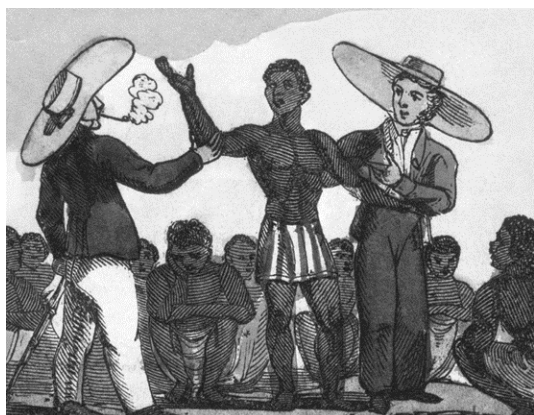


Books and arts



Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution. By Simon Schama.

Black and white – and red all over

Britain's best-known historian examines a turning point in the history of slavery – and the fight for American independence

- 1 NATIONS need luck in their historians, as with everything else, and in Simon Schama, Britain – not to mention America, where he lives and works – has hit the jackpot. It must have been tempting to follow his panoramic “A History of Britain”, the three volumes of which dominated the bestseller lists in 2000 and beyond, and made him into Britain’s national storyteller, with more from the lucrative mainstream. The book trade would surely have opened up acres of space for Mr Schama on Victoria, on Churchill, on Lincoln.
- 2 But he has done no such thing. On the contrary, Mr Schama has deployed his celebrity in the service of an episode which did not even rate a

footnote in his earlier work – the noble but half-baked attempt to plant a colony of freed American slaves in Sierra Leone at the end of the American war of independence in 1776. Anyone who felt that his “A History of Britain” skipped a little lightly over the empire’s adventures overseas (leaving some ugly national skeletons unrattled in the process) 29. Like a stealthy chef, Mr Schama was pocketing truffles for his own later use.

- 3 He was also returning to the form of vibrant and cosmopolitan narrative which entitled him to write “A History of Britain” in the first place. His first book, “The Embarrassment of Riches” (1987), was a meticulous and witty account of Holland’s artistic golden age in the 17th century; “Citizens”, his next work, was a storming narration of the French revolution, a bloodbath which generations of abstract ideologues had managed to drain of blood. Now, once again, his articulate intelligence plays elegantly over a saga full of grim twists. There are heroes and cowards, fools, chancers and baffled victims. The doomed migration from Nova Scotia to Africa is gripping and vivid. It stinks of putrid flesh and maggots, tar and rope, chains and broken promises.
- 4 The story of the freed American slaves is not quite unknown, but neither is it well known. British history has rarely dwelt on the loss of its colonies across the Atlantic (preferring to celebrate victories), and until recently has been happy to draw a veil over the horrors of slavery (“ghastly business – the less said about it the better”). But this terrific story straddles some very large

contemporary concerns: the roots of transatlantic racism, and the ugly wrench that inspired the special relationship between Britain and America.

5 At the height of the conflict, Britain guaranteed freedom to any slave who fought for the king against George Washington's slave-owning rebels. And in 1772, in London, Lord Mansfield, nudged by the advocacy of Granville Sharp, an abolitionist, judged that Africans could not be transported against their will. It sounded good. Thousands of slaves, lacking a better offer, joined the king's cause.

6 It goes without saying that Britain's pledge was issued with only token expectation that it would need to be honoured – victory would surely render it irrelevant. But military incompetence and American resolve turned it into a disquieting political reality. After much smudging, a liberal haven was marked out in Sierra Leone.

African-Americans began to go "home".

7 It was 34 from the start; what began as a rescue mission was later seen as a "racist deportation". As revolutionary echoes from France made London's potentates tremble, cargoes of ex-slaves were dumped on a malarial strip of impossible land. Some were seized as slaves again; others, in an even more horrid reverse, became slavers themselves. It was the only business they knew.

8 With dash and cunning, Mr Schama follows his leading characters into the shadow that falls across his story. "Histories never conclude," he writes. "They just pause." If it is true that history is not the past – merely what we have now instead of the past – then we must tip our caps to Mr Schama for reminding us of the grotesque events whose scars still sting today.

The Economist, 2005

Tekst 8 Black and white – and red all over

- “But he has done no such thing.” (paragraph 2)
- 1p 28 What is meant?
- A Mr Schama has not chosen another subject of major historical interest.
 - B Mr Schama has not done what his publishers urged him to do.
 - C Mr Schama has not let his success go to his head.
- 1p 29 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 2?
- A may have been wrong
 - B now knows why
 - C will be disappointed
- 1p 30 What is the main point made in paragraph 3?
- A Mr Schama fills each subject that he treats with new life.
 - B Mr Schama has made history a popular and accessible subject.
 - C Mr Schama’s books have a recurrent theme of rebellion against riches and oppression.
 - D Mr Schama’s wide choice of subjects shows his erudition and lively imagination.
- 1p 31 What does paragraph 4 draw attention to?
- A The continued existence of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic.
 - B The effect that the disclosures in Mr Schama’s book have on worldwide relationships.
 - C The fact that feelings of guilt about the past still play a part in present-day British politics.
 - D The relevance of the story of the American slaves to present-day issues.
- “Britain’s pledge” (eerste zin alinea 6)
- 1p 32 Wat hield deze in?
- “a disquieting political reality” (alinea 6)
- 1p 33 Voor wie was deze realiteit verontrustend?
- 1p 34 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 7?
- A a criminal plan
 - B a disastrous enterprise
 - C a military failure
 - D an audacious undertaking
- “the grotesque events whose scars still sting today” (laatste regel)
- 1p 35 In welke alinea wordt de pijn van deze littekens aan de orde gesteld?
Noteer het nummer van deze alinea.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.