to me that the society's attitude towards the trade was complex and varied.

On the one hand, the fact that many of the society's members were involved in the trade to some degree, either directly or indirectly, might indicate that the society was complicit in the trade's perpetuation. The report suggests that the society's members benefited from the profits generated by the slave trade, whether through investments in slave-trading companies or through the consumption of products produced by enslaved labour.

On the other hand, the report also notes that some members of the society actively opposed the slave trade and worked towards its abolition. These members, who included prominent Manchester figures such as John Ferriar and Thomas Barnes, used their positions within the society to promote abolitionist ideals and advocate for the end of the slave trade.

Overall, the report's findings suggest that the Lit & Phil's attitude towards the slave trade was not monolithic, but rather reflected the varied and often conflicting views of its members. While some members may have profited directly from the trade, others used their positions within the society to promote abolitionist ideals and advocate for an end to the slave trade.

The fact that the abolitionist members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society ranged from those who were slowly persuaded that the trade was wrong and actually inhumane to those who campaigned actively against it suggests that the society was not a monolithic entity with a single stance on the slave trade.

Rather, it was a diverse group of individuals who held a range of opinions and beliefs, and who were influenced by a variety of factors in their views on the slave trade. Some members may have been initially tolerant of the trade but eventually came to see its evils, while others were more consistently opposed to it. They became uncomfortable with the comfortable.

This diversity of opinion within the society likely reflected (and still until today) the broader debates and discussions taking place in Manchester and throughout Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries regarding the slave trade and its abolition. These debates were often complex and nuanced, and individuals' views on the issue could change over time as new information and arguments were presented. This is what we find happening in today's conversations.

Overall, the fact that there were abolitionist members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society suggests that there was a growing awareness and opposition to the slave trade in Manchester and throughout Britain during this period. The society provided a forum for discussion and debate on the issue, and its members' views reflect the complex and evolving attitudes towards the trade at the time.

The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society's tolerance of members on both sides of the debate regarding the transatlantic slave trade does not, in my view, necessarily amount to tacit acceptance of the trade as a 'fact of life'.

It is important to remember that the society existed during a time when the slave trade was widely accepted as a legitimate and lucrative enterprise. Many individuals, including members of the society, may have believed that the trade was a necessary part of the global economy and were not aware of the full extent of the horrors of slavery and the slave trade.

Furthermore, the society's role as a forum for intellectual discussion and debate means that it would have been natural for members with different views to express their opinions and engage in debate on the issue. This does not necessarily mean that the society as a whole tacitly accepted the trade, but rather that it allowed for diverse viewpoints to be expressed and debated.

From a 21st-century perspective, it is clear that the transatlantic slave trade was a deeply unethical and immoral enterprise that caused immeasurable harm to millions of kidnapped and then enslaved Africans and their descendants. However, it is important to consider the historical context in which the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society existed and not judge it solely through the lens of our modern-day perspective. Instead, we should seek to understand the society's views and actions in their historical context and use them as a starting point for a broader conversation about the ongoing legacy of the slave trade and the ongoing struggle for racial justice, equality and equity.

The publication of this report that focuses mainly on the beneficiaries of slave-trading may risk marginalising the abolitionists and painting an incomplete picture of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society at the time.

While it is important to acknowledge the ways in which its members benefited from it, this should not overshadow the contributions of those who opposed the trade and worked towards its abolition. By focusing mainly on the beneficiaries of the slave trade, there is a risk of downplaying or marginalising the abolitionist members of the society and painting an incomplete picture of the society's views and actions.

Furthermore, by solely examining the economic and financial aspects of the society's indirect connections with the slave trade, there is a risk of overlooking other factors that may have influenced its members' views and actions, such as religious beliefs, political ideologies, and cultural norms and connections.

To present a more complete picture of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and its views on the slave trade, it is important to examine all aspects of its history and the diverse range of views held by its members. This includes acknowledging the contributions of abolitionist members and exploring the broader historical context in which the society existed. By doing so, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the society's views and actions, and their role in shaping the broader historical narrative of the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition.

It is encouraging to see that the research findings of the report are being actively used by the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society to further its attempts to increase diversity and inclusiveness.

