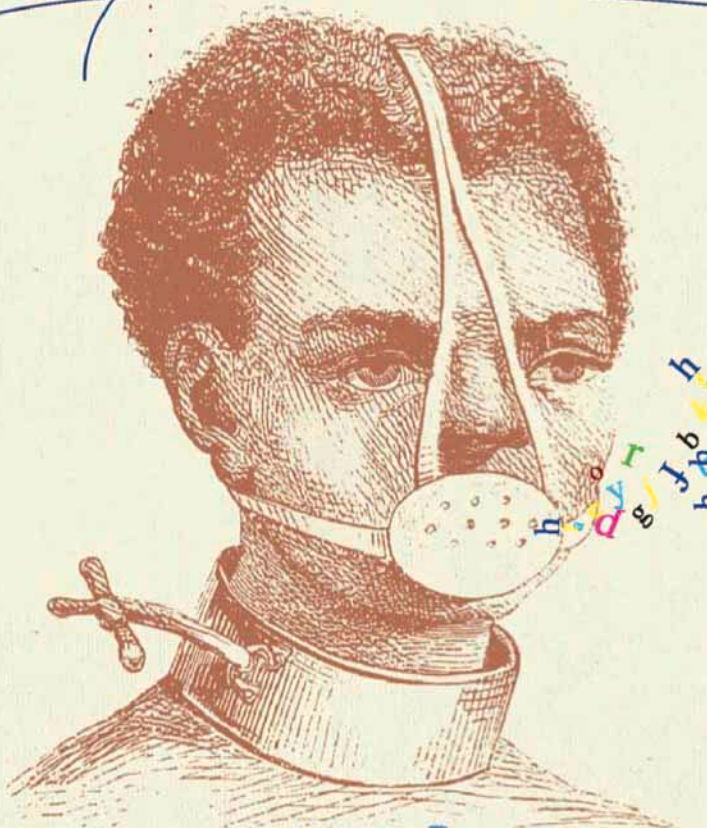




United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

The Slave Route



Scientific research activities, in particular those related to the transatlantic slave trade, together with the formation and promotion of thematic networks, were among the priorities of the *Slave Route Project* at its launching. The networks, located in scientific institutions or coordinated by recognized researchers, contribute to the findings of research, teaching and education on the slave trade, explain the selection of places of memory, and give meaning to living artistic and cultural expressions. The project has aroused growing interest in different countries around the world, in particular those which were affected

by the slave trade and slavery. The resulting momentum has prompted the launch of public awareness campaigns, the development of research, the publication of works and the production of audiovisual and teaching materials. By giving the issue of the slave trade and slavery a universal dimension, the project has helped to make it a tragedy that concerns humanity as a whole. Nowadays there is less reluctance in countries to open this tragic chapter of their history and a greater desire to include it in their collective memories and add it to calendars of

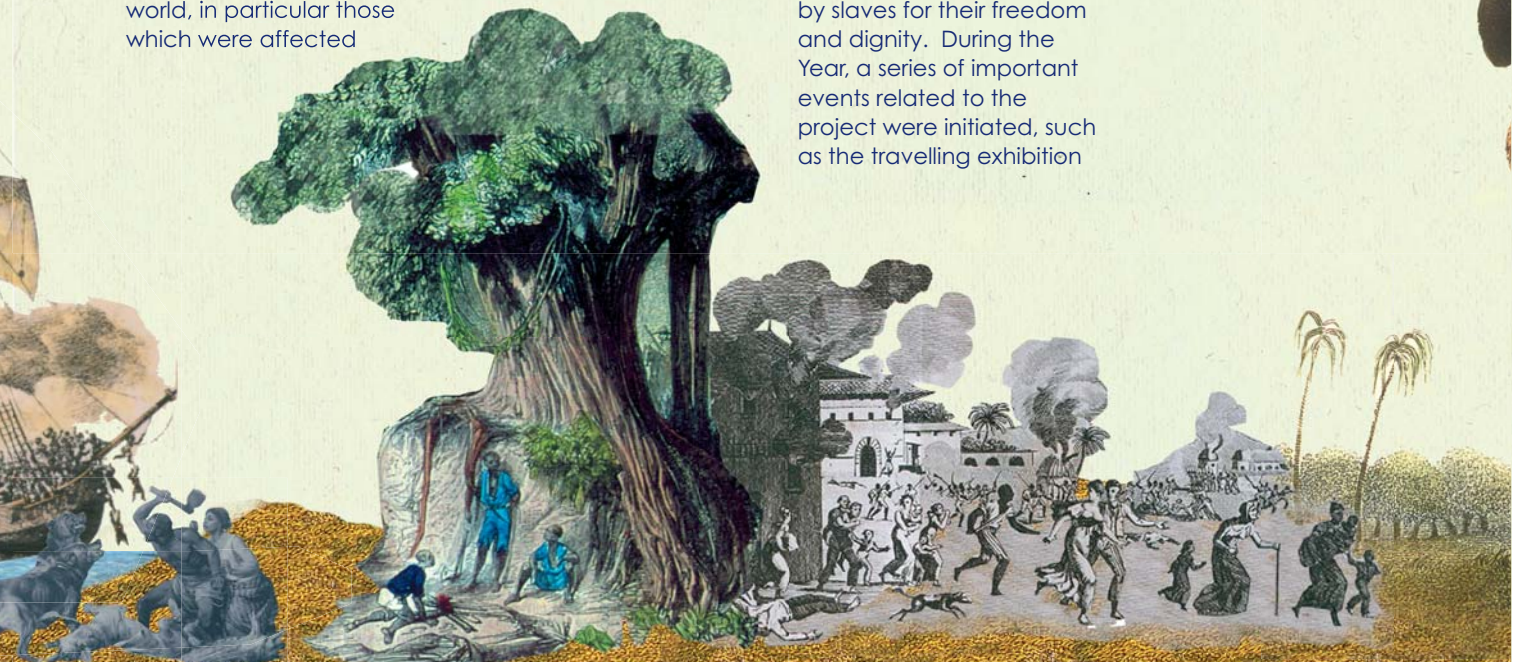
commemorations and political agendas.

One of the main accomplishments of the project was its contribution to the recognition of the slave trade and slavery as a "crime against humanity" by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. A strategic action plan led to the proclamation by the United Nations of 2004 as International Year to commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition, a tribute to the Haitian Revolution and the relentless struggle by slaves for their freedom and dignity. During the Year, a series of important events related to the project were initiated, such as the travelling exhibition

"Lest We Forget: The Triumph over Slavery", and the award of the UNESCO – Toussaint Louverture Prize to two emblematic figures of the struggle against the after-effects of slavery, Aimé Césaire and Abdias do Nascimento.

Support to other Proposals

In addition to its own activities, the project supports proposals from partners who share the project's objectives and encourage the exchange of experiences on the subject of the slave trade and slavery.





I. Origin of the project

At the suggestion of Haiti and the African countries, the General Conference of UNESCO approved, at its 27th session in 1993, the establishment of the *Slave Route Project* (27 C/Resolution 3.13). The project was officially launched in 1994 in Ouidah, Benin.

Aware that ignoring or endeavouring to hide key historic events can, in itself, be an obstacle to mutual understanding, international reconciliation and stability, UNESCO decided to study the subject of the slave trade

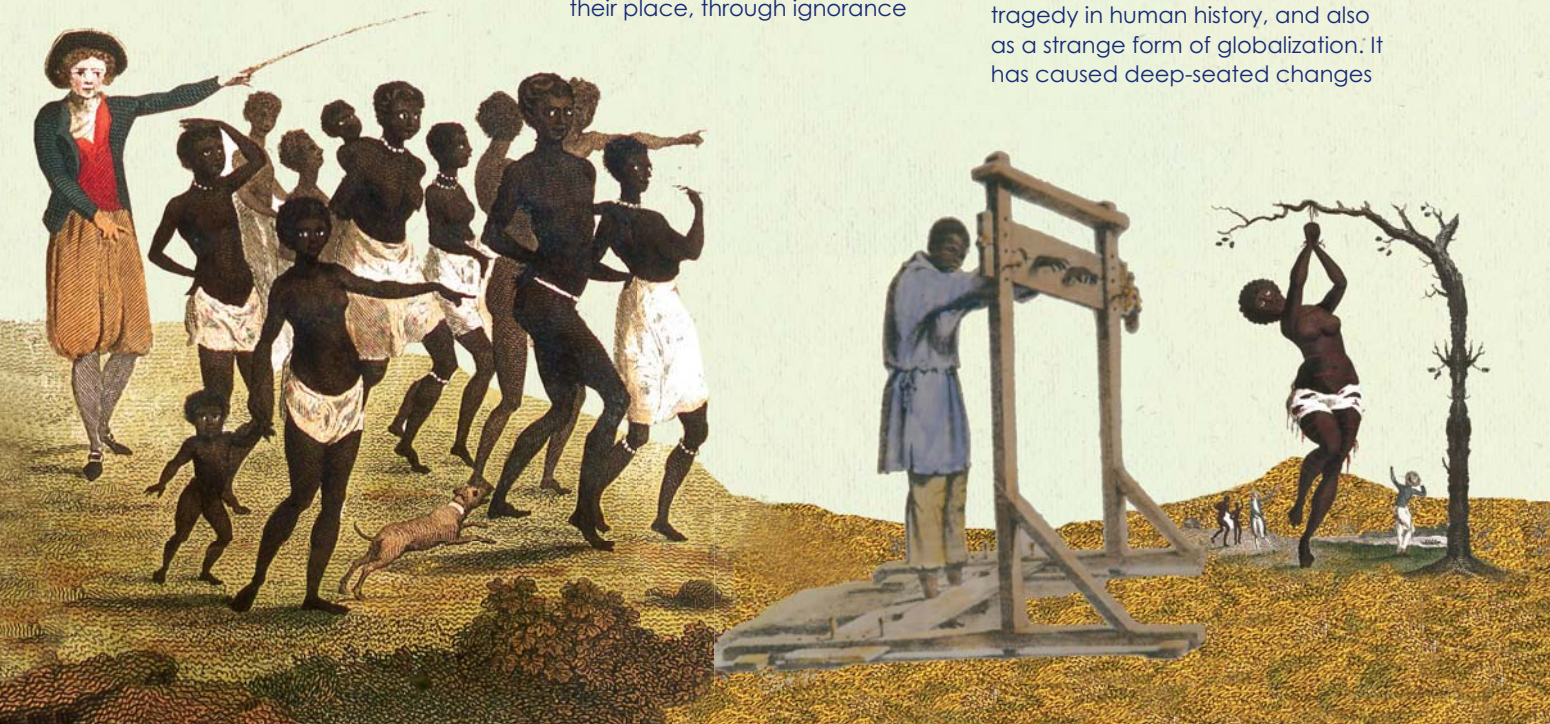
and slavery as a means of contributing to the preservation of peace, one of the fundamental goals of the United Nations.

This tragedy, symbol of denial of the most basic human rights, must be recalled to human conscience. It illustrates the preamble of UNESCO Constitution which acknowledges that horrors such as those of the last world war are caused by "the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance

and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races".

By virtue of the universal silence that has shrouded it, the extreme violence that accompanied it, the troubling light that it sheds on the ideologies used to justify it and the paradoxical exchanges to which it has given rise, the slave trade is a matter of concern to modern society. It raises some of the most burning issues in today's world, namely human rights, the building of identities, citizenship, the sharing of resources and cultural pluralism.

By virtue of its scale and duration, the slave trade is regarded as the greatest tragedy in human history, and also as a strange form of globalization: It has caused deep-seated changes



