'This is an extremely timely and significant book that tackles the growing area of media and memory studies, namely mediated public memory and its relationship to the politics of justice. The book has an international line-up of authors who have provided insightful and original material from around the world. *Public Memory, Public Media, and the Politics of Justice* brings to our attention the difficult and important question of whether there should be an international human right to memory and what this would mean for the politics of justice.'
— **Anna Reading**, *University of Western Sydney, Australia*

How does the construction, representation and distortion of public memory affect the way we treat other people? How is policy-making influenced by the way the media cover contentious issues, such as the ongoing but largely ignored conflict between Russia and Chechnya, the claims of indigenous people in Peru to know what really happened during the war against the Shining Path, and South Africa's post-apartheid attempts to build a new nation? Contributors to this book explore the challenges and obstacles to affirming a universal right to memory on the long road to justice for all.

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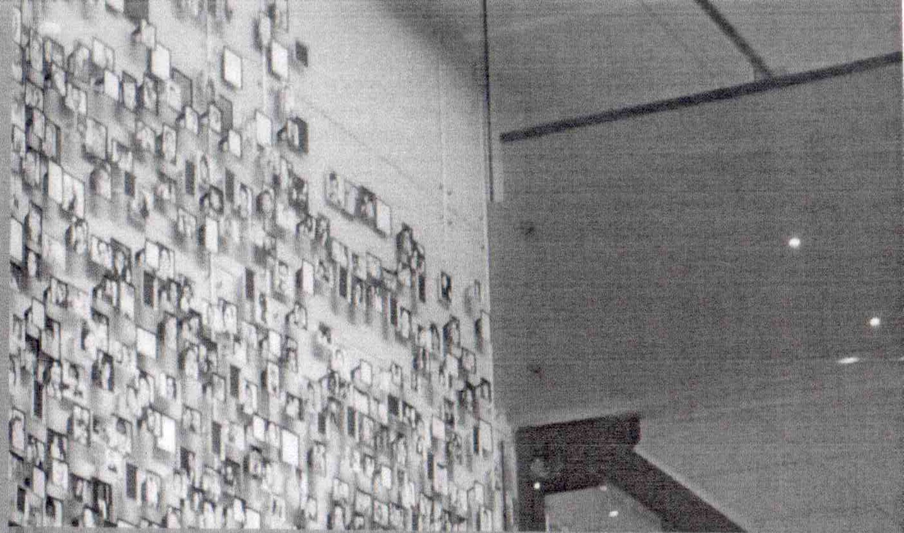

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Public Memory, Public Media, and the Politics of Justice

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9

Slavery and Emancipation in the Caribbean: Preserving the Public Memory

Hopeton S. Dunn

> Olaudah Equiano, an Ibo from Nigeria, was just 11 years old when he was kidnapped into slavery. He was held captive in West Africa for seven months and then sold to British slavers, who shipped him to Barbados and then took him to Virginia. After serving a British naval officer, he was sold to a Quaker merchant from Philadelphia who allowed him to purchase his freedom in 1766. In later life he played an active role in the movement to abolish the slave trade.
>
> [Excerpt from the autobiography: *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano* . . . (*c.* 1789)]

A few enslaved Africans, like Olaudah Equiano, contributed with their narratives to exposing the outrage of slavery even before it was abolished in the British Empire in 1838. Other icons have since helped by their writings to preserve the memory of emancipation as a landmark in the struggle for human freedom. But the biggest contributors to the cause and memory of emancipation are the millions of known or anonymous victims whose lives were brutally taken in the protracted and galling experience of chattel slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas.

The preservation of the memory of slavery and emancipation goes deeper than recounting the horror of capture, the middle passage (the transport of slaves across the Atlantic), and the de-humanizing treatment meted out to African ancestors in the Caribbean region. It is about the indomitable spirit of oppressed people, the power of their minds in rising above hellish circumstances and the maintenance of an insistent

revolt against this atrocity that should never have occurred and should never be repeated or forgotten. This racially oriented economic and political exploitation has shaped and continues to influence the psyche of Caribbean societies today, re-defining individuals, families, communities, nations, and the region. Its legacy forms part of a public memory that cannot be erased even if one tries, but the lessons to be extracted from that memory must be preserved.

