



Press Release

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New online exhibition opens up 300 years of Caribbean history

Caribbean Histories Revealed, a new online exhibition from The National Archives, launches on Tuesday 6 March. The exhibition traces the history of the British Caribbean through Colonial Office records from the 17th century to 1926. From maps and photographs, to letters and petitions, it brings to life over 300 years of life in the Caribbean.

The launch of this new resource marks the culmination of 'Your Caribbean Heritage', a three-year cataloguing project at The National Archives, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project has created 125,000 new online record descriptions relating to the Caribbean, making the documents more easily accessible to a wider audience through The National Archives' catalogue.

The online exhibition gives a historical overview of the Caribbean through a series of topics including:

- The transatlantic slave trade
- Struggles against slavery and colonialism
- Everyday life
- Political conflicts
- The role of West Indian soldiers in the First World War

These topics are discussed under six themes, each illustrated by documents carefully selected among the vast amount of newly catalogued records.

The award-winning novelist Andrea Levy, best known for *Small Island*, says: "It is fascinating, and very gratifying, to see the historical records of the Caribbean becoming more accessible to ordinary people. The on-line exhibition makes a great starting point for anyone interested in researching this part of Britain's heritage. I hope the archive will grow into a rich and much-used resource."

One of the documents featured in **Caribbean Histories Revealed** is a letter from G. Jenner, British Minister at Bogata, expressing concern for the treatment of Caribbean workers on the Panama Canal in 1895 (National Archives File reference CO/284/16):

"They number upwards of 6,000 and without their assistance the Panama Canal cannot be proceeded with. Nevertheless, although I have spoken frequently on the subject, I do not see that any steps have been taken by the Central Government to secure them better treatment at the hands of the local Authorities."

Dr Gemma Romain, researcher at The National Archives, who took part in the project said: "'Your Caribbean Heritage' has been an important opportunity for us to investigate a wealth of information held at The National Archives. Throughout this huge project, we have come across

thousands of fascinating documents offering significant insights into the history of the Caribbean. The website, **Caribbean Histories Revealed**, highlights some of the most interesting documents, and is a great online resource for finding out more about this part of world history.“

To find out more visit: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/caribbeanhistory. For further information, image requests and interviews please contact **S everine Gould**, press officer on +44 (0) 20 8392 5277 (severine.gould@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

Notes to editors

1. About the project

- The 'Your Caribbean Heritage' project and the ensuing **Caribbean Histories Revealed** website will be launched on Tuesday 6 March at an event organised by Louise Ellman MP, Dawn Butler MP, and The National Archives and will take place at the Houses of Parliament.
- 'Your Caribbean Heritage' is a three-year cataloguing and outreach project at The National Archives, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which comes to an end in March 2007.
- Examples of the newly created records can be found by searching The National Archives catalogue for Colonial Office (CO) documents, including CO 37 (Bermuda), CO 318 (West Indies), CO 101 (Grenada) or CO 137 (Jamaica).
- The on-line exhibition and launch was organised in conjunction with Lifelong Learning at The National Archives.

2. About The National Archives

The National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, is a government department; and also an executive agency of the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs. Over 600 staff work in Kew, in Norwich, at Admiralty Arch in central London and at the Family Records Centre in Islington. The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also www.opsi.gov.uk

The National Archives is at the heart of information policy – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record. **The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive**, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible.

The vision of The National Archives is to:

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone