

International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition

“Fighting slavery’s legacy of racism through transformative education”

By Marsha Hall

For decades, the institutionalised system of slavery and its horrific effects and traumatic presence have lingered within the global community, whether in the faces of descendants of the former enslaved African people; powerful images; relics of the past or through tangible and intangible heritage. The ‘domino effect’ of this inhumane system signified that no society could remain complacent or indifferent to the intergenerational trauma that followed. With this in mind, each year on August 23, the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition commemorates the memory of lives lost and numerous societies still haunted by the legacies of slavery. The precursor to this was that night of 22 – 23 August 1791 when thousands of enslaved peoples in Haiti revolted in the Haitian Revolution which played a crucial role in the abolition of the transatlantic trade in enslaved people, which began in Santo Domingo (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic). The quest for self-liberation is historically significant as the cries of freedom reverberated in other colonies and among the African enslaved masses.

The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank (ACIJ/JMB), an agency of the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, lends its voice and space in strong support of this day designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). As we pay tribute to the countless men and women who fought against oppression, racial discrimination, injustices, violent prejudices and their freedom - our freedom - the ACIJ/JMB has, over the years, embarked on educating and sensitising educational institutions; private organisations; visitors; and the general public, through its rich archives, exhibitions, lecture series and social media platforms about the brutal system of the slave trade and the remnants that are still with us.

As we observe and pay homage to the memories of countless victims who paved the way in a long struggle for freedom, let us all re-shape a world where the collective memory continues to put up resistance, armed with the knowledge of these inhumane treatments meted out to millions of people because of the colour of their skin. In light of this, we actively and boldly declare while sharing the words of Haile Selassie 1, the late emperor of Ethiopia:

That until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned ... that until the colour of a man's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes; that until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all, without regard to race ...

The responsibility is with us to recognise policies that are still deeply entrenched in previous societies that enforced and profited from slavery while dismissing calls for reparations. Systematic racism is a barrier to everyone. Therefore, this generation must rewrite the narratives about the strength and resilience of Africans and people of African descent who sacrificed their lives for a better world. It is in our ability to overcome that we find solace. Together, let us unite and transform; education is our greatest weapon as we pause to recognise the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.



Photo credit: <https://teifidancer-teifidancer.blogspot.com/2021/08/international-day-for-remembrance-of.html>

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