

## WILLIAM WILBERFORCE... HISTORY'S MOST UNDERRATED FIGURE? (Continued)

William Wilberforce was born in 1759, at a time in Great Britain when being a "do gooder" was not necessarily the "cool" thing to be. By the time he died in 1833 this had completely changed; and he was the man who led this change. The example of his life and his life's work fighting Britain's social ills and working on behalf of the underdog would change the societal landscape where by the time of his death, it would be "cool" to do good in Britain. It would be "cool" to work on behalf of the underdog.

Wilberforce's example would ensure that in the future Britain would, utilizing its power, take seriously its responsibility to help lift up the unfortunates of the world. In fact in Victorian England as well as the United States and elsewhere in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there would be an explosion of movements formed to do good works, heal societies' social ills, and to help lift up the world's underdogs.

Given Great Britain's power and influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I believe it is not an overstatement to say that this remarkable development in our world toward more sensitivity to the poor and the less fortunate owed its emergence and existence to the life of William Wilberforce.

Here are some quotes that I think tell the tale:

**Acton Institute:** On William Wilberforce's influence: "*His efforts made goodness fashionable once again in England, and laid the foundations for the great moral revival of the Victorian period.*"

**Oz Guinness (Oxford Scholar):** Referred to William Wilberforce as "*the greatest reformer in history*".

**Robert Southey (Britain's Poet Laureate from 1813 – 1843),** in addressing Wilberforce: "*The House of Commons will not look upon your like again.*"

**Eric Metaxas (Wilberforce biographer):** "*Taken all together, it's difficult to escape the verdict that William Wilberforce was simply the greatest social reformer in the history of the world. Wilberforce presided over a social earthquake that rearranged the continents and whose magnitude we are only now beginning to fully appreciate.*"

### Last Thoughts

William Wilberforce was a great man. He not only passed down a great legacy to the world that inherited the fruits of his work, he also influenced many in his own times, and many who came after him - historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, Henry David Thoreau, Fredrick Douglas, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Abraham Lincoln to name a few. Also, Wilberforce University in Ohio – the oldest Black college in the United States – was named after him.

Our times could use a William Wilberforce or two. What a treat that would be!

But maybe the best thing to take away from the William Wilberforce story is for us, the little guys, to be inspired by and learn from the example of his life. I think the example Wilberforce gives us is universal, whether we are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Atheist, etc.

He fought with conviction and he fought relentlessly. He fought with integrity. He fought against impossible odds and against tremendous economic interests in order to right the wrongs of his times. He thought not of himself but of his duty to a higher purpose. Though the goals he set for his life were impossible goals to reach, he never quit. Eventually, and miraculously, he would reach these impossible goals!

I think maybe William Wilberforce said it best himself:

*"It is the true duty of every man to promote the happiness of his fellow creatures to the utmost of his power."*

Jeff Jentgen  
President  
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SPRING 2011

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*From Jeff:*

I read and study a lot of history. I'm nerdish that way. I gravitate to figures in history that were principled, had guts and sacrificed tirelessly to make the world better for us - the people who came after them. Jesus, Paul, Martin Luther, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Gandhi, Mother Teresa – these are some of the figures from history that inspire me.

But one relatively unknown man, William Wilberforce, may be at the top for me. He is one of the most underrated in the pantheon of great historical figures. Because his life was fascinating and important, and because he doesn't get his due, I felt a quick sketch of his life would be a worthwhile subject to write about in this issue of Fostrian's newsletter.

Changing direction, Fostrian Business Capital is well capitalized and continues to provide factoring and asset based credit lines to financially stressed/emerging small businesses. Fostrian has been working with various banks in helping them better position themselves with their struggling clients and/or clients that have outgrown their bank credit lines and need capital to expand. Banks are also using Fostrian as a tool to help them in establishing new client relationships – Fostrian and the bank team up, with the bank taking on the clients' deposits, and Fostrian providing a credit line. If you would like to learn more about Fostrian's services, please feel free to give me a call.

Spring is here!

# WILLIAM WILBERFORCE... HISTORY'S MOST UNDERRATED FIGURE?

It was February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1807, and the life's work of William Wilberforce to abolish the slave trade was about to come to fruition. At 4 am, Britain's House of Commons voted - Ayes, 283; Noes, 16; a majority of 267 to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain. Soon after this historic day the world would follow; something that only 25 years earlier would have been unthinkable.

As Wilberforce's biographer John Pollock described it:

*"the House rose almost to a man and turned towards Wilberforce in a burst of Parliamentary cheers. Suddenly, above the roar of 'Hear, hear,' and quite out of order, three hurrahs echoed and echoed - while he sat, head bowed, tears streaming down his face."*

Twenty-six years later on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1833 Britain would outlaw slavery itself throughout its empire. William Wilberforce at this time was aged and a very sick man. Upon hearing of this news, he was finally able to enjoy the peace that came from knowing that the ultimate goal of his 46 years of labor had been reached. He would die 3 days later.

