

**Mary Prince’s Prior Knowledge**

1. Mary was born in 1787 in Bermuda into an enslaved family. As a child, she was sold along with her mother to Captain George Darrell and given to his granddaughter Betsey as a ‘gift’.
2. She knows she was sold again when she was 15, at auction for £57 (Bermudian currency). At that point she was separated from her family.
3. She knows she was then sent to Grand Turk, another Caribbean island, where she was sold again at auction for £100 (Bermudian currency).
4. She knows she worked as a slave there in terrible conditions in the salt ponds up to her knees in water. She knows she was often forced to work up to seventeen hours straight. She was often flogged and beaten.
5. She knows that in 1815, she was sold for a fourth time, to John Adams Wood who purchased her for £100 (Bermudian currency).
6. She knows she went with him to Antigua and worked in his household as a domestic slave, attending his wife, nursing a young child, and washing clothes.
7. She knows she began to suffer from rheumatism, which often left her unable to work. She was given no help through her illness and was often flogged and beaten.
8. She knows she joined the Moravian Church (a form of Protestantism) where she learned to read.
9. She knows that in 1826 she married Daniel James in the Moravian Church. She knows Daniel was a former slave who had managed to buy his freedom. The English church did not allow slaves to marry free men.
10. She knows that when her owners, the Adams Wood family, moved to London in 1828, she came with them.
11. She knows Mr and Mrs Woods continued to be cruel to her, often flogging and beating her when she was too ill to work and threatening to abandon her in England, where she would be free but completely alone.
12. She knows she eventually ran away and took shelter with the Moravian church in London. She then met Abolitionist Thomas Pringle who tried to help free her from her owner, Adams Wood, so that she could return to Antigua.
13. She knows she currently cannot return to Antigua to rejoin her husband and friends because outside England she is still owned by Adams Wood, who has now returned to Antigua. He refuses either to free her from slavery or sell her to anyone else.
14. She knows, in 1830, she is now working happily in the household of Thomas Pringle and his wife as a trusted paid servant.
15. She knows that Thomas Pringle has introduced her to Susannah Strickland who is helping her to document her life story.

**Mary Prince’s Speech**

These words spoken in 1830 and published in January 1831 in a booklet about her life story. The Slavery Abolition Act was enacted in August 1833.

-1-

I am often much vexed, and I feel great sorrow when I hear some people in this country say, that the slaves do not need better usage, and do not want to be free. They believe the foreign[[1]](#footnote-1) people who deceive them, and say slaves are happy. I say, Not so.

-2-

How can slaves be happy when they have the halter round their neck and the whip upon their back? And are disgraced and thought no more of than beasts? And are separated from their mothers, and husbands, and children, and sisters, just as cattle are sold and separated?

-3-

Since I have been here I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feeling of shame, I think, since they can see and do such things.

-4-

They tie up slaves like hogs—moor[[2]](#footnote-2) them up like cattle, and they lick[[3]](#footnote-3) them, so as hogs, or cattle, or horses never were flogged - and yet they come home and say, and make some good people believe, that slaves don't want to get out of slavery. But they put a cloak about the truth. It is not so.

-5-

All slaves want to be free—to be free is very sweet. I have been a slave myself—I know what slaves feel—I can tell by myself what other slaves feel, and by what they have told me. The man that says slaves be quite happy in slavery—that they don't want to be free—that man is either ignorant or a lying person. I never heard a slave say so. I never heard a Buckra[[4]](#footnote-4) man say so, till I heard tell of it in England. Such people ought to be ashamed of themselves.

-6-

They can't do without slaves, they say. What's the reason they can't do without slaves as well as in England? No slaves here—no whips—no stocks—no punishment, except for wicked people. They hire servants in England; and if they don't like them, they send them away. They can't lick them. Let them work ever so hard in England, they are far better off than slaves. If they get a bad master, they give warning and go hire to[[5]](#footnote-5) another. They have their liberty. That's just what we want.

-7-

We don't mind hard work, if we had proper treatment, and proper wages like English servants, and proper time given in the week to keep us from breaking the Sabbath. But they won't give it. They will have work—work—work, night and day, sick or well, till we are quite done up; and we must not speak up nor look amiss, however much we be abused.

-8-

And then when we are quite done up, who cares for us, more than for a lame horse? This is slavery. I tell it, to let English people know the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God, and call loud to the great King of England, till all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore.

**Weblinks for further research**

* UK Parliament’s [digital book on Influential Black Britons](https://assets-learning.parliament.uk/uploads/2020/09/Influential-Black-Britons-book.pdf)
* [Google doodle](https://www.google.com/doodles/mary-princes-230th-birthday)
* Video on [The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/mary-prince-who-british-slavery-memoir-author-abolition-history-google-doodle-a8562706.html)
* [Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/the-slave-trade-and-abolition/sites-of-memory/ending-slavery/women-against-slavery/)
* [The British Library](https://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/campaignforabolition/abolitionbackground/biogs/greatcampaigners.html)

1. West Indian settlers [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fasten or tie [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. whip [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. white [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. get hired by [↑](#footnote-ref-5)