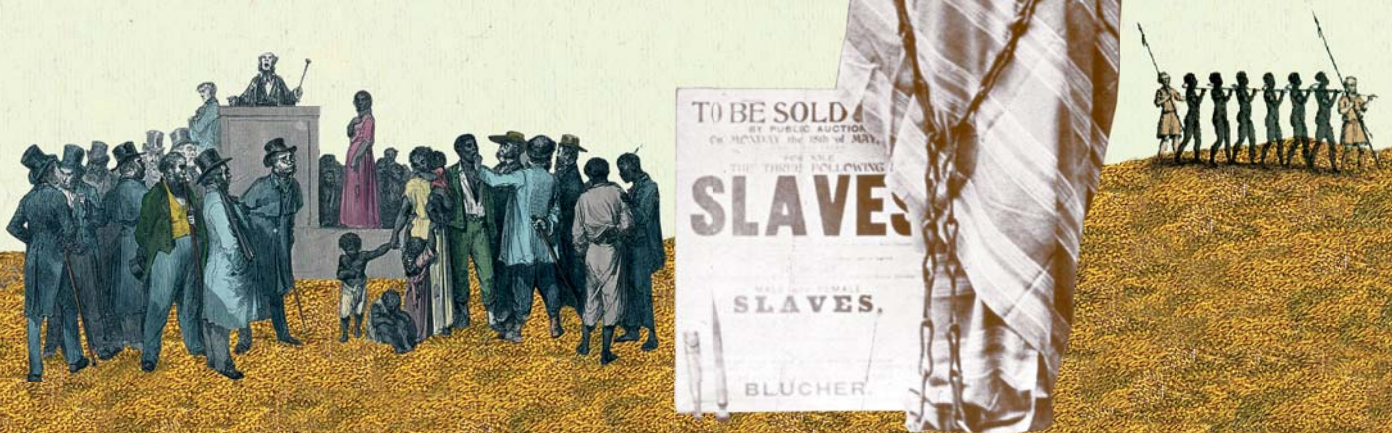
worldwide, which account in part for the geopolitical and socio-economic configurations of the world today.

The need to examine this painful chapter in human history holistically and methodically is all the more urgent owing to the debate on the impact of historical factors on the development of the African countries and on the socio-economic and cultural status of people of African origin elsewhere in the world.

Beyond its economic impact, the slave trade has also given rise to significant interactions among the peoples of Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Indian Ocean, the Arab Muslim world and Asia, which have profoundly and lastingly transformed their cultures, knowledge, beliefs and behaviour. The process of interculturality that began with the slave trade is still going on and continues to transform humanity.

The concept of "route" was chosen to illustrate this flow of exchanges among peoples, cultures and civilizations that has transformed the geographical areas affected by slavery,

a unique interaction that encourages intercultural dialogue, with issues of considerable importance to the building of modern societies. And so, far from looking backwards, the project aims to improve understanding of the present and to contribute to the debate on the future of multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.

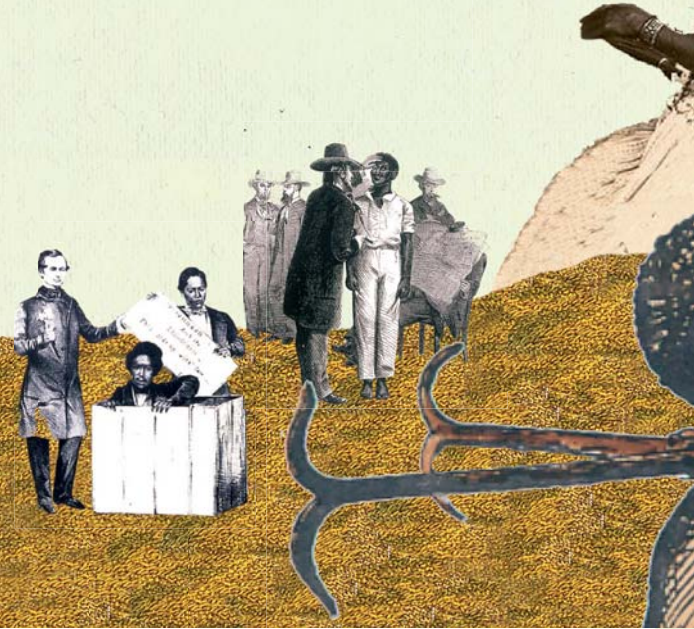


II. Objectives

- To put an end to the silence surrounding the tragedy of the slave trade and slavery by contributing to a better understanding of its deep-seated causes, its implications and its forms of operation through multidisciplinary research;

- To objectively highlight the consequences of the slave trade on modern societies, in particular the global transformations and cultural interactions among peoples generated by the tragedy;

- To contribute to the establishment of a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between peoples by encouraging debate on cultural pluralism, the building of new identities, citizenship and intercultural dialogue.





