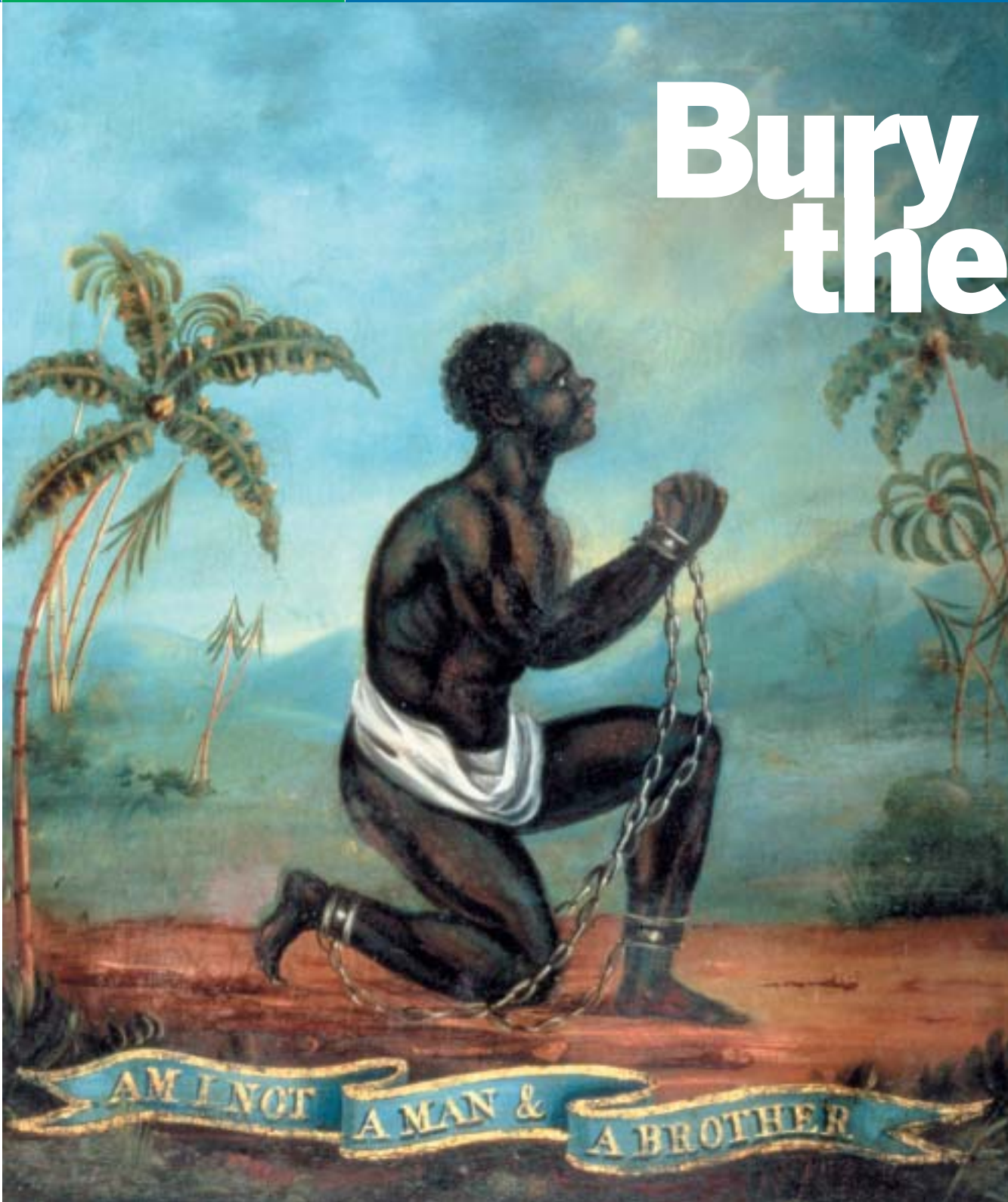


Bury the



LEFT PAGE: THE KNEELING SLAVE: 'AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER' (OIL ON CANVAS) ENGLISH SCHOOL, 18TH CENTURY; WILBERFORCE HOUSE, HULL CITY MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES, UK; THE BRIDGEEMAN ART LIBRARY; RIGHT PAGE: ©THE HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Chains

by Adam Hochschild

How an essay sparked an international human rights movement that changed the course of history

The Story So Far...

