

Narration for 'Living in the Wake of the *Lust for Sugar*'

James is my last name,
A reminder of the cruellest, most brutal,
And the darkest time in human history.

However, as I stand here,
I stand not just as I,
But also, as We.

We, the spirits of those who were enslaved.
And We, the spirits of those who were enslaved, who did not survive,
The holding,
The middle passage,
The plantation life,
Or the plantation torture.

And so, We have returned to this location,
And here, We witness how our brother's and sister's story is
recounted and displayed in this setting.
For they are living in this wake,
In this wake of the lust for sugar.

Our hearts are heavy.

We ask ...
Who was permitted to tell our story in this setting?
Who signed it off?
Who controls the narrative?

We sense so much is missing,
And so much seems to be deflected.



The History of Mary Prince by Mary Prince (1831)

My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently that I pressed
my hands quite tightly across my breast,
But I could not keep it still,
And it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body.
I was soon surrounded by strange men who examined and handled me,
In the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was
about to purchase,
And who talked about my shape and size in like words,
As if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts.
I was then put up for sale.

When the sale was over, my mother hugged and kissed us,
And mourned over us, begging us to keep a good heart,
And do our duty to our new masters.
It was a sad parting,
One went one way, one another,
And our poor mammy went home with nothing.



It was night when I reached my new home.
The house was large and built at the bottom of a very high hill,
But I couldn't see much of it that night,
I saw too much of it afterwards,
The stones and the timber were the best things in it,
They were not so hard as the hearts of the owners.

My mistress often robbed me, too, of the hours that belong to sleep.
She used to sit up very late, frequently until morning,
And I had to then, to stand at a bench,
And wash during the greater part of the night,
Or pick wool or cotton,
And often, I have dropped down,
Overcome by sleep and fatigue,

Till roused from a state of stupor by the whip,
And forced to start up to my tasks.

I lay down at night,
And I rose up in the morning,
In fear and sorrow,
And often wished I could escape from this cruel bondage,
And be at rest in the grave.

My new master Mr D was usually quite calm.
He would stand by and give orders for a slave to be cruelly whipped,
And assist in the punishment,
Without moving a muscle in his face,
Walking about and taking snuff with the greatest composure.
Nothing could touch his hard heart,
Neither sighs, nor tears, nor prayers, nor streaming blood,
He was deaf to our cries,
And careless of our sufferings.

Mr D had often stripped me naked,
Hung me up by the wrists,
And beat me with a cow skin,
With his own hand,
Till my body was raw with gashes.

He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked,
And ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water.
This was worse to me than all the licks.
Sometimes when he called me to wash him,
I would not come,
My eyes were so full of shame.

He would then come to beat me.

Where to learn more

- ElsaJames.com
- DecolonisingtheArchive.com (University of Repair)
- *The History of Mary Prince by Mary Prince* (1831)
- *Reading the London Sugar & Slavery gallery* (2007), Caroline Bressey and Tom Wareham
- *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christine Sharpe
- *Illustration of Beatings* (1849), Everett Collection Inc