As an act of remembrance, 23 August each year is observed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition. This day commemorates the anniversary of the slave uprising in Haiti in 1791, which became a forerunner of the abolition of the trade in enslaved Africans. Countries around the world have used this day to recall various telling aspects of the period. Initiatives over the years have included the opening of the International Slavery Museum in the UK in 2004, and the annual staging of exhibitions at major museums, the hosting of conferences and cultural exhibitions throughout the Caribbean and the rest of the world.

These acts of remembrance highlight an appalling historical reality. It is estimated that 150 million people, mainly from West Africa, were transported or died en route to colonial plantations in the Caribbean and the Americas during more than 300 years of the slave trade and of African chattel slavery itself (Boateng, 2011, p. 28). This would make it 'the largest involuntary movement of persons in recorded history' (Beckles, 2007). This transatlantic slave trade has 'left behind an emotionally charged legacy that drives a shame and guilt cycle that continues to shackle minds and inhibit discourse' to the present day (Beckles, 2007, p. xi).

Of a world population of seven billion in 2011, estimates point to just over one billion people residing on the African continent. The United Nations (UN) indicates that some 200 million people of African descent also live in the Americas, including the Caribbean, South America, and North America, all constituting the new homeland of an African diaspora that originated with the slave trade. Many more descendants of this displaced African community live outside of the Caribbean and the Americas, with estimates of about 1 per cent residing in Europe. All told, some 20 per cent of the world's population may have originated from the slavery experience and its associated harsh patterns of migration and repression. Many Europeans are beneficiaries of its ill-gotten gains, including famous cities, baronies, museums, and other places of culture, prosperity, and 'civilization' in the global North.

In promoting the important UN observances related to slavery and emancipation, the international community has recognized, in the words of the UN, that 'people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected'. Furthermore, of the projected increase in the world population to nine billion by 2050, Africa is expected to contribute at least 1.1 billion or 49 per cent to this growth, with a large proportion migrating to more developed regions of the world. It should, therefore, be clear that Africa, its people, its history, and its present, will continue to come face to face with the wider world over the next generation. The world will continue to confront the immutable scars of slavery, the consequences of the slave trade, ancestral memories, and the footprints of a dispersed but resilient African population.

Meaningful preservation

When we speak of the preservation of memory, we tend to refer mainly to recollections like those found in various autobiographical slave writings as well as documentation in art forms such as paintings and monuments. We often dedicate these collected monuments to past heroes and to the recollection of past generations by future ones. But an important question is: are these mementos by themselves adequate as a lasting memorial to slavery and emancipation?

The Egyptian tale of wise King Thamus has an important lesson for all of us in this regard. It is recounted that Theuth, the mythical inventor of the written word (and a leading member of the king's court) presented his invention to King Thamus as an innovation to improve the wisdom and memory of the Egyptians. Upon reflection, the King thoughtfully observed that this invention was a mere tool of recollection, not a new device for memory, and further remarked with great insight that people would 'cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writings to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of their own internal resources.' The legendary King Thamus is quoted as further observing that 'they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction and in consequence, be thought of as very knowledgeable when they are for the most part ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom, they will be a burden to society' (in Postman, 1992, p. 4).

This does not seek to invalidate historical literature, artefacts, and monuments of slavery and past history. What the story of King Thamus is reminding us about is that true historical memory does not primarily

reside in these material and textual artefacts but more so in the hearts and minds of those implicated in its unfolding. It is better seen as the wisdom derived from internalizing the social consequences of historical events, their meanings, and human implications. Lasting memory and real wisdom, it is argued, come best from interpersonal and intergenerational sharing of ancestral knowledge and insight about the experience of slavery, evolved over time and shaped by the manner in which we live and by the environment in which we raise our children. But even so, we also have to rely on the documentation and artefacts of the past for our analysis of the present and vision for the future.

Triangulated victimhood

The victims of slavery are to be found at each geographical and ethnic juncture of the infamous triangular trade route linking Europe, Africa, and the Americas. It is the story of the jailed and the jailor being jointly imprisoned and their respective communities being scarred by the experience.