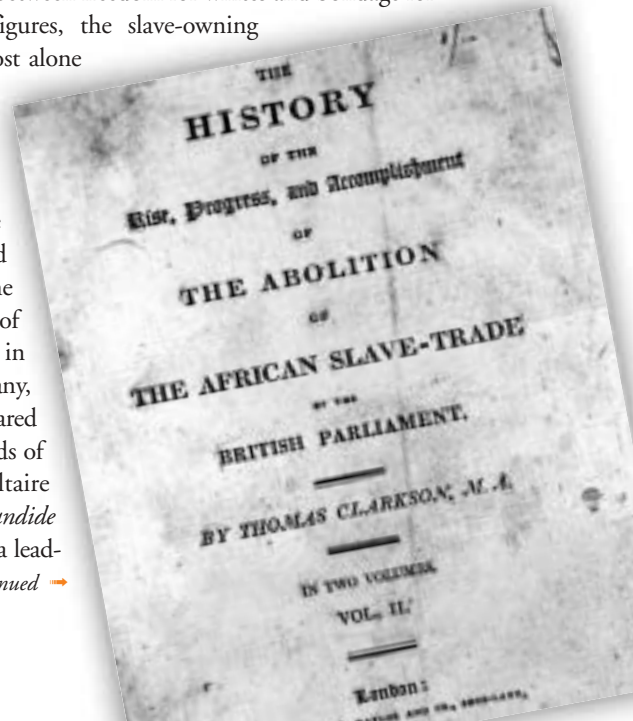
In 1787, a small group of British citizens initiated a grassroots campaign to end slavery—a practice the vast majority of Britons regarded as not only acceptable, but vital. Within five years, hundreds of thousands of English citizens were refusing to eat slave-produced sugar. By the 1830s, slavery had been abolished in the British Empire—years before it was abolished in the United States. Here's how it all got started...

Left: This image was reproduced on everything from cuff links to hatpins, in what was likely the first widespread use of a logo designed for a political cause. Right: The title page of Thomas Clarkson's essay.

A LATENT FEELING WAS IN THE AIR, BUT AN INTELLECTUAL UNDERCURRENT disapproving of slavery was something very different from the belief that anything could ever be done about it. An analogy today might be how some people think about automobiles. For reasons of global warming, air quality, traffic, noise, and dependence on oil, one can argue, the world might be better off without cars. And what happens when India and China have as many cars per capita as the United States? Even if you depend on driving to work, it's possible to agree there's a problem. A handful of dedicated environmentalists try to practice what they preach, and travel only by train, bus, bicycle, or foot. Yet does anyone advocate a movement to ban automobiles from the face of the earth?

The 1700s were, of course, the century of the Enlightenment, the upwelling of ideas about human rights that eventually led to the American and French revolutions, expanded suffrage, and much more. Yet surprisingly few people saw a contradiction between freedom for whites and bondage for slaves. Among political figures, the slave-owning Thomas Jefferson was almost alone in revealing any discomfort over this. The philosopher John Locke, whose ideas about governments arising from the consent of the governed had done so much to lay the foundation for this century of revolutions, invested £600 in the Royal African Company, whose RAC brand was seared onto the breasts of thousands of slaves. In France, Voltaire mocked slaveholders in *Candide* and other works, yet when a lead-

continued →



← continued from page 13

ing French slave-ship owner offered to name a vessel after him, he accepted with pleasure. Once the French Revolution erupted, merchants would promptly christen slave ships *Liberté*, *Égalité*, and *Fraternité*. Nor was the Church of England's slave plantation anything out of the ordinary: Countess Huntingdon, the leading patron of the Methodists, also owned one, and George Whitefield, the most influential Evangelical minister of his day—both Newton and Equiano heard him preach—owned more than fifty Georgia slaves and believed firmly that “hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes.”

THIS, THEN, WAS THE WORLD INTO which Granville Sharp sent his fusillade of outraged letters about the slaves thrown overboard from the *Zong*. Most were ignored. But directly or indirectly the news reached a prominent Anglican clergyman, Dr. Peter Peckard, and it deeply disturbed him. In 1784, the year after the case was heard in court, he preached a sermon condemning the slave trade as a “most barbarous and cruel traffick.” Soon afterwards, Peckard became vice chancellor—the equiva-

lent of an American university president—of Cambridge University, and there, in 1785, he put to use one of the most powerful tools the head of a university had at his command. He set as a topic for Cambridge's most prestigious Latin essay contest the question *Anne liceat invitos in servitutem dare?*—Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?

