

The French Abolition Process

Introduction:

Britain, the forerunner of abolition now began to pressure the other European governments to abolish slavery throughout their Empire. France was the first to do on **April 27, 1848**.

France also chose the gradual path.

1. In 1788 the Society for the Abolition of the slave trade was formed. Societe des Amis de Noirs.
2. 1789 a revolution breaks out in France. The following year, the revolutionary government under the ideology of 'liberty, fraternity and equality' declares slavery abolished throughout the empire.
3. In 1791, Haiti's revolution begins.
4. In 1803, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte restores slavery throughout the empire



Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte

5. January 1, 1804, Haiti declares itself independent of France. Slavery is abolished in Haiti.

6. 1818: the French government agrees to end the slave trade. This was not enforced until 1830. She also adopts amelioration.

Amelioration Measures

- (a) No more tax on manumission
- (b) All enslaved MUST be registered
- (c) Branding and mutilation of enslaved prohibited
- (d) Whipping is to be curtailed
- (e) Religious instructions and elementary education must be given to enslaved

7. 1820's and 1830's slave rebellions in Martinique

8. 1834: The Society for the abolition of slavery is formed under the leadership of Victor Schoelcher.

9. Schoelcher is made Under-Secretary for the colonies.

10. 1848- Slavery is abolished throughout the French empire. There is to be no apprenticeship system.

How similar was the path to that taken by Britain? What differences can we find?

Similarities

- The ending of the slave trade as a means of weakening the system of slavery
- Economic factors undermining the profitability of sugar. In both cases Cuban grown sugar and beet sugar caused a decrease in the price of sugar from the French and British colonies.



Sugar Mill in Miranda, Cuba



Transferring Cuban sugar on a train

- Both had organized societies to spearhead the movement
- Both had influential men in parliament to present petitions: Wilberforce and Schoelcher.
- Amelioration proposals were common to both
- The planters reacted violently to the abolition movement in both cases. Different interest groups advanced pro-slavery arguments.
- The Amelioration failed miserably and paved the way for the call for immediate abolition.
- Rebellions played an integral role in speeding up the process. Both governments acted out of fear. Both referred to the example of Haiti.
- The use of education to get public support
- Industrialization created a support base among factory owners and workers and industrialists.
- Political reforms increased support in Parliament for the cause of abolition
- Planters are compensated for the loss of their property.

Differences

- Slavery was abolished and then restored
- One colony wrenched freedom from the Mother Country while slavery was still in force in the others.
- There is the absence of the Missionaries. The French movement was more humanitarian than religious based.
- There is no period of Apprenticeship in the French colonies
- The Mother Country underwent a revolution during the process
- The campaign was largely conducted by one person: Victor Schoelcher.