

Slavery and its Abolition, French colonies, Research and Transmission of Knowledge

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Abstract

Knowledge of the history of transatlantic human trafficking and the slave system in the Caribbean has advanced considerably since the final 30 years or so of the twentieth century. By examining the conditions under which these practices were abolished, it is now possible to answer many questions still raised in the countries that were involved in them. Yet omissions remain. Disregard for the past, which long beset this history, led to the development of myths, and gave rise to what were usually unproductive celebrations in spite of the declared aims. Today, a wealth of information is available from the channels for conveying this phase of history, which comprise education, research bodies, various demonstrations of public memory via all kinds of commemoration, the media and audiovisual outlets. The present articles offers a brief survey of knowledge and lines of research and work to be pursued in these different areas as far as the French colonies are concerned. This is followed by a non-exhaustive summary of facilities for accessing existing work, along with a selective French bibliography, which should point the way to essential comparative appraisals covering other geographical areas.

Historical research, and more generally research in the humanities and social sciences, took a decisive turn from the 1960s and 1970s as regards the colonies that had been subjected to the slave trade and slavery. The social and political movements which then occurred there led to renewed interest in the questions with which contemporary observers confronted history. The French colonies in the Caribbean, in which some 80% of the total population had lived under the slave system since the seventeenth century, underwent a most unusual experience involving the initial abolition of slavery in 1794, its re-establishment in 1802 and then a second – and permanent – abolition in 1848.

As in the case of all colonies in the Caribbean and Americas, history was long written there by colonial planters, administrators and jurists who conveyed a picture of real life that was at best incomplete, if not inaccurate and mythicized. In fact, their writings formed a set of demands tied to successive contexts: the desire for free trade and grievances centred on the

yearning for political autonomy akin to that of the British possessions, and for the dispatch of greater law enforcement services.

By contrast, no testimony from any slave either during the period of slavery or at the time of its abolition is available. This is a grave critical flaw in the body of documents at the disposal of historians.

There is another aspect to accessing knowledge of the past in the French colonies: the way their history was written and handed down subsequent to the events in Santo Domingo/Haiti between 1791 and 1804, and then from 1848 onwards following abolition, suffered from a skilfully managed policy of disregard for the past. The growth of long-lasting historical myths was the major – and persistent – outcome of this reality.

Finally, this chapter of history, which for long firmly reflected a colonial stance, remained unaffected by progress in the French historical school until the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, it was only from that period onwards that new questions were raised, that the official documents were re-examined, and contrasted and compared with different sources. It is said that each generation rewrites its own history. It rereads documents, discovers new ones, and expands and cross-checks information whether written, oral, literary, archaeological or artistic. For three decades, research into transatlantic human trafficking, the slave system in the Caribbean and Americas, successive moves to abolish it and their aftermath, have made fresh progress, providing for a real challenge to the historiography and a break with the manipulation of memory.

The celebration in 1998 of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the French colonies and then, in 2001, the recognition of the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity by the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance meeting in Durban, and by the French parliament – when it passed the law of 21 May 2001 – have initiated debates that have often been productive. But progress and achievement as a whole still leave much to be desired in many areas. The manipulation of memory through reliance on specific means of transmission – education or commemorative rituals – gave rise to highly elaborate myths capable of resisting both the hard truth and time. In fact, many mythical constructs dating from the immediate aftermath of abolition in 1848 survive to this day. Commemorations and educational curricula continue to lend weight to them. In France and its former colonies, citizens and historians alike are still revisiting the revolutions of 1848, and attempting to unravel the ambiguities revealed and created in the period when slavery was abolished.

Here, it may be worth remembering that when historians enter the world of total wretchedness and irrationality but also of economic power, and political and coercive strength, which defined the slave trade and massive slavery in the Caribbean and Americas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, they very quickly realize that no norm or customary yardstick for evaluating and reconstructing history is operable or geared to such a historical process, until then unprecedented. No meaningful comparison with other systems for confinement and the exploitation of forced labour is possible. This article contains a brief summary of the current state of knowledge and of relevant resources available to anyone depending on their purpose and needs.

The slave trade and the slave system

The complex history of networks for human trafficking from Africa to the Caribbean and Americas and of the slave system has been the subject of much research. The following points of reference cover some of the main areas of research that has been carried out or which remains to be undertaken.

The main routes of human trafficking leading from the coasts of Africa are increasingly well known. UNESCO is supporting archaeological research and recording of the oral tradition, the signs and decisive evidence of this long past in human trafficking (see Gueye, Niane and Kwenzi-Mikala in the bibliography). There is growing familiarity with the conduct of trading operations from the commercial, strategic and material points of view. The negotiations pursued on the African continent, the establishment of trading posts and the building of forts have all been the focus of archival research. The same applies to the fitting out of ships, supplies of goods for trading and of water and food for crossing the Atlantic, the maintenance of order aboard, and death rates among captives and crews.

Yet still not much is known about the beginnings of the French slave trade from the middle of the fifteenth century. Sources for the earliest commissioning of ships are not available or far too limited. The financial networks that underpinned this traffic in Europe, and more especially in France, have however been the focus of fairly targeted research which should result in a broad view of the interests involved in this kind of operation, whether they were financiers, shipowners or insurance concerns. The same is likely to be true of the many workshops and factories which from not far inland and for four centuries supplied commodities of all kinds shipped for the colonies (see Thomas, Daget, Deveau and Pétré-Grenouilleau in the bibliography).

As a result, further research into the economic interests linked to this human trafficking is required. Neither the networks of interest nor all sources of funding have been identified. Many documentary resources have disappeared or remain inaccessible because they have not been added to the repository of public records. The most exaggerated figures were suggested for the gains accruing from this economic activity which, notwithstanding the exceptional risks involved, lasted legally for no less than three centuries and was continued intensively and illegally in the nineteenth century.

Accounts of trade itineraries – which could last up to a year-and-a-half – are very few in the case of French maritime areas. The same goes for the rebelliousness of captives – common though it was – on the African coasts and on ships crossing the ocean. Knowledge of resistance to the raids and to channels for trafficking in Africa, which were linked to the supply networks for the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, is steadily improving. African archaeologists and historians are checking their data against the oral tradition also being recorded (see UNESCO research in the bibliography).

