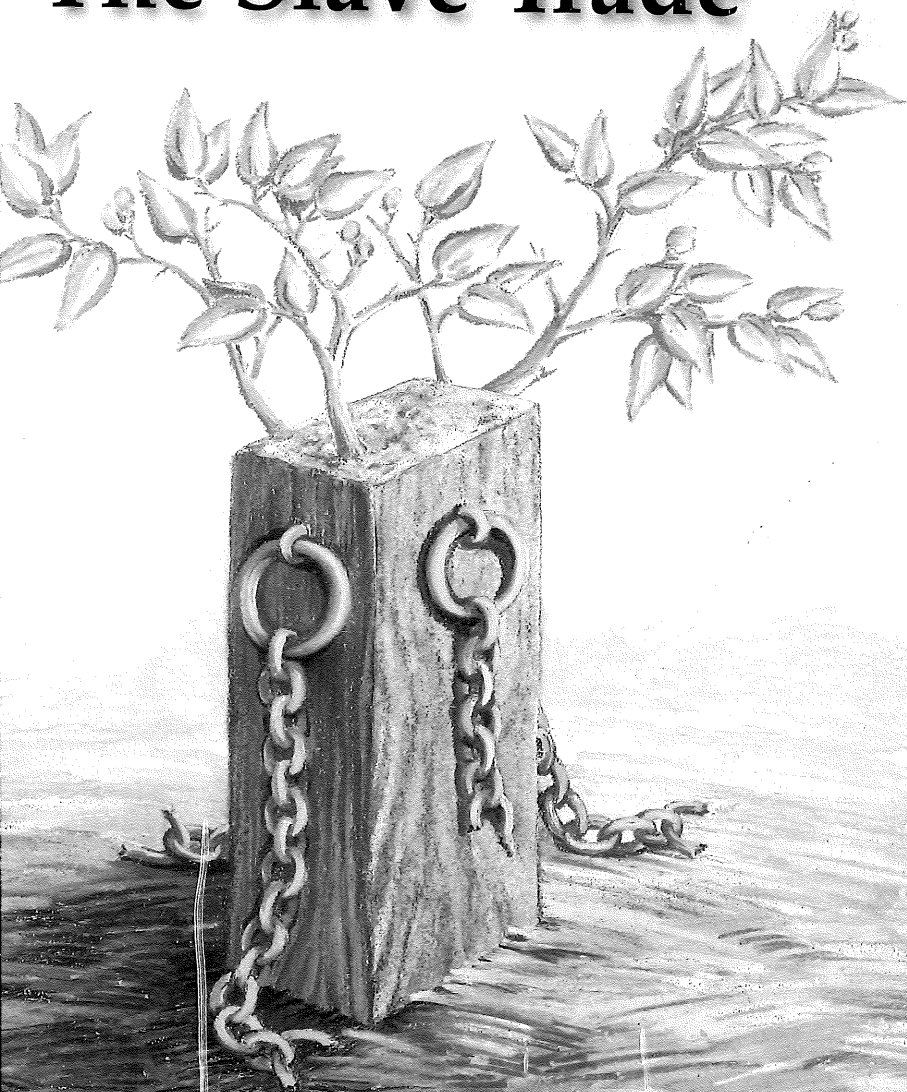




United Nations
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TELL ME ABOUT ...

The Slave Trade



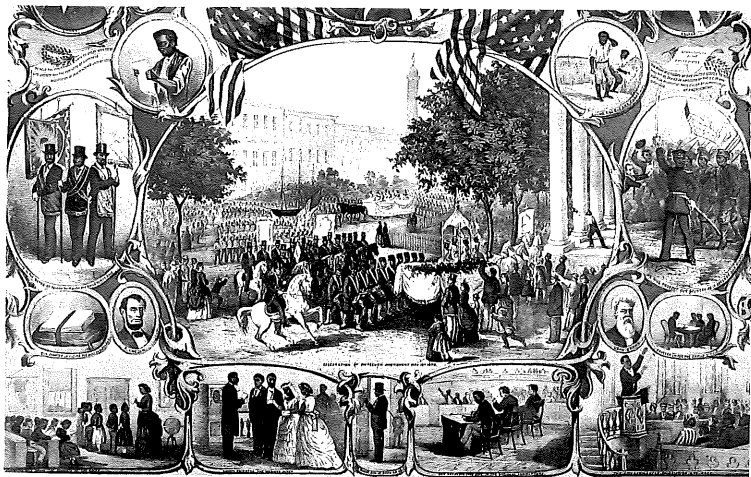
Discovering the World series

UNESCO Publishing

1800, Nat
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aves.

