

Slavery Memorials in the Caribbean

Redemption Song by Laura Facey (2003) in Emancipation Park, Kingston Jamaica.

- The statue takes its name from Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song' and is inscribed with the lyric (originally spoken by Marcus Garvey) 'none but ourselves can free our minds'.
- The artist said of the statue that 'The water washes away the pain, angst and suffering of slavery... The figures rise having transcended the past, standing in strength, unity and reverence.'
- Both Redemption Song and Emancipation Park were to serve as a 'monument to the resilience of Jamaicans who successfully resisted slavery, endured protracted suffering and proved, against all odds, the invincibility of the human spirit' according to Prime Minister P. J. Patterson.
- It was controversial among some conservative and religious Jamaicans for its depiction of nudity in a public space. Others suggested its hypersexuality was a racist trope which had its origins in slavery.



Emancipation or 'Bussa' Statue by Karl Broodhagen (1985) in St Michael, Barbados

- The statue depicts an enslaved man breaking his chains. It is known as the Bussa memorial in memory of the leader of the largest enslaved uprising in Barbados in 1816. The artist Karl Broodhagen originally called it 'Slave in Revolt'.
- The inscription at the bottom reads 'Lick an Lock-up Done Wid, Hurray fuh Jin-Jin [Queen Victoria]. De Queen come from England to set we free Now Lick an Lock-up Done Wid, Hurray fuh Jin-Jin.' This was the chant of the crowds when apprenticeship was abolished in 1838. This is the date that many people in the Caribbean understand as the ending of slavery.
- 'The insurgent spirit embodied in the statue is clear, particularly when compared with the famous icon of the British abolitionist campaign. This abolitionist icon represents the grateful, redeemable and passive figure of a slave that was at the heart of abolitionist thought and expectation, a passivity frequently contested through small and great acts of resistance both during and after slavery. In contrast to the icon's supplicating posture, Barbados's Emancipation Statue is rising from the ground, its arms outstretched, with the chains of slavery broken and its head thrown back in victory...it can be seen to evoke not so much the deliverance of emancipation - freedom granted to enslaved people - but freedom won' (David Lambert, 2007, pp.347-9).



1773 Monument or the Cuffy Monument by Philip Moore (1976), Square of the Revolution, Georgetown, Guyana

- The statue was unveiled three days before the 10th anniversary of Guyanese Independence
- The work celebrates the Guyanese anti-colonial struggle, resistance against, and eventual emancipation from slavery.
- The memorial is dedicated to the memory of Cuffy, an Akan man sold into slavery who led a revolt against the Dutch owners of the Magdalenburg plantation on the Canje River in Berbice (now Guyana). Although the uprising was ultimately unsuccessful, Cuffy's rebellion anticipated the eventual end of slavery in Guyana.
- 'Cuffy is a spirited monument ...it was inspired from a dream the original artist Dr Phillip Alphonso Moore had. The sculpture embodies who we are as a people; he represents our struggles, resilience, defiance, and resistance against every form of slavery. A symbol of struggle and freedom ...Cuffy is testament to unity in action,' Dr David Hinds



‘Spirit of Freedom’ or the Sally Bassett Memorial by Carlos Dowling (2009), Hamilton, Bermuda

- In 2009, to commemorate Bermuda’s 400-year anniversary Bermuda’s first black local Government—the Progressive Labor Party – erected a 10ft tall statue of Sarah (Sally) Bassett, an enslaved woman who was burned at the stake in 1730 having been accused of poisoning several people, including the man who owned her granddaughter. Bassett was depicted as being ‘pregnant with freedom’.
- The monument was controversial with the debate split largely along racial lines. Some white Bermudians claimed the statue celebrated a criminal. For the Black population she represented a freedom fighter.
- Debates about the statue took place in relation to tourism – an important part of the economy. The tourist economy has a racial politics to it and there was a fear that the statue’s uncompromising representation would upset white visitors. The statue has in fact become one of the most popular heritage sites to visit.
- The monument was constructed as part of the PLP’s attempts to nationalize Bermuda’s history through programs such as the African Diaspora Heritage Trail and National Heroes Day.
- ‘The Bassett monument will continue to remind us of her burning memory as long as the legacies of slavery, oppression, and colonialism remain. In doing so, it will continue to generate unavoidable and uncomfortable discussions about an unforgettable history, an absolute freedom fighter, and her legacy of uncompromising resistance’ (Quito Swan, 2012, p. 88).





‘Statue of the Mulatta Solitude’ by Jackie Poulier (1999), Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe

- Born c.1772, Solitude was the daughter of an enslaved African woman who was raped by a sailor during the Middle Passage to the Caribbean. After the abolition of slavery in Guadeloupe in 1794, Solitude joined a maroon community. When Napoleon Bonaparte re-established slavery in the French colonies in 1802, Solitude participated in armed resistance, fighting the French army. She was captured whilst pregnant and sentenced to death. She was executed by hanging the day after the birth of her child.
- In Guadeloupe today Solitude’s name adorns squares, avenues, a library, and a museum room. Her story is remembered in songs, poems, fiction books and the musical Solitude la Marronne.
- According to the UNESCO education project ‘Women in African History’, Solitude ‘symbolizes in Caribbean collective imagination all the unknown women and mothers who courageously fought for equality and freedom from slavery.’
- On 10 May 2022, France’s National Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade, Slavery, and Their Abolition, a new statue of Solitude was erected on the Général Catroux Square in the 17th arrondissement in Paris. The Mayor Anne Hidalgo stated that ‘History and memory are part of our lives’, but that women tended to be the forgotten ones’.