III. Structure

The *Slave Route Project* is an intersectoral and transdisciplinary UNESCO project involving all of the Organization's fields of competence. In this connection, a *Task Force on UNESCO Activities relating to the Study of the Slave Trade and its Implications* was established by the Director-General of UNESCO to ensure that this particular aspect of the project was duly taken into account.

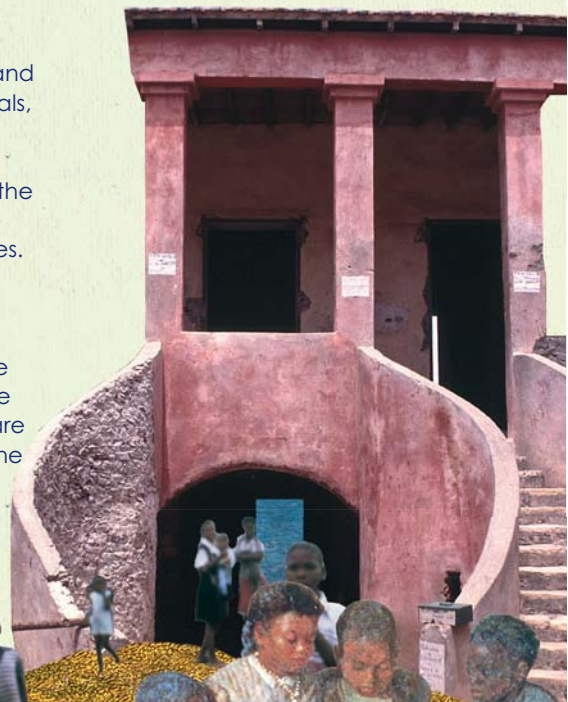
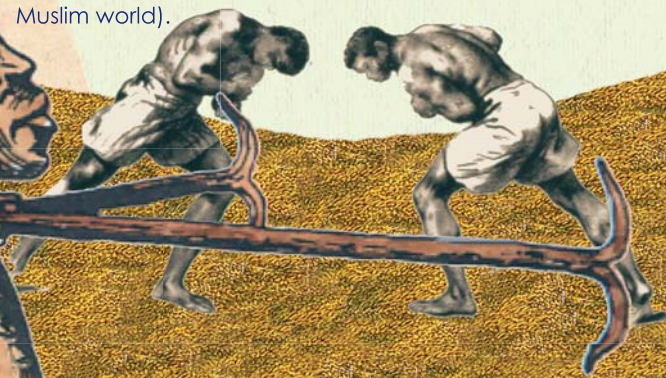
The Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue coordinates and follows up the project's activities; it is supported by the following bodies:

International Scientific Committee

Restructured in 2006, the Committee, which is composed of 20 members, is appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO on the basis of their personal qualifications. Its task is to ensure an objective and, if possible, consensual approach to *Slave Route* issues and to advise UNESCO on the project's main lines of emphasis. The Committee, which is multidisciplinary and multicultural, is composed of experts from various scientific fields and from various regions of the world (Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, the Indian Ocean and the Arab-Muslim world).

National Committees

To mobilize the population groups and stakeholders concerned (intellectuals, researchers, artists, educators, journalists, community leaders and others) and ensure participation in the project, National Committees have been established in several countries. Their task is to raise the necessary awareness at the national level, promote debate and help to build a consensus on the approach to be taken on the issue of the slave trade and slavery. National committees are generally composed of experts in the field of the slave trade and slavery, representatives of the UNESCO National Commissions, civil society and the academic institutions and ministries most concerned.



IV. The project programmes

Since its inception, the project has been organized around five closely linked programmes:

- a scientific research programme based on an extensive network of institutions and specialists around the world;
- an educational and academic programme supported by a worldwide UNESCO network of more than 7 900 Associated Schools and designed to encourage education specialists to incorporate this tragedy into formal and non-formal curricula;
- a programme on the contribution of the African Diaspora and the promotion of the living cultures and artistic and spiritual expressions of the interactions resulting from the slave trade and slavery;
- a programme on the collection and preservation of the written archives and oral traditions related to the slave trade;
- a programme on the identification and preservation of the tangible and intangible heritage related to the slave trade and slavery, in particular, the promotion of the programme on tourism of memory.