In West Africa, whence came the majority of enslaved Africans destined for the Caribbean, the conspiracy of capture involved legislators, corporate speculators, European slave ship operators, as well as ensnarers and enforcers among the Africans themselves. Stories collected under UNESCO's Slave Route Project, such as the *Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch* paint pictures depicting the use of ambush, schemes of trickery, images of shackled frightened children being separated from their families and dragged off to unknown destinations, and uncertain futures. Brinch, a West African youth who emerged from a lifetime of slavery to take advantage of the opportunities of education, detailed his memories for succeeding generations. He recalls that in 1758, as a 16-year-old, he attempted to return home through the African bush after a celebration and a splash in the river with other youthful friends:

> To our utter astonishment and dismay . . . we found ourselves waylayed by thirty or forty more of the same pale race of white vultures, whom to pass was impossible. We attempted without deliberation to force their ranks. But alas, we were unsuccessful, eleven of our fourteen were made captives, bound instantly and notwithstanding our unintelligible intreaties [sic], cries and lamentations, were hurried to their boats, and within five minutes were on board, gagged and carried down the stream like a sluice, fastened down in the boat with cramped jaws.
>
> [Brinch quoted in Bailey, 2007, p. 103]

Brinch tells another story in which another batch of villagers from further down the coast was added to the ship in which he was already bound and gagged after being captured with his friends. He overheard from others on board that an act of trickery was to be carried out against other unwitting villagers:

> It was announced that a grand feast was to be held on board the ship, apparent preparations were made accordingly and all the principal inhabitants of the Town were to attend. This was considered a civility due from that deluded people, to the officers of the vessel, while the blackest perfidy rankled in the hearts of those traitorous villains who conceived and executed the plot... [T]he principal inhabitants of the town came on board, in short, but few staid [sic] behind only the sick, lame aged and children; they brought with them many valuable articles of plate &c. when all were on board, the festivities commenced but mark, the slaves were cautiously concealed in the cockpit that vigilance might be kept asleep and suspicion lulled into security... When they had drank freely, laudinium [sic] was secretly conveyed into their liquor, a general intoxication and sound sleep soon prevailed and insensibility was the consequence. These dexterous dealers in iniquity seized upon the moment, fastened with implements already prepared, each individual down upon their backs, with poles across their breasts and leggs [sic], with hands and feet drawn up by cords to certain loopholes therein.
>
> [Brinch quoted in Bailey, 2007, pp. 104–105]

These graphic accounts leave no doubt about the treachery and brutality of the slave trade, presented from the point of view of the hunted.

Speaking from another perspective, John Barbot, an agent for the French Royal African Company, provides his historical narrative of at least two voyages to the West Coast of Africa in 1678 and 1682:

> Those sold by the Blacks are for the most part prisoners of war, taken either in fight, or pursuit, or in the incursions they make into their enemies['] territories; others stolen away by their own countrymen; and some there are, who will sell their own children, kindred, or neighbours. This has been often seen, and to compass it, they desire the person they intend to sell, to help them in carrying something to the factory by way of trade, and when there, the person so deluded, not understanding the language, is old and deliver'd up as a slave, notwithstanding all his resistance, and exclaiming against the treachery... The kings are so absolute, that upon any slight pretense [sic] of offences committed by their subjects, they order them to be sold for slaves, without regard to rank, or possession... In times of dearth and famine, [an] abundance of those people will sell themselves, for a maintenance, and to prevent [themselves from] starving. When I first arriv'd at Goerree, in December, 1681, I could have bought a great number, at very easy rates, if I could have found provisions to subsist them; so great was the dearth then, in that part of Nigritia.
>
> [Barbot quoted in Astley and Churchill, 1732]

Providing yet another angle, Alexander Falconbridge, an English physician vividly witnessed an act of disposal of Africans on their arrival at their destination:

> When the ships arrive in the West Indies (the chief mart for this inhuman merchandize), the slaves are disposed as I have before observed by different methods. Sometimes the mode of disposal is that of selling them by what is termed a scramble, and a day is soon fixed for that purpose. Previously the sick or refuse slaves, of which there are frequently many, are usually conveyed on shore and sold at a tavern, by vendue or public auction. These in general are purchased... upon speculation, at so low a price as five or six dollars a head. I was informed by a mulatto woman that she purchased a sick slave at Grenada, upon speculation, for the small sum of one dollar, as the poor wretch was apparently dying of the flux. It seldom happens that any who are carried ashore in the emaciated state to which they are generally reduced by that disorder long survive after their landing. I once saw sixteen conveyed on shore and sold in the foregoing manner, the whole of whom died before I left the island. Sometimes the captains march their slaves through the town at which they intend to dispose of them, and then place them in rows where they are examined and purchased. The poor astonished Negroes were so terrified by these proceedings, that several of them, through fear climbed over the walls of the courtyard and ran wild about the town, but were soon hunted down and retaken.
>
> [Falconbridge, 1778, as recounted by The Slave Route Project]

Writings such as these, as well as the first-hand recollections of ex-slaves who endured the hardships of slavery and went on to become integral to the abolitionist movement are both a testament to the human spirit

of resistance and to the failure of the British imperial planter classes to truly enslave their victims. Among the icons of anti-slavery resistance in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the ex-slaves known as Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780) and Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (1757–*c.* 1801). Their stories reveal the early successes of a small number of activist African ex-slaves with a connection to the Caribbean but living in imperial Britain.