One entrant in Peckard's Latin contest was a 25-year-old divinity student, Thomas Clarkson, attending Cambridge on a special scholarship for the sons of deceased clergymen. In 1784, Clarkson had won a lower-ranking Latin prize and now, in 1785, he was competing for the big one; no student had ever managed to take them both. He had two months to research and write the essay. With the thoroughness and energy that would characterize his life, Clarkson read all he could find, managed to get access to the papers of a slave merchant who had recently died, and sought out several British officers returned from the American war, where they had seen slavery firsthand. One of these was his younger brother, John, a lieutenant who had served

Classic Connections

TWO MORE BOOKS THAT SHED LIGHT ON LITTLE-KNOWN EPISODES IN THE HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

THE BOOK



KING LEOPOLD'S GHOST (1999)
by Adam Hochschild

THE STORY

In the 1880s, King Leopold II of Belgium seized an area of land in Central Africa. He established a colony and initiated a reign of terror that resulted in the subjugation and genocide of millions of indigenous people.

THE STYLE

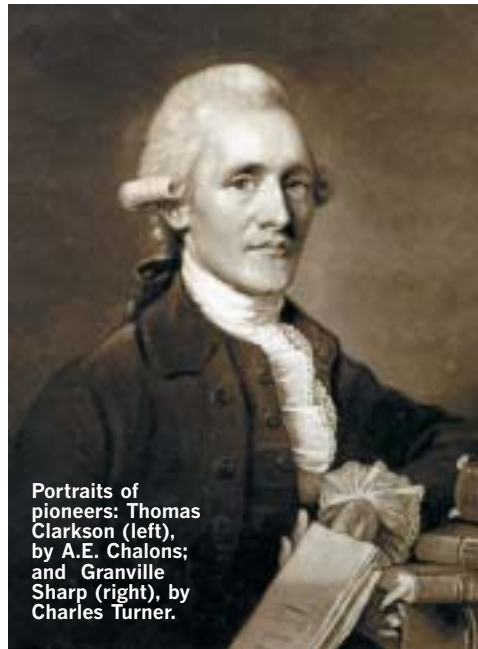
Hochschild relies heavily on eyewitness accounts of the monstrous abuse; he also presents a moving and fascinating account of those who heroically fought to expose the crimes.



DISPOSABLE PEOPLE: NEW SLAVERY IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY (2000)
by Kevin Bales

According to Bales, slavery is “not confined to history.” Though it is illegal, at least 27 million people are currently enslaved around the world.

Bales's exhaustively researched book explains where, how, and why modern-day slavery exists. Bales provides concrete suggestions for abolishing slavery, and is donating all of his royalties to fight it.



Portraits of pioneers: Thomas Clarkson (left), by A.E. Chalons; and Granville Sharp (right), by Charles Turner.

MEET THE AUTHOR: Adam Hochschild

BORN
1942, in
New York
City



RÉSUMÉ
Hochschild published his first book in 1986. He is a former commentator on the NPR program "All Things Considered" and co-founder of the magazine *Mother Jones*.

He also teaches writing at UC Berkeley.

HOW HE FOUND THE TOPIC

Hochschild told *Mother Jones* that he originally planned to write a biography of John Newton, a one-time slave trader who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace." While researching Newton, Hochschild found a reference to someone he had never heard of: Thomas Clarkson.

on ships in the West Indies, where many slaves worked as Royal Navy stevedores and dockyard laborers.

CLARKSON HAD ENTERED THE ESSAY competition with only a student's ambitions. "I had no motive but that which other young men in the University had on such occasions; namely, the wish of . . . obtaining literary honour." Unexpectedly, as he marshaled his evidence, he found himself overwhelmed with horror. "In the day-time I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief . . . I always slept with a candle in my room, that I might rise out of bed and put down such thoughts as might occur to me in the night . . . conceiving that no arguments of any moment should be lost in so great a cause."

His essay won first prize. Clarkson read it aloud in Latin to an audience at the university's majestic Senate House, where such ceremonies are still held today. His studies finished, already a deacon in the Church of England, he mounted the horse he owned to head for London and for what seemed a promising career.

