

The Guardian confesses its sins. It is better for it, a...

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I would not normally quote a piece from a newspaper as long as this, but I do today. It comes from the Guardian's morning newsletter:

The story of the Manchester Guardian began in 1821, in the aftermath of [the Peterloo massacre](#), when working people rallying for political reform were killed by the troops sent to disperse them. It was founded with the financial backing of a group of middle-class radicals who shared founding editor John Edward Taylor's commitment to enlightenment values, liberty, and justice.

That is a true story. But it is also an incomplete one. Yesterday, the Scott Trust – which owns the Guardian today – [published a report](#) which excavates a far darker aspect of the newspaper's history.

The report sets out the evidence that, even as Taylor led a newspaper which favoured the abolition of slavery, he profited from the labour of enslaved people through the cotton trade. It also reveals that at least nine of his 11 backers had similar ties – and one of them co-owned an estate in Jamaica where more than 100 people were enslaved. Now the Scott Trust [has apologised](#) “for the part the Guardian and its founders had in this crime against humanity”, and allocated more than £10m to a decade-long restorative justice programme.

Meanwhile, the Guardian has published the first part of [Cotton Capital](#), a series that traces the story from its origins in 19th-century Manchester to its consequences today.

This video is well worth watching:



In it, Prof David Olusoga, who is a Scott Trustee, and therefore one of those with responsibility for publishing the Guardian, admits his own previous blindness to its history.

He suggests that the Guardian has an “unpayable debt”. In [the video](#), he reflects on why the work of seeking redemption is an obligation nonetheless. “That reality can’t be negotiated with, it can’t be explained away,” he says. “This history can never be solved. It can never be remedied. But something good can come from it.”

I applaud the Guardian for addressing this issue.

It is appropriate that it acknowledge its own deep failings on this issue in its past.

The acknowledgement that abuse and exploitation has occurred does not wipe the slate clean. The harm cannot be undone. But acknowledgement begins a process. Nothing happens without that.

The Guardian will, no doubt, be accused of being ‘woke’ by those on the right. Thank goodness, I say. Isn’t awareness of systemic abuse and a desire to eradicate its consequences essential for our current wellbeing? If not, why not? That is the question the right will not answer.