A further documentary trail worth investigating involves turning to foreign records on the same subject for comparative purposes. The rivalries that emerged between the European powers from the outset of the transatlantic slave trade in the 1440s resulted in testimony that should enable the identification of material of comparative interest, such as the presence of European merchants and (slave-ship) captains on the African seaboard, the treaties concluded with various local kingdoms and the conflicts they could engender.

As far as numbers are concerned, and in particular the number of captives who fell victim to this trafficking, the greatest possible caution is required. While very detailed counts have been undertaken (see Mettas and Daget in the bibliography), the fact remains that not all documents concerned with slave trading were examined, not all ship captains and shipowners submitted declarations though they were mandatorily required by the navy high command, and not all admiralty documents were safeguarded. Official statements on the sale of slaves were sometimes far from accurate. Furthermore, many ships from French ports engaged in illegal slave trading after the period of prohibition, from the 1815 Congress of Vienna to the final French law that curbed such trafficking in 1831. In the colonies, few if any firm traces of the arrival of slave ships and of statements about the sale of their human cargo have been preserved.

Trade in human beings for work in plantations and mines in the Caribbean also occurred within the region itself, with trade routes linking Brazil, the Gulf of Mexico seaboard and the

coasts of North America and the Caribbean islands. They were the scene of constant trafficking from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, which can barely be quantified but should not be overlooked. For three centuries, Guadeloupe and Martinique took in slaves from other mainland and island colonies in the Caribbean region (see Lara, *Caraïbes en construction*, [The Caribbean in the Making]), in which trafficking was conducted via the human trade hubs of Saint Thomas, Saint Martin and Saint Barthélemy. Finally, there are few remaining signs of the trade routes used by slave ships before returning to Europe. Many of them indeed followed roundabout routes towards North America, as far as Canada and Newfoundland, bringing back wood and casks of dry or salted cod for example. Thus the concept of “triangular trade” appears highly simplistic (see the entire section “Slave Trading” in the bibliography).

The daunting economic powerhouse that the European colonies in the Caribbean became from the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century – the value of their exports in the 1770s was two and a half times as high as that of the Thirteen Colonies in North America and achieved with a population half the size – was based on reducing 80-90% of their total population to slavery and on a system of control and social death, until then unprecedented. In the French colonies, sugar accounted for 80% of exports.

The profitability of the system is no longer questioned. While its production techniques long remained fairly primitive, the planters or their administrators took little time to master economic management of the plantations and sales routes. They also managed to control the harshly oppressive system inflicted on slaves, which entitled them quite legally and with total impunity, to impose punishments and decree life or death in the secrecy of what became known as their *habitations* (or “homes”). The term was a very euphemistic one peculiar to the French colonies and, at the time, denoted the holdings of those referred to as their *habitants*, meaning their colonial owners. This term, which historians place in inverted commas, has connotations of welcome and protection which badly misrepresent what slavery was really like. The word “plantation”, used in the British context, gives a more accurate idea of the purpose of this type of property which was devoted entirely to labour, production and export. Attention should be drawn to the great scarcity and dissimilarity of documentary records from plantations – whether stocklists, accounts or correspondence – in the French colonies. Remnants of documents concerning plantations in Santo Domingo and Martinique in the eighteenth century are the only public records to have been preserved, along with documents relating to a plantation in Guadeloupe in the first half of the nineteenth century, which were

recently acquired by the French National Archives (see Schmidt in the bibliography). This is why the descriptions regarding the work, the production techniques used on these plantations, and the living conditions or punishments suffered by slaves, which were published by travelling observers and missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have done relatively little to further our knowledge of the daily lives of slaves. Under such circumstances, demographic data are more akin to assumptions and theories than findings from calculations based on plentiful and reliable data.



A plantation in a colony in the Caribbean. Italian engraving, 1820. © UNESCO

Documents that belonged to planters in the French colonies – such as correspondence and diaries – are also rather scarce, in contrast to those from the British possessions.¹

From the end of the seventeenth century, the Caribbean became a place of wholesale coercion and repression. European governments all drew up for their colonial territories a set of regulations concerning the social death of slaves and repressive terror, regulations which

¹ Diaries and items of correspondence from planters have been published, such as the *Journal* [Diary] by Pierre Dessalles, which appeared as *La vie d'un colon à la Martinique au XIX siècle* [The Life of a Colonial Settler in Martinique in the nineteenth century], vols. I-IV, published by Henri de Frémont and Léo Elisabeth, Courbevoie, H. de Frémont, 1980-86. (A condensed and translated version is entitled *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race: The Letters and Diary of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). See also the diaries of Elodie Dujon-Jourdain and Renée Dormoy-Léger published by Henriette Levillain as *Mémoires de Békées* [White Creole Memoires], Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, vol. 1, 2002, and the diary of Elodie Huc, published with the same title, *ibidem*, vol. 2, 2006. Letters, notes and extracts from the personal diary of Victor Schœlcher have been – and are being – published by Nelly Schmidt as *La correspondance de Victor Schœlcher* [The Correspondence of Victor Schœlcher], Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1995, and *Victor Schœlcher, Documents inédits* [Victor Schœlcher, Unpublished Documents] Editions l'Harmattan, Paris, 3 vols, 2007-08. As regards documentary records concerning plantations, it is worth noting for example research by Gabriel Debien who studied in particular records from plantations in Santo Domingo. See the collection of his *Notes coloniales* [Colonial Notes] in the National Library of France.

were constantly renewed. A particularly coercive form of social control was contained in what became known as the colonial *coutumes* (“customs”) and then in the 1685 *Code noir* [Black Code] (see Sala-Molins and Lara in the bibliography). It was a deadly system in which it is estimated that for every African captive who reached the Caribbean or Americas alive, five others had died beforehand when captured in Africa, on the road to the seaboard, in the coastal baracoons or on board the slave ships. The new arrivals in the colonies had a life expectancy of five to six years, while 40-50% of them died in the first year following their arrival.

A long series of regulatory measures constantly governed the supervision of slaves, the control of their labour, their movements, any possible activities by them outside the plantations and events in their lives, as well as the extensive freedom as regards action and decisions to punish that their masters could take against them. In 1771, the newly appointed intendant in the rich French colony of Santo Domingo received instructions that were anything but ambiguous. They stated: “if a few masters were to misuse their power, one should, while secretly reprimanding them, always lead slaves to believe that the former can never have wronged them” (French Overseas National Archives, Instructions of 24 April 1771, C 9A/139).