Over six feet tall, Clarkson had thick red hair and large, intense blue eyes that looked whomever he spoke to directly in the face.

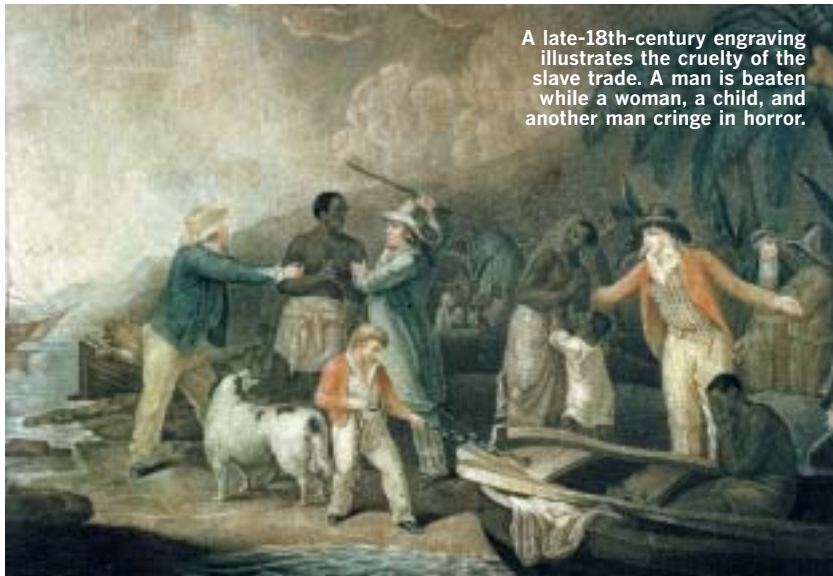
Riding to the capital in the black garb of a clergyman-to-be, he found himself, to his surprise, thinking neither of his prospects in the church nor of the pleasure of winning the prize. It was slavery itself that "wholly engrossed my thoughts. I became at times very seriously affected while upon the road. I stopped my horse occasionally, and dismounted and walked. I frequently tried to persuade myself in these intervals that the contents of my Essay could not be true. The more however I reflected upon them, or rather upon the authorities on which they were founded, the more I gave them credit." These feelings grew more intense at the midpoint of his journey, as he was riding down a long hill toward a coach station where the road crossed the River Lea. "Coming in sight of Wades Mill in Hertfordshire, I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end."

Long months of doubt followed his roadside moment of revelation. Could a lone, inexperienced young man have "that solid judgment . . . to qualify him to undertake a

continued →

← continued from page 15

task of such magnitude and importance;—and with whom was I to unite?” But each time he doubted, the result was the same: “I walked frequently into the woods, that I might think on the subject in solitude, and find relief to my mind there. But there the question still recurred, ‘Are these things true?’—Still the answer followed as instanta-



A late-18th-century engraving illustrates the cruelty of the slave trade. A man is beaten while a woman, a child, and another man cringe in horror.

“I wished the Essay to find its way . . . among such as would think and act with me.”

neously “They are.”—Still the result accompanied it, “Then surely some person should interfere.” Only gradually, it seems, did it dawn on him that he was that person.

With the help of his brother, he translated his Latin essay into English, expanded it, and decided to publish it. Visiting one well-known London publisher, he was disappointed to find that the man wanted to print the essay only because it had won the prize and would therefore be read by “persons of taste.” Clarkson, however, was already thinking like an activist. “I was not much pleased with his opinion. I wished the Essay to find its way . . . among such as would think and act with me.” Turning down the offer, he left the publisher’s office and was walking to a friend’s house when, in the street outside the Royal Exchange, he ran into a Quaker friend of his family. The man greeted him warmly and said Clarkson was just the person he was looking for. Why hadn’t he published that antislavery essay of his?

Together they walked to the printing shop and bookstore of James Phillips, in George Yard, just a few blocks away in the

warren of narrow, curving streets of London’s business district. In those days, publishing, printing, and bookselling often happened under the same roof (with the printer and his family likely to be living upstairs and a cow and a few hens out back), and this was the work that the 40-year-old Phillips did for his fellow Quakers. Clarkson took an immediate liking to him, and on the spot he agreed to let Phillips publish the essay. This was the day that Clarkson discovered he was not alone.