Ignatius Sancho started life as a child slave, having been born on a slave ship en route to the West Indies. He was later transported to Britain and employed as a house servant in London before being freed to establish himself as a successful black entrepreneur. He joined the anti-slavery lobby in the late eighteenth century, serving as a living testimony to a frequently sceptical British public of the humanity, intellectual capacity, and cultural sensibilities of African people. His writings, in the form of letters, were published a few years after his death in 1780. He played an important and pioneering role in documenting and embodying first hand, the protracted struggle for abolition. While suffering the travails of slavery, Sancho devoted his later life and works to the struggle for change.

Quobna Ottobah Cugoano was kidnapped from what is now Ghana and transported to slave plantations in Grenada. His close association with abolitionist preachers led to his travel to Britain, where he was baptized and re-named 'John Stuart'. He was deployed in the household of the British artist Richard Crosway. Cugoano's 1787 semi-autobiographical treatise, entitled *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Commerce of the Human Species*, makes him the pioneer of the concept of human trafficking, a practice which he explicitly associated with slavery and the slave trade and which he unequivocally deplored as an ex-slave himself living in the seat of the empire. His book is also regarded as the first formal pro-abolition publication to be written by an African in Britain.

These accounts and those of other African slaves such as Olaudah Equiano (*c.* 1745–1797), who emerged from their experiences to acquire an education and even in the face of continuing hostility made their contribution to emancipation and to the memory of their travails and triumphs.

We cannot forget those whose blood was shed at one of the primary destinations in the triangular trade: the West Indies. Not only were hundreds of thousands killed but the leaders of the slave revolts were also put to death in an attempt to snuff out all signs of insurrection and to suppress memory of the atrocities of which the leaders spoke.

In western Jamaica, Sam Sharpe, lay preacher and a leader of enslaved people, was murdered for leading the famous Christmas Revolt in 1831. Nanny of the Maroons was a matriarch, military leader, and mystic who successfully led a series of mid-nineteenth-century battles against British colonial soldiers in Jamaica and eventually triumphed to be later called a national heroine of her adopted country over a century later, in independence.

Another freedom fighter turned national hero, Paul Bogle, led a revolt in the eastern end of Jamaica, and was eventually executed for his stand against injustice, as was George William Gordon, a middle-class mulatto who argued and agitated in defence of human freedom. In the Dutch Caribbean, the 1793 revolution in Berbice (now in British Guyana), the struggles of the Maroons in Suriname, (Drescher & Emmer, 2010), and the Bussa Revolt in Barbados in 1816 are all reminders of the widespread resistance to slavery and oppression that took place in the Caribbean area. Much of the inspiration for this resistance and revolt came from the Haitian Revolutionary War of 1791–1803 which led to the creation of the world's first Black Republic under General Toussaint L'Overture.

The calling to memory of the heroic activities and sacrifices of these freedom fighters should be cathartic for all concerned because their actions dealt a severe blow to the inhuman, and brazen exploitation of slavery and the slave trade that were a bondage to all.

Ending the slave trade

In England, an intense political battle was under way in the closing decades of the eighteenth century for the abolition of the slave trade, a trade that had been going on during the preceding 300 years and more, starting in the early sixteenth century. It is to be noted that successive legislative acts of the British parliament over that period endorsed and supported the trade. One of the unrepentant defenders of the slave trade, General Sir Banestre Tarleton of Liverpool, speaking in the British House of Commons on 10 June 1906, in a debate for the abolition of the trade, declared that 'whatever may be said about the injustice or the inhumanity of the Trade, it is not to be denied that it has been carried out under the auspices of this House' (verbatim account of the House of Commons debate, reproduced in Boateng (2011, pp. 28–34)). The motion for the abolition of the trade was brought to the Commons by the then Secretary of State Charles James Fox. He did so in 1806 against a background of centuries of the trade being encouraged by his leading countrymen and parliament. Indeed, up to 1876 when the matter was

brought for a vote, the House defeated a motion for abolition. Some 30 years later, with an increasing intensity of slave revolts in the British colonies and against the background of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the abolitionists gained ground and were emboldened to make another attempt. The debate that ensued in the British parliament provides a shocking and poignant reminder of the mindset of those who wished to perpetuate this despicable trade. The most strident were the gentry of Liverpool, reflected for example in the further contribution of General Tarleton:

> I have no difficulty in saying that the prosperity of Liverpool is intimately connected with the African Slave Trade . . . It is difficult for me to assent to any measure which appears to be injurious to the interests of my constituents, closely connected as they are to the general interests of this country. As to the situation of Liverpool, I have this to say: It was once a mere fishing hamlet, but it has risen into prosperity in exact proportion to the extent of the African Slave Trade, so as to become the second place in wealth and population in the British empire, renowned for its loyalty and its commercial enterprise.
> [British MP Banestre Tarleton, to parliament 10 June 1806]

The member of parliament's (MP's) revealing contribution and his claim that this situation in Liverpool reflected the general interest of Britain at the time were borne out by indications that by 1783 the 'triangular route' that took British goods to Africa to buy slaves, transport the slaves to the West indies, and bring slave-grown products such as sugar, tobacco, and cotton back to England, 'represented about 80 per cent of Britain's foreign income' (Boateng, 2011, p. 36). By 1806, many MPs and senior state officials, led by William Wilberforce, had begun to understand the true character of this trade, which Wilberforce recalled as 'a system of injustice and inhumanity' with 'ruinous effects on the condition of mankind'. Another member of the House, Solicitor General Sir Samuel Romilly, characterized the slave trade as 'an indelible disgrace'. Speaking about perpetual shame that would not be forgotten, Romilly further observed:

> After all this has been proved, after it has been ascertained by indisputable evidence that this Trade cannot be carried on without the most iniquitous practices, that rapine, robbery and murder are the foundations of it; that men are falsely accused and on false accusations condemned, in order to supply its victims; that wars are fomented to support this Traffick [sic]; that most disgusting cruelties attend it in the passage of this unhappy part of our species from their native home to the place of their slavery; that they are there subjected to a cruel and perpetual bondage, I do say that this Trade ought not to be suffered to continue for an hour. It is a stain upon our national reputation and ought to be wiped away. The inhumanity of the Traffick [sic] is most enormous and such as we cannot look at [it] without shuddering.
> [British MP Samuel Romilly, to parliament, 10 June 1806]

But the debate was not to end before another anti-abolitionist rose to his feet to defend its benefits and bemoan the grave consequences he saw with any approval of the resolution for abolition. An MP, recorded only as Mr Barham, who owned hundreds of slaves and several plantations in the Caribbean, claimed that financial compensation for labour as an alternative to putting an end to all slavery 'was impossible':

> A negro does not understand any condition but that of master and slave. He has so few wants that nothing that you can offer him in the way of money will be regarded as an equivalent for his labour when he has his choice between labour and rest.

At the end of the debate, the abolitionists prevailed. But although parliament voted to end the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807, it continued in some quarters unchallenged. It also took another 30 years before the full abolition of slavery itself in the British colonies. The trade continued in the Caribbean well into the 1880s. Had it not been for the constant struggles of the enslaved people, these systems may have never ended when they did, though they continue in other forms today. History must also recall that Haiti, which had by then emancipated itself, was subjected to paying compensation for the loss of business to the European slave master, an act of further cruelty and enslavement which has impacted that country to this day.

These stories of the struggle to end the slave trade in Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe, and the acts of resistance, revolt, and political reform were major contributors to the triumph of freedom over tyranny. Many historians, including Drescher and Emmer (2010) and Hart (1985) have concluded that it is the revolt of the slaves that ultimately led to their emancipation. 'Every Emancipation Act, whether it concerned French, English, Spanish, Danish or Dutch colonies was preceded by a more or less extended slave rebellion which precipitated this decision'

(Drescher & Emmer, 2010). These insights into the events of slavery, the resistance, and the revolution reflect what Nettleford (2007) described as perhaps the most important aspect of the legacy which should not be silenced: 'the invincibility of the human spirit against all odds'. The past then, and its memorials, become a blueprint for future actions and a roadmap for the next generations.

