

Queen Elizabeth Orders "Blackamoors" Deported to Spain and Portugal (1596, 1601)

While the English became heavily involved in the slave trade, and became the owners of the world's largest population of slaves in the American colonies, African slavery remained a minor institution on the British islands themselves. In this series of edicts, Queen Elizabeth orders London merchants to return all "Blackamoors" to Spain and Portugal, ridding the country at once of a group of "infidels" and relieving the suffering poor of England of their competition for labor. In return for the slaves, she also hoped to receive back from Spain a number of English prisoners captured during their recent hostilities.

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UK National Archives, PC 2/21, f. 306 (18 July 1596)

An open warrant tot he L[ord] Maiour of London and to all other vyceadmyralles, Maiours and other publicke officers whatsoever to whom yt may appertaine. Whereas Casper van Senden a merchant of Lubeck did by his labor and travell procure 89 of her Ma[jesty's] subiectes that were detayned prisoners in Spaine and Portugall to be released, and brought them hither into this Realme at his owne cost and charges, for the w[hi]ch his expences and declaration of his honest minde towards those prizoners, he only desireth to have lycense to take up so many Blackamoors here in this Realme and to transport them into Spaine and Portugall. Her Ma[jes]ty in regard of the charitable affection the supli[ant] hath shewed being a stranger to worke the delivery of our contrymen that were there in great misery and thraldom and to bring them home to their native contry, and that the same could not be don w[i]thout great expence and also considering the reasonableness of his requestes to transport so many Blackamoors from hence doth thincke yt a very good exchange and that those kinde of people may be well spared in this Realme being so populous and nombers of hable persons the subiects of the land and xpian [Christian] people that perishe for want of service, whereby through their labor they might be mayntained. They are therefore in their L[ordshi]ps' name req[ui]red to aide and assist him to take up suche Blackamores as he shall finde w[i]thin this Realme w[i]th consent of their masters, who we doubt not considering her Ma[jesty's] good pleasure to have those kindes of people sent out of the lande & the good deserving of the stranger towards her Ma[jesty's] subiectes, and that they shall doe charitable and like Christians rather to be served by their owne contrymen then with those kynde of people, will yilde those in their possession to him.

Second official proclamation:

WHEREAS the Queen's majesty, tendering the good and welfare of her own natural subjects, greatly distressed in these hard times of dearth, is highly discontented to understand the great number of Negroes and blackamoors which (as she is informed) are carried into this realm since the troubles between her highness and the King of Spain; who are fostered and powered here, to the great annoyance of her own liege people that which covet the relief which these people consume, as also for that the most of them are infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel: hath given a special commandment that the said kind of people shall be with all speed avoided and discharged out of this her majesty's realms; and to that end and purpose hath appointed Casper van Senden, merchant of Lubeck, for their speedy transportation, a man that hath somewhat deserved of this realm in respect that by his own labor and charge he hath relieved and brought from Spain divers of our English nation who otherwise would have perished there.

These shall therefore be to will and require you and every of you to aid and assist the said Casper van Senden or his assignees to taking such Negroes and blackamoors to be transported as aforesaid as he shall find within the realm of England; and if there shall be any person or persons which be possessed of any such blackamoors that refuse to deliver them in sort aforesaid, then we require you to call them before you and to advise and persuade them by all good means to satisfy her majesty's pleasure therein; which if they shall eftsoons willfully and obstinately refuse, we pray you to certify their names to us, to the end her majesty may take such further course therein as it shall seem best in her princely wisdom.