He knew his major allies would be the Quakers: they were rock-firm in their convictions and had a strong tradition of supporting their beliefs with generous donations. As organizers, they had a national network—an international one, in fact, because of their close ties to American Quakers: one of the people in Clarkson’s new circle, for instance, was William Dillwyn, a plump, ruddy-cheeked Quaker businessman from Pennsylvania who had gone to the American South to study slavery firsthand, lobbied the New Jersey legislature for slave freedom, then moved to London. For the Quakers, Clarkson was a godsend: young, brimming with enthusiasm, skilled at persuading people to join the cause—and, above all, an Anglican. Their strenuous pleas against slavery had been ignored, they knew, simply because they were Quakers. To influence public opin-

FROM *BURY THE CHAINS* BY ADAM HOCHSCHILD. COPYRIGHT © 2005 BY ADAM HOCHSCHILD. PUBLISHED BY HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY.

ion they needed a talented Anglican willing to devote all his time and energy to the movement, and now at last they had one.

At James Phillips's house, a group of Quakers told Clarkson, "that from the time they had first heard of the Prize Essay, they . . . had had their eyes upon me, and, from the time they had first seen me, had conceived a desire of making the same use of me as I had now expressed a wish of making of them." The ultimate success of the movement would be grounded in a series of brilliant alliances. This, between Clarkson and the Quakers, was the first. Together they decided to form a new organization that no one could write off as being controlled by a fringe sect. After much careful planning a committee of a dozen men was agreed on—nine Quakers, including James and Richard Phillips and the American-born Dillwyn, and three Anglicans, including Clarkson and Granville Sharp, who, as the elder statesman of antislavery efforts, would be titular chairman.

“WENT TO TOWN ON MY MARE to attend a committee of the Slave Trade now instituted,” confided Dillwyn to his diary as he headed for the first meeting, on the afternoon of May 22, 1787, at James Phillips's bookstore and printing shop.

The minutes of the occasion, only one page long, are in Clarkson's clear and flowing handwriting. They begin with a simple declaration: "At a Meeting held for the Purpose of

taking the Slave Trade into Consideration, it was resolved that the said Trade was both impolitick and unjust." Perhaps most remarkable, for it showed how much the twelve were of one mind, they promptly resolved that for conducting committee business, only three members would be needed for a quorum.

We can only imagine how the committee members felt as they dispersed to their homes that night. The task they had taken on was so monumental as to have seemed to anyone else impossible. They had to ignite their crusade in a country where the great majority of people, from farmhands to bishops, accepted slavery as completely normal. It was also a country where profits from West Indian plantations gave a large boost to the economy, where customs duties on slave-grown sugar were an important source of government revenue, and where the livelihoods of tens of thousands of seamen, merchants, and shipbuilders depended on the slave trade. The trade itself had increased to almost unparalleled levels, bringing prosperity to key ports, including London itself. How even to begin the massive job of changing public opinion? Furthermore, nineteen out of twenty Englishmen, and all Englishwomen, were not even allowed to vote. Without this most basic of rights themselves, could they be roused to care about the rights of other people, of a different skin color, an ocean away?

In all of human experience, there was no precedent for such a campaign. ■

SKILL DRILL

WRITE A 1-2 PARAGRAPH SUMMARY OF THIS EXCERPT.

Read through the excerpt again, dividing it into sections as you go. Jot down the main idea or function of each section. (For instance, you might consider the opening through the middle of the first column on page 14 one section, and label it "attitudes about slavery in England in 1700s.") Be sure to be both specific and concise! (So, if you write that the excerpt opens with a presentation of the prevailing attitude toward slavery in England in the late 1700s, be sure to mention what that attitude was, but leave out nonessential details.)

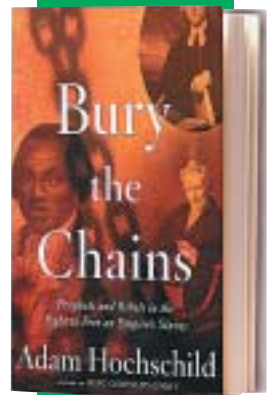


20-Minute Essay

>>TAKE 20 MINUTES

TO PLAN AND WRITE AN ESSAY BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

What does Hochschild mean by the final sentence of the excerpt?



LC Book Club Question

What are some current examples of practices or institutions that some people find acceptable and others find reprehensible?