Marcel Verdier, “Punishment of the four stakes”, Menil Foundation, Houston, Texas. This painting was refused by the Salon du Louvre (Paris) in 1847, as potentially provoking public “hatred of slavery”... (Archives of the Louvre Museum, “Les Salons du Louvre”, Paris). © Menil Foundation, Houston, Texas, United States.

Historians possess a set of descriptions – and sometimes direct testimony on the part of observers who visited the region – about the physical and moral violence to which slaves were subjected. Proceedings on grounds of illegal cruelty, which were instituted against slave masters or those who ran their plantations, became increasingly frequent in the 1840s. The resultant reports provide historians with clearer and firmer information about the conditions for survival among slaves and the relations that developed between plantation masters and the colonial authorities. While the process of discrimination and social exclusion imposed on slaves – and on “free people of colour” – is becoming better known, fresh investigations should lead to a more accurate perception of what really happened. Judicial sources and items of correspondence concerning matters brought to court have not yet been subject to special scrutiny.



The Murat Plantation, Marie-Galante, Guadeloupe. © Conseil général de la Guadeloupe

Resistance and survival

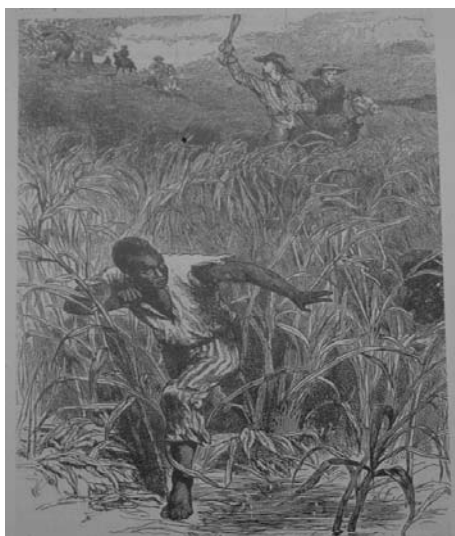
The phenomenon of resistance on the part of slaves, in either individual or collective terms, has been the focus of relatively little research. Not much is known about it from the signs and testimony regarding means of survival, which sources are still revealing. It is too often accepted that acts of resistance should be viewed on the one hand as established facts and, on the other, as sporadic incidents undermining the prosperity of the colonies – indeed, *incidents* that could be dealt with *simply* by means of troop reinforcements and increasing the membership of local militia.

Yet captives and slaves in the French colonies resisted their plight in the most varied ways imaginable. Observers in favour of abolishing slavery themselves failed to recognize the value and real significance of these acts in which servitude was rejected. Until the 1960s, there was a refusal to accept that slaves had any social and political view of their own about what their action meant. As a result, little research was devoted to the culture and knowledge that African captives possessed on arrival in the Caribbean colonies (see however Lara, *De l'Afrique à l'aire des Caraïbes* [From Africa to the Caribbean Area] in the bibliography).

Colonial historiography is still regrettably misleading as regards the traits which the planters and certain colonial administrators attributed to slaves whom some regarded as “quiet and hard-working”, and others as “idle”, “bellicose”, or liable to revolt. Such descriptive terms were attributed in accordance with the presumed geographical origin of captives arriving from Africa. The rebellions that broke out from the onset of colonization in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century were regarded as regrettable incidents undermining the long-awaited prosperity. This was still the case when in the first half of the nineteenth

century, the same period in which the British parliament voted to abolish slavery, the French Ministry of the Navy and Colonies called for a special committee to revise both the *Code noir* and the subsequent eighteenth-century regulations, in order to strengthen the framework for social control.

Escape – or attempted escape – by slaves in the French colonies (a phenomenon known in French as *marronnage*), in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion and Guiana also requires further research. Even in the writings of western abolitionists at the end of the eighteenth century and then in the nineteenth, only brief and superficial reference is made to the survival of fugitive slaves in the Basse-Terre mountains in Guadeloupe, the mountains of Martinique and Réunion, and the Guyanese forest. Certain historians have however furthered knowledge of these matters, by relating study of the resistance to human trafficking in Africa to the forms and development of *marronnage* in the Caribbean and the Americas (see Lara, Fouchard, Hector and Moïse in the bibliography).



Pursuit of a runaway slave, or marron Negro. © UNESCO.

Finally, though uncommon, sources which have only lately provided a glimpse into the existence of underground resistance and social survival networks in Guadeloupe and Martinique, as well as the neighbouring Caribbean islands, are of decisive significance. “Clubs” or “convoys” of slaves – the heirs to the “nations” of captives who had recently arrived in the colonies – which were vehicles for social self-help, were in most cases apparent during funeral ceremonies. However, their purposes were much broader and transformed them

into clandestine forces for opposition which were especially feared by the planters and colonial authorities.

Legal history and the reports of slave trials, along with private correspondence and testimony, should be the subject of thorough research covering the long history of these colonies. While ways in which colonial government, production, coercion and punishment were organized are becoming steadily better known, the same definitely cannot be said of many persistently dark gaps in our knowledge about what slavery meant in terms of reactions for survival.

Calls for freedom

Western historiography of the abolition of slavery has tended to overlook the role of slaves and their resistance in the process of ending servitude. Very few abolitionists acknowledged the impact of slave rebellions and social tension, permanent though it was in the colonies, on abolitionary decisions. Equally few and far between until the 1960s were historians who studied what was after all the highly instrumental part played by incidents of resistance to the system among the first abolitionists, namely slaves themselves.

In Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana and Réunion, slave revolts, threatened uprisings and incidents of *marronnage* occurred in constant succession, endlessly fuelling social fears. The instructions to governors and reports by prosecutors testify to constant changes in measures for social control and the continual renewal of repressive measures, which alone could guarantee perpetuation of the colonial system.

Until the beginning of 1848, shortly before the abolition of slavery, trials of planters on grounds of cruelty took place. In the same period, certain magistrates, religious figures and members of the armed forces decided to forward accounts of the most outrageous scandals to abolitionists.