Slavery had been abolished throughout the entire British Empire which covered much of the world at the time. Britain would go on to work against and fight slavery around the globe throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the precedent set by Great Britain, France would abolish slavery 15 years later, Argentina in 1853, the U.S. in 1865, Brazil in 1888 and China in 1910. The Russian Empire would free its serfs in 1861.

The fire against world slavery that had been set by William Wilberforce had spread from his own Great Britain and would engulf the world. Within a century after his death slavery would virtually be eliminated from the globe.

But amazingly, leading the world's assault on slavery was just one half of William Wilberforce's legacy to those of us that came after him. Wilberforce himself stated: *"God has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the Slave Trade and the reformation of manners."* He would devote himself, along with the abolition of slavery, to his "second great object" - the "reformation of manners" – in other words (in today's parlance).... he would work against every other lesser social ill in the Great Britain of his time. Wilberforce would be just as successful in this venture as he was in his work against slavery.

William Wilberforce was a Christian with conviction. The England he was born into scoffed at serious Christians. Serious Christians were stigmatized and became societal outcasts. Wilberforce's own mother, who had sent William at age 8 to live with his Aunt and Uncle, upon learning that her 12 year old son was becoming deeply spiritual as a result of the influence of his Aunt and Uncle, pulled him from them. She would allow these committed Christians to have no further influence over her son. She would do her best to exorcise this spirituality that had "infected" her son. She would be somewhat successful as Wilberforce would become quite worldly in his young adult years. But her success would be temporary. Wilberforce's spiritual seeds had been planted and at the age of 25 they again would germinate. He underwent his "great change" and dedicated the balance of his life to serving God and God's children; regardless of what his upper class peers would think of him.

William Wilberforce did not get caught up in the pomp, tediousness and falseness of the religion of 18<sup>th</sup> century England. On the contrary he would dedicate his life to the heart of the Gospel - to "love your neighbor as yourself" and to "do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Wilberforce would take these Christian edicts to heart, and would successfully push Britain to do the same. Britain, being the great dominant power at the time with a worldwide empire, would have great influence on what went on across the globe. Thus William Wilberforce's life would change the world.

## First Great Object

When William Wilberforce first entered Britain's House of Commons in 1780, abolishing slavery was virtually unthinkable. Slavery had existed as long as civilization had existed. Slavery was an accepted institution around the world. The peoples of virtually every great empire in history utilized



slaves with zero compunction. Peoples throughout history considered slavery economically necessary and even morally defensible. Slavery was part of the fabric of life and the way of the world when William Wilberforce came onto the scene. It had always been.

Wilberforce changed all this. Together with his allies they toiled for 46 years to rid the world of slavery. They worked relentlessly, against setback after setback after setback until they were victorious.

Wilberforce himself was a lively wit, a human being with immense charm and a fabulous orator. He harnessed these gifts and led the assault against slavery in Parliament. Others toiled outside of Parliament but William Wilberforce was the leader.

The fruit of Wilberforce's work was one of the most amazing transformations in human history. Great Britain would end the slave trade in 1807 followed by outlawing slavery altogether in 1833. Great Britain was the world's great power at the time. It possessed a worldwide empire and thus had great influence across the globe. Britain not only outlawed slavery in its empire, but fought against slavery thereafter all over the world. It signed anti-slavery pacts with 50 African rulers, and its powerful navy would police the world's seas against the slave trade. The result of these actions, and Britain's moral stand and influence in the world, was that the world would follow Great Britain's lead, and within a century, the planet would be virtually free of its cancer called slavery.

Think about this! Slavery had existed forever - had been accepted virtually across the board by all humans as an acceptable element of human life - and in the (relatively speaking) wink of an eye, human beings' views on slavery had been transformed, resulting in slavery being wiped off the face of the planet.

This is a remarkable occurrence in human history!

And William Wilberforce led the way.

## Second Great Object

Maybe no less remarkable was Wilberforce's accomplishments with respect to his "second great object" – the abolition of every other "lesser social ill" in Britain.

The time in which Wilberforce lived was a period where life in Britain was extraordinarily callous, decadent, brutal and violent. It was a time of rampant degeneracy. Alcoholism, child prostitution, public executions for petty crimes, public dissections, public burnings of the executed..... all of these things were endemic to Great Britain and flourishing when William Wilberforce came onto the scene. He would work tirelessly to fight against these social ills and would make much progress in their eradication.

Maybe even more important and a greater accomplishment than the specific good works Wilberforce carried out, was his influence over the miraculous change that swept over the societal landscape with respect to how society viewed charitable work and its role in promulgating philanthropy.

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