# City of London plaques on slave-trade figures branded superficial smokescreen



The City of London Corporation’s latest attempt at “reinterpreting” its past by installing plaques on statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass is nothing more than window dressing—another smokescreen that sidesteps the real issue: its historical complicity in slavery and ongoing moral failure. This so-called project, “Revealing The City’s Past,” is merely a PR stunt aimed at softening its tarnished legacy, rather than genuinely confronting the economic and ideological foundations that fueled the transatlantic slave trade.

The plaques, placed at Guildhall—the very heart of the City’s authority—attempt to confront the brutal realities behind Beckford and Cass’s wealth. But make no mistake: these figures are emblematic of a sordid history of greed, prejudice, and cruelty that the City of London continues to gloss over. Beckford, a twice-elected Lord Mayor, grew rich off Jamaican plantations sustained by enslaved Africans—a fact the City’s superficial labels choose to acknowledge only after concerted public pressure. Sir John Cass, whose prominence as a merchant and MP was built on the misery of countless exploited lives, remains a hero to the establishment despite the evidence of his true moral character.

This superficial reinterpretation is guided by a handpicked “diverse” steering group, including representatives from various marginally related bodies, but it ultimately serves a predetermined narrative. The inclusion of poets and heritage professionals—such as Rachael Minott and others—appears more as performative tokenism than a meaningful effort to engage with the brutal realities of the slave trade. The digital platform the City Corporation touts as a “deeper exploration” is just another attempt to sanitize history, diminishing the legacy of Caribbean slavery to virtual “bits and bytes” instead of confronting its real impact.

This decision to retain rather than remove the statues is a calculated compromise, a stark reminder that the City prefers to placate calls for symbolism rather than undertake genuine reckoning. After the 2021 uproar—prompted by Black Lives Matter protests—the Corporation’s reversal to keep these monuments is a cynical move driven by government policy, not moral conviction. The “Retain and Explain” approach allows them to preserve their historical icons while paying lip service to “context,” rather than facing the uncomfortable truth about their complicity and ongoing influence.

Prominent officials talk about “educating future generations,” but they are really just delaying the day of honest reckoning. The statues, symbols of “prejudice, cruelty, and greed,” as one committee chair admitted, continue to glint in the shadows of history—untouched, unchallenged. The superficial plaques and curated narratives cannot excuse the fundamental injustice of celebrating figures intertwined with the brutal slave trade, nor should they serve to diminish the moral urgency of addressing the City’s dark past.

Links to Culture&’s involvement—though presented as an “inclusive” effort—are more about optics than substance. While cultural ambassadors claim to increase understanding, the overarching agenda remains clear: sanitizing uncomfortable truths to preserve London’s brand as a global financial hub built on exploitation. Their assurances of “increased understanding” do little to hide the reality that London’s history of slavery is woven into its very fabric as a city that thrived on theft, prejudice, and greed.

This staged effort to “manage” our shared history exemplifies how the powers that be prefer to keep monuments intact—symbolic relics of a past they refuse to fully confront—while compartmentalizing the truth in sanitized narratives designed to appease public discontent without causing real change. It’s a power play that continues to marginalize those who suffer the consequences of this legacy, all under the guise of “education” and “inclusivity.” Meanwhile, the City remains comfortably tucked away from accountability, insisting on superficial acknowledgements instead of true justice.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/project-to-reinterpret-slave-trader-statues-in-london-launched/a583030764.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-66806354> - The BBC reports that the City of London Corporation has unveiled plaques on statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass, acknowledging their involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The plaques aim to provide historical context and reflect the Corporation's commitment to addressing its past. The project, titled 'Revealing The City’s Past,' includes contributions from artists and poets, and features a digital platform for further exploration of the City's history with slavery.
3. <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-statues-with-links-to-slavery-to-be-retained-and-contextualised/> - According to the City of London Corporation's news release, the Court of Common Council voted to retain statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass, opting to contextualise them with plaques detailing their links to the slave trade. This decision aligns with the Corporation's commitment to equality, inclusivity, and diversity, aiming to acknowledge and address the legacy of the City's past involvement in slavery.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-55753101> - The BBC reports that the City of London Corporation announced plans to remove statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass from the Guildhall due to their links to the transatlantic slave trade. The decision was made following nationwide Black Lives Matter protests, marking a significant step towards an inclusive and diverse City.
5. <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/slavery-statues-in-city-of-london-to-be-removed> - The City of London Corporation's news release states that statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass, both linked to the transatlantic slave trade, will be removed and re-sited. The Corporation plans to set up a working group to oversee the removal and consider commissioning a new memorial to the slave trade in the City.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-58833814> - The BBC reports that the City of London Corporation has decided to retain statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass, opting to contextualise them with plaques detailing their links to the transatlantic slave trade. This decision aims to educate the public about the City's historical involvement in slavery.
7. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/10/08/city-of-london-u-turn-on-historic-statues> - The Art Newspaper reports that the City of London Corporation has reversed its previous decision to remove statues of William Beckford and Sir John Cass. Instead, the Corporation will retain the statues and place plaques alongside them to provide contextual information about their links to the transatlantic slave trade, aligning with the UK government's 'retain and explain' approach.