The establishment in 1821 of the *Société de la Morale Chrétienne* [Society of Christian Morals] and its committee against trafficking and slavery reignited antislavery activity that had been reduced to non-existence under the Empire. Abolition in Britain in 1833 was followed, in 1834, by the founding of the French Society for the Abolition of Slavery in Paris. British abolitionists, and especially the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, conducted active campaigns for an immediate end to colonial slavery in European countries and in particular France (see Schmidt and Vergès in the bibliography).



Abolitionist medallion. “Am I not a man: a brother?” late eighteenth century, manufactured in 1789 by the royal porcelain manufactory in Sèvres, inspired by a medallion designed by the English ceramicist, Wedgwood, in 1788. This medallion appeared in a number of versions until the twentieth century, produced by several antislavery organisations and movements. © Adrien Dubouché national museum, Limoges.

The abolition of slavery proclaimed in Santo Domingo in 1793, against the background of the slave rebellion that started in August 1791, was confirmed when passed by the Convention in February 1794 and became effective in Guadeloupe and Guiana. However, colonial order and the presence of the French authorities were challenged in Santo Domingo – in which Toussaint Louverture enacted a new constitution – and in Guadeloupe.



Nicolas-André Monsiau, “The abolition of slavery by the Convention, on 16 pluviôse II (4 February 1794)”, 1794. The original is in the Carnavalet Museum, Paris. © Coll. UNESCO.

On the order of the First Consul Napoléon Bonaparte, in 1801, large-scale military expeditions to the Caribbean were prepared. They reached their destination in Santo Domingo and Guadeloupe in 1802. The colonial war set off in Santo Domingo led to a reign of “terror”, to quote General Leclerc in a letter dated 6 August 1802: “... I am making terrible examples and, since all that is left to me is terror, I use it on the rebels ...”. Fighting intensified until the French troops were defeated in November 1803 and the independence of Haiti was proclaimed on 1 January 1804 (see Hurbon, Hector, Lara, Dorsinville and Dorigny in the bibliography). In Guadeloupe on the other hand, the repression headed by General Richepance led in a few weeks to the death of the main leaders and mass executions. Slavery was reintroduced on 16 July 1802 in Guadeloupe, and then on 25 April 1803 in Guiana. Instructions to governors recalled the need for heightened vigilance regarding possible Haitian emissaries who might infiltrate the two French islands, Guadeloupe and Martinique (see Bénot, Dorigny, Dubois, Lara, Régent and Schmidt in the bibliography).

In the 1840s, the great majority of denunciations and trials of plantation masters, overseers and administrators for illegal brutality resulted in acquittals or dismissal of the charges. Most of the accusations concerned the “barbaric and inhuman” treatment of children and adult slaves over periods ranging from several months to several years. Descriptions of such scandalous incidents which were published by Schœlcher in *Histoire de l’esclavage pendant les deux dernières années* [History of Slavery during the Last Two Years] in 1847 raised a storm of protest aimed at the Ministry. Up to 1848, the *bureau des Colonies* (Colonies Office) received letters denouncing the leading planters in Guadeloupe and Martinique who a little earlier had gone on trial.

The few witnesses for the prosecution who appeared gave evidence bravely. Indeed, it was normally out of place in the first half of the nineteenth century to express the slightest criticism of the colonial regime. Clergy who risked expressing their opinion and disobeying the orders of governors were at once expelled from the colonies in which they officiated. In most cases, the Christian church complied with the *fait accompli*, only rarely speaking out for the abolitionist cause. While a few priests publicly defended it, Christian missionaries who declared their opposition to the system were quickly expelled from the colonies (see Quénun in the bibliography). As to the papacy, its action was limited to a recommendation against human trafficking issued by Gregory XVI in 1839. A few magistrates and one gendarme who had been posted for several years to Guadeloupe and Martinique placed their testimony on record, providing firm evidence of their descriptions of slave living conditions and the misuse

by planters of their power. For example, Jean-Baptiste Rouvellat de Cussac, who had held office as a magistrate in Guadeloupe and Martinique from 1829, was recalled to France for insubordination to local regulations. He noted in *Situation des esclaves dans les colonies françaises* [The Situation of Slaves in the French Colonies] (1835) that the abolitionists had until then “obtained nothing”, and that “although ‘en route’ for over 50 years, it appeared that one was still at the point of departure”. He stated that he owed his contemporaries “truth and justice” since “much care”, as he put it, was taken “in our Antilles to ensure that anything happening as regards slaves should remain unknown in France, and that repugnant incidents are buried in total oblivion” (see Schmidt in the bibliography).

The planters thus considered they were “delivered to their enemies”, namely the abolitionists who were the accomplices of England, and representatives of the beet-sugar-producing departments in the north and east of France. The Colonial Council in Martinique even viewed the succession of Paris committees dedicated to colonial matters and with overhauling the slave system in the 1840s, as a “court” from which they could “expect nothing but a death sentence”.

Abolitionist commitments

Recent research has been published on the two phases of the French abolitionist movement, first during the second half of the eighteenth century (see Bénot, Dorigny, Gainot, Dorsinville, Dubois, Erhard and Wanquet, in particular, in the bibliography), and then from the 1820s (see Schmidt in the bibliography). The proposals for emancipation drawn up, from Condorcet up to the 1840s, all called for gradual and steady abolition over the long term and guaranteed the upholding of public order and of the planters’ interests. Most of the abolitionists – with the notable exception of Schœlcher – did not go to the colonies and were unaware of what social relations between masters and slaves were really like. From 1842, the principle of “full and immediate” emancipation was accepted. The failure of apprenticeship in the British colonies, which was ended prematurely in 1838, led the idea of abolition with no transition to spread much faster, as did the propaganda campaigns undertaken by British abolitionists in Europe (see the entire section “The Abolition of Slavery” in the bibliography).

By contrast, the reactions of abolitionists to the militancy of slaves themselves and how the former responded to the ceaseless appeals of acts of resistance no less intense in the nineteenth century than in previous periods, were not examined to the same extent. Certain questions such as the following were not addressed:

- ways in which western abolitionists took into account incidents of resistance among slaves;
- the relations that could possibly have been formed between slaves and abolitionists when the latter travelled to the colonies;
- the nature of the firm evidence that abolitionists might have possessed regarding the circumstances of the slave system and the survival strategies gradually developed by slaves.