The report's findings about the society's historic connections to the slave trade provide an opportunity for the society to reflect on its past and to take steps to ensure that it is more representative of the diverse communities of Manchester today. This includes examining its programming, membership, and relationship to the city's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities, and actively working to make the society more accessible and welcoming to all.

By acknowledging its historic connections to the slave trade and working to address the legacy of that history, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society can demonstrate its commitment to promoting greater understanding and social justice, inclusion and diversity, equality and equity. It can also serve as a model for other organisations grappling with their own histories of complicity in systems of oppression.

Overall, the society's efforts to use the report's findings to promote diversity and inclusiveness are a positive step forward and can help to foster greater understanding and reconciliation in the community.

The report's recommendations for knowledge transfer and engagement with communities that have been neglected in the past can be seen as a form of reparations. While financial reparations are one way to address historic injustices and inequities, they may not always be feasible or effective in achieving lasting change. Instead, knowledge transfer and community engagement can provide a means to promote understanding and reconciliation, and to help address the ongoing legacy of historic injustices.

Through knowledge transfer, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society can help to increase awareness and understanding of the ways in which its historic connections to the slave trade have contributed to systemic racism and inequalities. This can include providing educational opportunities, supporting research and scholarship, and engaging with diverse communities in the city.

Engagement with communities that have been historically neglected can also help to foster greater understanding and collaboration, and to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented within the society. This can include outreach efforts, partnerships with community organisations, and initiatives to increase diversity and inclusiveness within the society's programming and membership.

Overall, while financial reparations may have a role to play in addressing historic injustices, knowledge transfer and community engagement can also provide a means to promote understanding and reconciliation, and to help address ongoing legacies of systemic racism and inequality.

There are a number of ways in which you could use the report as a stepping stone towards greater diversity and inclusiveness, both proactively and publicly. Here are some suggestions:

1. Members should start by reading the report thoroughly and taking note of its key findings and recommendations.
2. Consider how the report's findings relate to your own organisation or community, and identify areas where greater diversity and inclusiveness may be needed.
3. Develop a plan of action to address these areas, using the report's recommendations as a guide. This could include initiatives to increase representation and participation of diverse communities, to provide educational opportunities and support research and scholarship, or to engage with community organisations and individuals.
4. Proactively reach out to diverse communities and organisations to build relationships and collaborations. This could include partnerships with local schools or universities, hosting community events or forums, or working with local advocacy groups.
5. Share your efforts publicly, both to raise awareness and to encourage others to take similar actions. This could include writing articles for local newspapers or community radio, speaking at conferences or events, or using social media to share your experiences and insights.

By using the report as a starting point for proactively promoting diversity and inclusiveness, and by sharing your efforts publicly, you can help to promote greater understanding and reconciliation in your community, and contribute to a more just and equitable society.

Finally, the research report on The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the Transatlantic Slave Trade provides a starting point for further research and exploration into the historical connections between organizations and institutions and the slave trade. Here are some possible areas for further research and collaboration:

1. Other organisations and institutions with historical connections to the slave trade could be identified and researched in a similar way, to build a more comprehensive understanding of the extent and impact of the slave trade on different communities and institutions.
2. The experiences and perspectives of enslaved individuals and their descendants could be explored in more depth, to provide a more complete understanding of the human impact of the slave trade and its ongoing legacies.
3. The role of Manchester as a centre of the Industrial Revolution and its connections to the slave trade could be further explored, to better understand the economic and social impact of the slave trade on the city and its inhabitants.
4. Collaboration with other organizations and institutions that have undertaken or are undertaking research into their own historical slave trade connections could provide opportunities for sharing insights, exchanging best practices, and building a broader network of researchers and advocates committed to promoting greater understanding and reconciliation.
5. The experiences of other marginalized groups, including indigenous communities and immigrant populations, could be explored in relation to the history of the slave trade, to better understand the intersectional nature of systemic racism and inequality.

By continuing to explore these and other areas of research, and by building networks of collaboration and understanding across different communities and organisations, we can work towards a more just and equitable society, rooted in greater understanding and reconciliation.