In the United States, although northern states had little-by-little banned slavery, in part under the influence of the Quakers, the southern, cotton-producing states lived off slavery and obstinately refused to put an end to it.

Plantation owners had bought large numbers of slaves in Cuba after 1815 and had encouraged them to have as many children as possible. By 1860 they numbered close to 4 million. But a press campaign carried out by William Lloyd Garrison in the newspaper *The Abolitionist*, and the great slave revolt led by Nat Turner in 1831 (Turner terrorized the South before being hung in Virginia with fifty-four other slaves), followed by further revolts in 1842 and 1851, convinced President Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation on 3 January 1863, abolishing slavery in all states that had seceded from the Union.



Memorial of the adoption of the Constitution's 13th amendment
abolishing slavery (19 May 1870)

But it was not until the North's victory in the Civil War that the thirteenth amendment of the United States' Constitution was ratified, in December 1865, permanently prohibiting slavery throughout the entire country.

Slavery today

Although most countries have officially abolished slavery since the nineteenth century, and the 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights prohibits slavery, it has never truly disappeared. According to estimates by the United Nations, there are close to 300 million slaves in the world today. Millions more men, women and children are exploited in conditions that closely resemble slavery.

Children

An estimated 246 million children between 5 and 18 years old live in slavery. They are principally found in India where, despite an official ban on the practice, millions of people are forced to work without pay to repay their debts. Parents are often forced to hand over their children, for whom they are unable to provide. These children are shut up in workshops that they are not allowed to leave: they often sleep in dormitories above the workroom, sometimes without a bed, or on the same benches they sit on to work at their sewing machines. Others are sent to work with their parents in quarries. They are barely fed and, when they fall ill, are rarely allowed to see a doctor. Many die from general neglect, and very few of those who are lucky enough to survive ever rejoin their families.



Children at work

Tens of millions of
the world's children
work full time and
are deprived of
school and leisure.

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The author is responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts included in this book and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

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The tragedy of the slave trade cannot be understood without studying its ideological underpinnings: the intellectual and scientific construction of racism and contempt for black people. The trade was, indeed, based on the colour of the victims and on a religious, philosophical and political discourse that contributed to the elaboration of monstrous theories of the inequality of races and civilizations which legitimized racism and appalling forms of domination.

UNESCO is calling for reflection on the link between this slavery of the past and certain forms of discrimination that now affect millions of human beings throughout the world. An understanding of this genealogy of racism is indispensable in order to meet the challenges posed by the perpetuation of racial discrimination.

The slave trade turned the lives of millions of people upside down. It also generated cultural interactions between the peoples of the continents concerned and influenced their knowledge, know-how and beliefs. Recognition of the stamp of African cultures on the world's civilizations makes it possible to deconstruct the prejudices that fuel racism. Intensifying the cultural exchanges that stem from this enforced dialogue helps to combat the ideologies of intolerance that are, indeed, based on a belief in racial purity that is unceasingly belied by historical reality.

The purpose of this work is to inform young generations about such crimes against humanity, to make them aware of the attitudes and prejudices inherited from this tragedy, and to warn them against racism and discrimination. By recalling that many of those who were torn from their lands to be sold as objects were children, the author appeals to the readers' feeling of solidarity and to their commitment as young citizens to combating the new forms of slavery affecting those who are most vulnerable, the girls and boys who are delivered to the new traffickers of human beings.

The author of this book, a member of the International Scientific Committee for the Slave Route Project, launched by UNESCO in 1994 to break the silence over the past and to contend with its legacy, is contributing to UNESCO's efforts to facilitate the understanding of all the heirs of these events, a prerequisite for lasting peace between peoples.

*Koïchiro Matsuura
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