Finally, one question still remains unanswered regarding the imbalance in sources possessed by historians. Although only limited, genuine testimony from slaves does exist in the case of the English-speaking world and the Spanish-speaking colonies. Most of it was recorded in writing as propaganda material by abolitionist committees, with definitely honourable intentions. By contrast, such evidence is non-existent in the case of the French colonies. The system of silence to which governors were so attached, in terms of withholding information about incidents that occurred in one colony so that they would not spill over to another, was a long-standing practice in colonial government.

On the plantations, another system of silence prevailed, based on fear and intimidation. When, in the 1840s, magistrates were given the task of surveying the state of labour and social relations on plantations in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana and Réunion, the visit reports which they handed to governors after interviewing masters and slaves clearly reflected the silence observed by the latter. This is why sources on which we depend should inspire doubt and humility, since they are no substitute for the voices of the slaves themselves whether before, during or after their liberation.

Freedom in 1848

The proceedings of the Commission for the Abolition of Slavery cannot be consulted without reference to the prevarication among certain members of the Provisional Republican Government, which had just come to power, when they were confronted with a measure they felt to be premature and overhasty. Victor Schœlcher, who chaired the Commission, called upon them to sign the abolition decree and its accompanying basic decrees, before the newly elected National Constituent Assembly met for the first time. He knew that this was a highly risky exercise, and complained about the time taken to publish the decrees in the *Moniteur universel* and dispatch them to the colonies: “In truth, I did not believe it would be so long

and difficult to end slavery under the Republic”,² he wrote to Pagnerre, Secretary of the Government.



Victor Schœlcher, by Decaisne, 1832. © Ville de Fessenheim, France.

As President of the Commission for Abolition and rapporteur of its activities to the Provisional Government, Victor Schœlcher undertook a detailed study of documents in the colonial field from the French Revolution and the proceedings of the Colonial Commission presided over by the Duke de Broglie between 1840 and 1843. He also drew considerably upon the British precedent and the 66 articles of the abolition decree of 1833 in the British colonies. He made every effort to soften the impact of the over-abrupt break caused by the transition from the system of slavery imposed on 75% of the population in the colonies, to one of freedom and paid labour. He told the government that the Commission had undertaken “this great act of reparation of a crime of human abuse” so that it “was conducted in a manner that was most beneficial to those who had been the victims” while preventing “any harmful influence (which might) compromise its findings”.³

The basic decrees – drafted and signed in April 1848 at the same time as the abolition decree itself – established the rights and freedoms of association, expression and press publication, as well as male universal suffrage to designate representatives to the National Assembly, freedom of employment and access to education for all. They were also potentially

² Extract from a letter of 1 May 1848 by Victor Schœlcher to Laurent-Antoine Pagnerre, Secretary General of the Provisional Government, and now in the Schœlcher Library, Fort-de-France, Martinique.

³ Victor Schœlcher, President, and Henri Wallon, Secretary of the Commission, *Preliminary report to the Minister of the Navy and Colonies by the Emancipation Commission*, published in the *Moniteur universel* of 3 May 1848.

self-nullifying. The sections proclaiming freedom all contained the legal safeguards required to monitor, regulate and finally limit it.⁴

While the French abolition decree differed from the British precedent in that it was more immediate – given that the English had subjected their slaves to a four-year period of unpaid apprenticeship with their former owners – it resembled it in many other aspects. Both items of legislation indemnified planters. Slaves, for their part, remained deprived of any financial compensation or plot of land. They could even be asked to vacate their huts and the land they were cultivating on the plantation if the owner so required (see Fuma and Lara in the bibliography).

After a long historiographic period of glorification, which was at the least simplistic in describing the emancipation of slaves as attributable to action by one man, Victor Schœlcher, with some romanticization of the individual concerned, historians studied all the available sources. They were able to demonstrate the complexity of the context, the difficulties facing Schœlcher himself given the interests at stake – those of the planters, shipowners and merchants in the big ports – as well as the hesitations of the republicans themselves in 1848. They began to examine the real circumstances surrounding emancipation in the colonies, and the hard and very slow transition from slavery to the system of paid wages. They assessed the repercussions of implementing a new colonial policy in which the authorities included supervisory measures of the most coercive kind.

Research conducted at the *Centre de Recherches Caraïbes-Amériques* (CERCAM) [Centre for Research on the Caribbean and the Americas] have very recently led to the compilation of lists of slaveholders in 1848, in the French colonies in which slavery was abolished, in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana, Saint Barthélemy and Senegal (see Fisher-Blanchet and Lara in the bibliography).

⁴ See the studies and very comprehensive documents provided by Oruno D. Lara in the book entitled *La liberté assassinée. Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique et La Réunion, 1848-1856* [Freedom Assassinated: Guadeloupe, Guiana, Martinique and Réunion, 1848-1856], Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 2005.



François-Auguste Biard, “The abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848”, commissioned painting, 1848-1849, National Museum of the Château de Versailles. The slaves watch their chains being broken; they express joy and gratitude to the general commissioner of the Republic, who stands in front of the French republican flag holding the abolition decree. Behind him, sailors represent colonial trade with its promise of prosperity. The planters are among the crowd of freed slaves, symbolising recommendations to “forget the past” issued by the colonial authorities and candidates standing for election as colonial parliamentary representatives. © Coll. UNESCO.



Alphonse Garreau, “Proclamation of the abolition of slavery in La Réunion” (1848), commissioned painting from 1849, in the Quai Branly Museum, Paris. The general commissioner of the Republic, Joseph Napoleon Sarda-Garriga, holds the abolition decree in his right hand and, with the other, points to the work tools of the newly released slaves. In the foreground: a group of slaves in positions of “gratitude” and a set of work tools. In the background: on the ground – slave chains, a bust of the Republic bearing the inscription “Liberty”, the banana tree as a sign of prosperity, the sugar factory, beehives and bees, synonymous with work. As soon as he arrived in the colony in October 1848, Sarda-Garriga mandated obligatory work before slavery was abolished on 20 December of that year. © Coll. UNESCO.

