

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### William Wilberforce: the great emancipator

by [Keith Windschuttle](#)

On *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* by William Hague.

In March 2007, on the two-hundredth anniversary of the British parliament's decision to abolish the slave trade, there was a flurry of contention in the letters pages of several newspapers and blogs. The points at issue were whether the British had really been the first in the world to take such action and whether the parliamentarian William Wilberforce deserved as much credit as he was then getting in the news media. Those taking umbrage were members of the political Left, who were determined to insist their side always led the way in the progress and liberation of the downtrodden. They claimed the first to abolish slavery were actually the Jacobins of the French Revolution in 1794, thirteen years before the British. The last thing they wanted to concede was that one of the greatest single blows ever struck in the history of human freedom had been initiated and enacted by a conservative, middle-class Englishman heading a political movement of eva ...

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