Chevannes (2007) reminds us that, 'Slavery aimed to deny its victims their humanity.' He quotes Orlando Patterson's well-known thesis that the true meaning of slavery was to seek to achieve the social death of its victims, cut off from their ancestral lineage, traditions, and history. And yet, as he points out, they triumphed in the struggle to end 'this exploitative and degrading relationship'. For Chevannes, an important part of what enabled this heroic triumph of emancipation was the preservation and tireless enactment of sacredly held African ancestral memories. 'It is possible to enslave anyone. All it takes is superior force,' he argues. 'But what made the enslavement of our ancestors non-sustainable was the freedom of spirit they retained through those long, dark years – refusing to surrender, refusing to give up the hope of light.' He points out that both before and after the passing of the Emancipation Act, expressions in chanting, in self-made language, proverbs, music, and dance provided moments of emancipation from the toil and brutality of slavery and from the drudgery of estate labour (Chevannes, 2007, pp. 86–97). These expressions also offered an opportunity for passing on traditions from one generation to the next and for codifying the spiritual resources required for endurance and resistance over centuries.

In this same vein, Olive Lewin (2007, pp. 72–85) invokes the memory of men and women who cleverly used music and song to strengthen communal life, for therapy, for cleansing, and as a potent political weapon. 'Between peers, songs have been used to pass messages and secret information under the guise of singing to lighten labour or to enliven the day. They also have been used to relieve stress and to keep hope alive,' says Lewin, so that music and song perform functional roles, but also served as expressions of human spirituality, belief systems, and a sense of community and collective memory.

Global memories from the now

As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon noted in a 2011 address to launch the website for a UN project to erect a permanent memorial for the victims of slavery, slavery did not end with emancipation:

> Slavery continues to manifest itself in such exploitative practices as serfdom, debt bondage and forced and bonded labour; trafficking in women and children, domestic slavery and forced prostitution, including of children; sexual slavery, forced marriage and the sale of wives; child labour and child servitude. This reality obliges the international community to bring perpetrators to justice and to continue pursuing with vigour its efforts to uphold human rights and human dignity.
>
> [2011]

As we reflect on these comments and on the current events in Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe, it is evident that despite the passage of 200 years since the end of the slave trade, the capture, enslavement, and inhumane treatment of people continue, even if on a different scale and global intensity. It has been estimated by the UN that there are approximately 27 million people in more than 160 countries enslaved worldwide. The 2009 UN Report on Trafficking in Humans provides alarming data indicating that sexual exploitation of women and children is the most popular form of enslavement (79 per cent), with the practice being a norm in some countries. Forced labour accounted for another 18 per cent of modern-day slaves. Children represent 20 per cent of trafficking victims and up to 100 per cent in some parts of Africa. In Asia, debt slavery is common.

The UN report refers to people 'trapped in debt bondage and forced to work to repay loans' allegedly granted to previous generations. 'Their designation as persons belonging outside a particular class system is a major determining factor of their enslavement.' It says over 80 per cent of the people held in such bondage are 'from communities designated as "untouchable" to whom certain occupations are assigned, so debts are passed on to the succeeding generations' (UN Sub-commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, February 2001). Profits from the trade have been estimated at up to 50 per cent in developed economies, 32 per cent in the Asia Pacific region, 5 per cent in Latin American, Caribbean, and sub-Saharan countries, and over 5 per cent in Middle Eastern countries.

There are notable similarities and differences between the past and the present. Enslavement and discrimination, both past and present were/are done under the misguided discrimination between classes of human beings: some regarded as either lower classes or lesser human beings. Additionally, it is undergirded by the economic opportunities it presents. The British Empire and other European countries were made rich through the existence of the transatlantic slave trade and it was

greed which propelled its continuation. Similarly, the modern-day trade in humans is said to be worth sums only second in value to the lucrative drug trade and a similar greed threatens to propel its continuation. In terms of differences, while the past targeted young African men, the present targets some of the most vulnerable in our society, women, children, and the poor. Further, while the transatlantic slave trade was made legal, however morally reprehensible that decision may have been, this modern-day slave trade is entirely underground and illegal. It is memory that enables comparison and vigilance in preventing a new proliferation of this evil transaction.