Consequences of abolition: rebuilding the colonial system

It is possible from the available records to discern relative continuity in French colonial policy during the first half of the nineteenth century, and then immediately subsequent to emancipation. After 1848, narrow and inflexible social control of “new freemen” was established. In the book *La liberté assassinée* [Freedom Assassinated] (see the bibliography), Oruno D. Lara sets out all items of evidence that bear witness to how this emancipation policy was developed through the control and strict economic, social and political supervision of the populations concerned. In 1848, freedom had been proclaimed and the former slaves had become potential wage-earners ready to take up jobs in the first factories and then in the central sugar-producing factories. The abolition decree conferred on them the status of citizens summoned to elect their representatives to the National Assembly through universal suffrage.

In the weeks immediately following implementation of the proclaimed laws and freedoms in the colonies, these were steadily cut back. Decrees were issued on the “labour police”, freedom of association was abolished, press freedom was gagged by exorbitant surety payments, crop-growing undertaken by the “new freemen” was controlled and taxed when it was not centred on sugar cane or coffee trees. Movement of “new freemen” from one small town or village to another required an internal passport. It became mandatory for workers to carry a work record book indicating formally that someone employed them, without which they faced arrest, imprisonment and a fine for vagrancy. Anyone wishing to send their children over the age of 12 to school was obliged to pay a tax. These provisions comprised a set of coercive measures that Schœlcher would describe several decades later as “attacks on individual freedom”.⁵

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the re-establishment of a social control system similar to the one in the period of slavery was the inheritance of a long-standing codified policy for slave management and discrimination. Surveillance of production, trade, public order and the press, along with the control of social relations, was the constant concern of governors and local services.

But an understanding of 1848 and its aftermath in the French Caribbean colonies requires, first, that one should return to 1802 when slavery was reintroduced by Napoléon

⁵ In *L'arrêté Gueydon à la Martinique, l'arrêté Husson à la Guadeloupe* [The Gueydon Decree in Martinique and the Husson Decree in Guadeloupe], Paris, Le Chevalier, 1872.

Bonaparte in the decree of 20 May. It also means taking account of the period of intense colonial warfare and repression in Santo Domingo – which became independent, under the name of Haiti, on 1 January 1804 – and in Guadeloupe. In this latter colony, as in Martinique and Guiana, between 1802 and 1848, the government conducted a policy running counter to the abolitionist trends that were clearly evident at the time in France itself and in the western world. Fears ran high over the influence of the events in Santo Domingo/Haiti, with the intervention of Haitian agents sparking off rebellions among slaves and the revolt of “free people of colour” who had been granted “civic rights” and “political rights” by the law of 24 April 1833. The arguments of distinguished barristers – Isambert, Gatine or Chauveau-Lagarde – when defending Bissette, Fabien and Volny who were accused and condemned between 1823 and 1827 for having circulated in Martinique the brochure entitled *De la situation des hommes de couleur libres aux Antilles françaises* [The situation of free people of colour in the French Antilles], were a significant factor in these decisions.

From 1848, the planters exerted pressure on the government to negotiate the introduction of an underpaid labour force recruited on a contractual basis in Africa, India and China. The precedent for this had been set by Cuba and then the English colonies from between 1815 and 1820. In February 1852, the French government reached the first agreements with Great Britain for the recruitment of Indians in areas under the latter’s control and for the employment of so-called “free” workers on the African seaboard. These were workers who received wages – assuming they were paid at all – that were a quarter of the legal entitlement of “new freemen”; “immigrants” who experienced working conditions that certain contemporaries denounced as “a second slavery”.

Social myths and paradoxes

Study of the history of the French Caribbean colonies since the abolition of slavery is unsatisfactory without taking account of the mythology which abolition engendered from 1848.

A crucial miscalculation in the aftermath of abolition was that colonial economies relied more than ever on the single-crop cane sugar economy, even though beet sugar production had satisfied national consumer needs since the 1840s. Around 40 sugar-production factories were built in Guadeloupe and Martinique in three decades. In the first major crisis caused by overproduction from 1882-83 onwards, their equipment was reported to be obsolete and poorly maintained. The dangers of an outward-oriented single-crop export economy and the

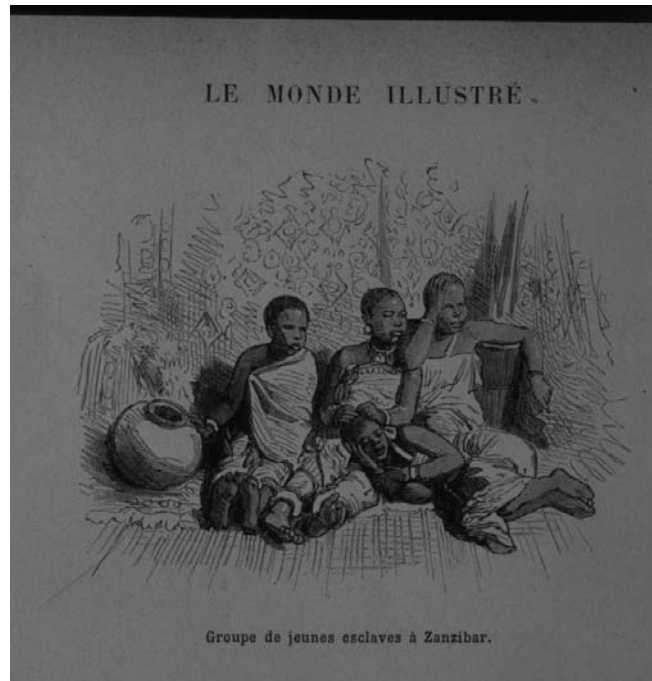
sales difficulties that it encountered on the European market were already lamented by some contemporaries.

Following the 1880s crisis of overproduction, the development cycle of the industrialized single-crop cane sugar economy in the colonies went through several main stages. The First World War led to short-lived prosperity even then regarded as fragile, following an increase in prices and the consumption of rum. This was followed by a long period of curtailed production and a social crisis matched only by the inability of the colonial economies to move towards other less precarious forms of land-use than banana production, which was viewed as the best way of responding to the uncertainties affecting sugar cane in the 1930s. The closure of virtually all factories in the 1960s led to unemployment, and the organized emigration of a high proportion of young and inadequately qualified young people. The full social and demographic impact of this migration is today clearer than ever in the Caribbean – one of the world regions from which emigration is highest.

The influence of the period of emancipation in 1848 lasted for well over a century. Its economic, land, trading and social repercussions are felt to this day.

