**Assignment Brief**

*Atlantic Slavery*

Today, we hear terrible stories about humans enduring slavery, despite it being illegal in all countries across the world. Some estimates put the figure of people living in slavery at 30 million, while others believe the figure to be considerably larger. What are the differences between modern slavery and the Atlantic slave trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Their differences aside, are there lessons to be drawn from the factors which led to the ending of Atlantic slavery and the efforts to combat modern slavery by organisations such as the United Nations?

It is often thought that slavery ended in Britain in 1807 with the Slave Trade Act, but, in fact, Africans continued to be shipped across the Atlantic until the 1860s. The numbers involved were staggering: 431,000 were landed in the 1820s in Brazil alone. People trafficking continued on this epic scale because slavery as an institution continued to flourish far into the nineteenth century. Slavery persisted in the British and French empires until 1833 and 1848 respectively, and in some parts of the Americas – like Cuba, Brazil and the United States – it expanded enormously.

The ending of Atlantic slavery was neither quick, nor easy, nor straightforward. As late as the 1850s slavery seemed an inevitable part of life in the New World. Yet slavery did perish. Sometimes it did so because of humanitarian campaigning and international agreement between the major European powers. More often though, slavery was ended through violence: by rebellions of the enslaved themselves – like that in Haiti in the 1790s – or through wars brought about disputes over slavery – like the Civil War that broke out in the United States in 1861. Slavery’s downfall raises fundamental questions about how historical change comes about.

**Contacts**

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