Human trafficking, enslavement, and all other forms of discrimination in the twenty-first century are cause for increasing global concern and form part of our unfinished struggle for physical and mental emancipation. There have been repeated calls at an international level for all countries to join in the fight by adopting various resolutions. These include the Slavery Convention of 1926, the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1956; the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation and the Prostitution of Others of 1949; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It must be recognized however that while adoption of these charters and treaties represents a commitment to take a stand for justice against intolerance and towards emancipation, the real pledge should be to embed in the upbringing and mindsets of future generations a culture of caring, to ensure that the freedom of others is not taken for granted and trampled upon. We must, in other words create the basis for a collective public memory of atrocities that should never again be allowed to take place. As we recall the stories and attain the knowledge and wisdom from the past sacrifices of others, it becomes an individual, national, and global responsibility to imbue the mantra of the UN anti-slavery movement into our consciousness and interactions.

In December 2009, the United Nations General Assembly, seized on this expectation and adopted a resolution which called for the observance of 2011 as the International Year of People of African Descent. In affirming that:

> All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and unabridged rights and freedoms, the UN resolution 'proclaims the year beginning on 1 January 2011 the International Year for People of African Descent, with a view to strengthening national actions and regional and international cooperation for the benefit of people of African descent in relation to their full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, their participation and integration in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society, and the promotion of a greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture.'

Our past must come to inform our future, our perceptions of ourselves, our societies, and our attitudes to modern forms of slavery. Let us not just recollect and preserve the lasting memory of slavery and emancipation, but also inculcate in all succeeding generations the knowledge and wisdom which flows from these recalled experiences.

Redemption

The excavation of negative memory and its impact on the social psychology of a region continue as significant challenges for the Caribbean in the post-slavery period. The need for the maintenance of dignity and self-worth in the face of a harrowing past is highlighted by Rupert Lewis (2007). In reference to frequent arrests, imprisonment, and sometimes killing of inner city youths by police or gangs in parts of the Caribbean region, Lewis argues that the notion of 'human expendability' continues in our region's social and cultural life. Speaking in a similar vein, Erna Brodber upholds the African people's history of dignity and the struggle for self-worth and achievement both before and after forced transportation to the Caribbean. She encourages remembrance of our past as a basis 'to see and respect ourselves as creative beings, with a history of creativity'. Against this background, Brodber calls for Caribbean people to 'look at this past so that we can distinguish slander from fact, so that we can hold on to the truths about ourselves, so that we can look at each other with the respect necessary for building together, beginning with new images of ourselves and our possibilities' (2007, p. 21). This theme of new images is picked up in an article by Nicolette Bethel (2011) who served as director of culture for the government of the Bahamas. She wrote:

> And yet, as I've written before, slavery is not over in the Caribbean... I'm talking about the kind of slavery Bob Marley recognized in his own people when he wrote and performed his 'Redemption Song' – the mental slavery that continues to dominate our society... the concept that Bahamians aren't able to do things

> very well, and the resultant habit of looking elsewhere for models and expertise; the preference for hiring consultants from abroad to give advice that Bahamian experts have already considered and rejected; the willingness to privilege outside plans for development over local ones; the general contempt for anything home-grown, and the overconsumption of anything from across the sea.

Bethel sees the vestiges of slavery in everyday life, the inability to make and take responsibility for decisions, and the tendency of those at the top to want to own decisions and actions, the practice of looking to the government for almost everything, tacit dependency on handouts. These scenarios are played out all across the Caribbean and suggest that despite the emancipation of which we speak, there is a continued need for mental emancipation. She concludes that, 'It's time for us to realize that every West Indian who refuses to make a decision, every Bahamian who seeks a handout, every West Indian who looks outside our region for validation, every Bahamian who believes that what we do isn't good enough, is in need of emancipation still' (Bethel, 2011).

And so we must confront history's unfinished business, including the process of on-going emancipation. The preservation of the memories of slavery and emancipation is important for the knowledge and wisdom to be gained from such memories. Among the ancestors of the new Caribbean are the Akan people of West Africa, who established a writing system called the *Adinkra*. One word from this system is *Sankofa* which means 'to go back and get it'. The symbol for this idea is depicted by a bird flying with his head turned backwards, with an egg in its mouth. As explained in Akan symbolism, the egg represents 'the knowledge of the past on which wisdom is based and that the future generation will benefit from such wisdom'. The Akan people, it is said, believed that the 'past illuminates the present and that the search for knowledge is a life-long process'. So, *Se wo were fi na wonsankofa a yenkyi*, translates as 'it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten'.

Our forefathers continue to teach us important lessons. Lest we forget!

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