New forms of servitude in the nineteenth century

The decree abolishing slavery in 1848 did not apply to Algeria. By contrast, in French trading posts in Senegal, slaveholders had to comply with it. Those living in foreign colonies were nominally given three years – but in reality longer than that – to free their slaves. Furthermore, according to the declared aims of the Berlin Conference in 1884-85, Europe was to coordinate the fight against human trafficking, and it was in the name of “freedom” that it undertook to colonize the African continent. The General Act of the Conference stated that each of the assembled powers firmly agreed “to employ all the means at (its) disposal for putting an end to the trade in slaves in the territories over which it exercised sovereign rights or influence”. However, in East Africa, the Zanzibar trading post and Pemba Island remained platforms for the distribution of slaves throughout the Indian Ocean until the early twentieth century. And Europe gave the name of “forced labour” to the employment of workers that it could no longer reduce to slavery. It was a labour force with servitude status, recruited by village leaders for building roads and railway lines, and for ensuring river traffic, penetrating forests, building bases, and mining and farming.



“Group of young slaves in Zanzibar”, late nineteenth century, *Le Monde illustré*. © Coll. UNESCO.

The Haitian diplomat Benito Sylvain noted clearly at the beginning of the twentieth century that, as Europeans dared not openly “maintain slavery everywhere in its primitive form, they found substitutes for it that were barely less heinous”.⁶

Following the Berlin and Brussels conferences, the congress of societies opposing slavery that Father Lavigerie staged in Paris in September 1890 upheld the role of guides that religious missionaries were meant to play alongside European colonizers. He assigned this task in particular to the order of Missionaries of Africa, the “White Fathers”, whose main activities would be to establish agricultural colonies without slavery and the training of African clergy. The need to abolish slavery was one justification among several for the expeditions and takeover of territory that occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, for example in Cochin-China, Africa and in 1896 in Madagascar, during what was termed a “pacification campaign”. Prisoners captured during military campaigns in Africa were assembled in “freedom villages”, in which the French army grouped together people then termed “non-free”, forming labour reserves for the major focal points of organized labour under colonization (see Renault in the bibliography).

⁶ *Du sort des indigènes dans les colonies d'exploitation* [On the Fate of Indigenous Populations in the Colonies subject to Exploitation], Paris, Boyer, 1901, p. 307.

Disregard for the past

Alongside the development of mythical interpretations of history that were peculiar to the French Caribbean colonies, a most unusual policy was implemented, which involved deliberately forgetting about the past and driving memory into a particular mindset. The scale of the process initiated in 1802-04 when slavery was re-established changed markedly from 1848 onwards. It was for the sake of “social reconciliation” between former slaves and their masters that, just after emancipation in 1848, the administration and all candidates seeking parliamentary representation expressly advocated “disregard for the past”. This expression crops up in professions of faith drafted by candidates of every conceivable persuasion during the legislative elections of 1848 and 1849.



Louisy Mathieu, former slave, elected representative of Guadeloupe to the National Assembly in 1848, under universal (male) suffrage, within the ranks of the “Schœlcherists”. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

In his first speech to the National Constituent Assembly, the former slave Louisy Mathieu, who was elected representative for Guadeloupe as a member of the “Schœlcherist” camp in 1848, expressed thanks to France for the freedom of his brothers. He was at pains in his short speech to emphasize the “generosity” of the former slaves who had also voted for Charles Dain, son of one of the island’s leading planters, when he too stood for election as a Schœlcherist: “They extended their hands” he said, “and uttered these words that were so

noble: ‘let bygones be bygones!’” As to François-Auguste Perrinon, “a free man of colour” from Martinique who became General Commissioner of the Republic in the island soon after abolition, he had on 27 February 1848 appealed “to (his) brothers in the colonies” for calm, and recommended that they should “totally forget the past”. The Martiniquan candidate Cyrille Bisette, “a man of colour” born free, highlighted for the benefit of “new freemen and new citizens” the virtues of “social reconciliation with the colonies”, forgetting about the past, and the unity of colonial citizens who belonged to “a common homeland” (see Lara and Schmidt in the bibliography).

It was through an effective policy for intimidating populations and for forgetting about the past that the colonial authorities were able to delete from the collective memory for over a century the most sensational political trial in the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, namely that of Léonard Sénécal, from Guadeloupe who advocated independence – “separatist” was the term used at that time – and of his supporters. Sénécal was accused of having wanted to re-enact the events of Santo Domingo in Guadeloupe soon after abolition in 1848. The trial which finally condemned him to penal servitude in 1851 was the subject of pamphlets, published at government expense, summarizing both the proceedings and the sentences in order to suppress any separatist aspirations (see Lara in the bibliography).

While the “new freemen” of 1848 were engaged in honouring and expressing their gratitude to the Republic as liberator – as well as its representative in colonial guise, Victor Schœlcher – by “forgetting about the past”, a very particular historical gesture was gradually devised. This was a manipulated variant of history that served the interests defended by its authors – planters and colonial administrators – who conveyed not history but their own economic, trade and political demands, as well as their social forebodings. Education, the clergy and the press were the main vehicles for this policy.

The slave trade, slavery and the resistance they provoked were reduced in written works to their simplest and shortest form of expression. Accounts of the era of slavery were conveyed orally within certain families but their testimony remained very furtive. Such “disregard for the past” in colonies in which the full awareness of history could lead to vengeance or, at the very least, to the perpetuation of deep social divisions, was compounded by a corresponding kind of cover-up in France. News there from the colonies was confined solely to great deeds, the tribute paid to pioneering and courageous settlers, accounts of abolition as having solved all problems, and words of encouragement for prospective investors.

Contemporary bondage

Today, there is no longer human trafficking or slavery readily comparable to the forms that developed intensively and legally from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Yet while no direct association is possible, constant reference is made in the twenty-first century to how unprecedented numbers of people throughout the world are reduced to servitude (27-30 million adults and 250-300 million children aged between 5 and 17, according to Anti-Slavery International and UNICEF). Economic hardship, a context of war and family indebtedness are today the essential causes of human trafficking and enslavement. While South Asia, India, Pakistan, the African continent, Indonesia and Central and South America are the hardest hit, the western countries with a high standard of living are by no means spared.