V. Achievements of the project

On the basis of the recommendations made and guidelines set by the International Scientific Committee, the achievements of the project include the following activities:

- Studies and research on the essential dimensions of the slave trade and its cultural, economic and political consequences;
- Organization of symposia, seminars and other important meetings;
- Organization of exhibitions, festivals and concerts;
- Preparation of teaching and information materials;
- Production of documentary films;
- Inventory of sites and places of memory with a view to developing remembrance tourism;
- Collection of data on the oral tradition;
- Support for creating and promoting museums on slavery;
- Identification, safeguarding and exploitation of slave trade archives;
- Formation of networks of scientific institutions;
- Publication of scientific works and documents for the general public;
- Creation of an Internet site: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/slaveroute> ;
- Celebration of the *International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition* and international commemoration days.





VI Publications

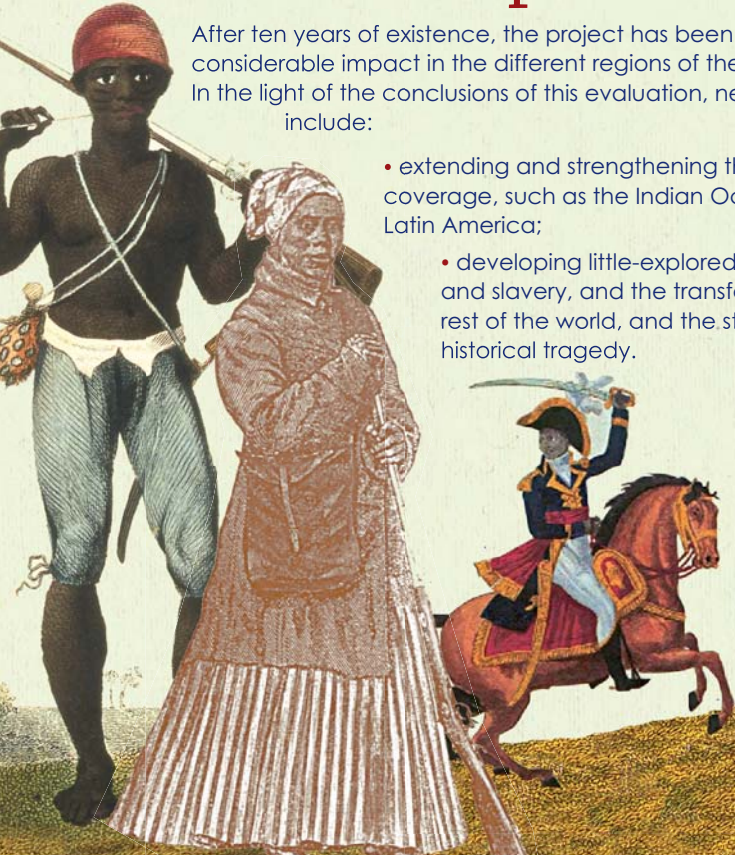
The project has established a UNESCO collection entitled *Memory of Peoples – the Slave Route* so as to publish the results of research initiated by UNESCO and by the various partner research networks. These publications also serve to publicize the debates between specialists on issues relating to the slave trade and its consequences. Some fifteen works have been published in this way; their titles appear on the project's Internet site. (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/slaveroute>)

The project publishes a Newsletter, which has devoted a special issue to the celebration of the *International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition*.

VII. New phase of the project

After ten years of existence, the project has been subject to external evaluation, which has highlighted its considerable impact in the different regions of the world and the great hopes and expectations it has aroused. In the light of the conclusions of this evaluation, new perspectives have been drawn for the future years. These include:

- extending and strengthening the project's activities in regions that have so far received little coverage, such as the Indian Ocean, Asia, the Arab-Islamic world and the Andes region of Latin America;
- developing little-explored topics, such as the long-term consequences of the slave trade and slavery, and the transfer of knowledge, know-how and techniques from Africa to the rest of the world, and the struggle against racial prejudice and racisms inherited from this historical tragedy.



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