Since the 1920s and 1930s, international organizations have played a decisive part in identifying the incidence of human trafficking and enslavement. The League of Nations published in its 1926 Convention the first twentieth-century international definition of slavery, described as the “status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and UNESCO have since developed recommendations, and programmes of aid and of education to prevent and curb enslavement.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union signed in December 2000 prohibits slavery, forced labour and traffic in human beings. The European Commission has stated its support for economic sanctions against countries clearly found to be perpetrating human rights violations such as enslavement and child labour.

In France, the Committee Against Modern Slavery (CCEM) offers legal support to those trapped in domestic servitude. In December 2001, a parliamentary mission on modern slavery submitted a report on *L'esclavage en France aujourd'hui* [Slavery in France Today], in which certain proposals were made as a means of “combating human trafficking and acknowledging its victims”. In May 2001, the French Parliament passed a law declaring “the Slave Trade and Slavery (in the fifteenth-nineteenth centuries) to be a crime against humanity”. In 2002, the National Assembly adopted a law intended “to curb human trafficking” (see the headings “Contemporary bondage” and website references in the bibliography).

The question of education

French school curricula very directly reflect a lack of understanding about the colonial process that was based on slavery and human trafficking from the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. They even offer so to speak a selective “close-up” of it. They approach the subject solely in terms of trade, “discoveries”, or individuals who have left their mark on this episode of history, such as the abolitionist Victor Schœlcher.⁷ Furthermore, most school textbooks refer to no more than a handful of facts, whether the transatlantic slave trade, the condition of a slave in Surinam through reference to Voltaire’s *Candide*, or the abolition of slavery for the first time in 1794 or again in 1848.

No chapter of the syllabuses or books concerned deals specifically and comprehensively with the issue of the colonial process, the various aspects of human trafficking, the slave system and moves to abolish them. The subject area known as “civics education” refers at best to abolition in 1848 in the chapter on “individual and collective liberties”. Admittedly, since 2000, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana and Réunion have offered curricula “adapted” to their “local” contexts, which are backed by a bibliography of special textbooks.⁸ Yet provision in national education has remained detached from this trend. The texts and illustrations produced for students uphold the myth of freedom granted by a triumphant Republic.⁹

Even more revealing than the subjects selected for textbooks are the curricular instructions or “recommendations” issued by the Ministry of Education. A February 1998 ministerial circular urged rectors in the *académies* to organize teacher training on the history of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition. Another circular in November 2005 recommended that teachers should be obliged to bring up the topic on 10 May each year, the

⁷ The study of curricula in primary and secondary education was the focus of research and proposals by the Committee for the Remembrance of Slavery between 2004 and 2008, the essentials of which were published in *Mémoires de la traite négrière, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions* [Memories of the Slave Trade, Slavery and their Abolition], a report of the Committee for the Remembrance of Slavery, Paris, Editions La Découverte, 2005. For information on changes in education and on discussion initiated through adoption of the French law of 21 May 2001, which recognized the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity, I refer readers to Nelly Schmidt, “Teaching and Commemorating Slavery and Abolition in France: From Organized Forgetfulness to Historical Debates”, in Ana Lucia Araujo, Ed., *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space*, Chapter 6, Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Boston, January 2011, London, Routledge, 2012.

⁸ See the *Bulletin Officiel de l’Éducation Nationale* [National Education Ministry Official Bulletin], No. 8, 24 February 2000, “Spécificités des Départements d’outre-mer dans les programmes d’histoire-géographie” [The Specifics of the Overseas Departments in Curricula for History/Geography].

⁹ Further teaching material exists. See for example the UNESCO DVD entitled “Slave routes: a global vision”: Nelly Schmidt, teaching package Enslavement, Quiz, and information contained in “Finding Out More”, 2010.

“day chosen to remember slavery and commemorate its abolition”.¹⁰ For many years, in fact, history in French primary school education has been relegated to the level of a so-called “early-learning” subject. This approach was felt to leave teachers free to consider a historical topic of their choosing, provided that the school instilled into its pupils – and I quote from the ministerial instructions for these curricula – a “national conscience”. Yet where in all this was any reference to colonial expansion? The foregoing emphasis was in fact viewed as a means of upholding “national cohesion”, through judiciously selecting events of note that pupils should have to study in preference to others that were often less commendable.

In secondary education, the status of history is different. While at this level, of course, history has always been a compulsory subject, recent ministerial measures – in 2009 and 2010 – have tended to cut back the time devoted to it in the final years of the curriculum. It is worth noting in this respect the “recommendations” or instructions that history teaching in France nowadays is meant to follow. These indications are in fact concerned with memory and amount to myths and certainties to be passed on. It is not a question of understanding but of memorizing a set of facts that enable one to acquire this much vaunted “national conscience”, as advocated by Michelet and Lavissee over a century ago. It is a matter of transmitting a selection of facts that symbolize a nation and its emergence, its unity and its power, in the name of values regarded (rightly or wrongly) as “universal”.

Commemorations

Among the questions raised by study of a commemoration, some of them have to do with the meaning and purposes of such an act and the memory it is meant to convey. This appears to confirm an immediate association between commemoration and political power. Many different means are used to choose a commemoration, decide that it should occur, organize it and make it visible to the general public. Study of the roles more or less overtly attributed to it says a great deal about how the commemorating authority intends to condition or even manipulate the memory of whatever is commemorated. The questions raised are thus directly linked to the existing relationship between history and power.

With regard to the precise context of celebrations concerned with the history of the French Caribbean colonies, and in particular slavery and its abolition, four commemorative periods are covered in turn here: celebration of the first anniversary of the abolition of slavery

¹⁰ See the *Bulletin Officiel de l'Education Nationale* [National Education Ministry Official Bulletin], No. 41, 10 November 2005, “*La mémoire de la traite négrière, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions*” [The Memory of the Slave Trade, Slavery and their Abolition].

in Guadeloupe in 1849; commemoration of the Tricentenary of the French Antilles and Guiana in 1935; the centenary of the abolition of slavery in 1948, and then its 150th anniversary in 1998.

1849

In 1849 and despite the very detailed instructions addressed to colonial governors by the Ministry of the Navy and Colonies about how the event should be conducted, the first so-called “liberty” anniversary led to incidents in Guadeloupe which pitted against each other the political tendencies in contention for representation in the legislative elections in June. A tree of liberty was to be planted by the governor in the presence of the apostolic prefect. Leaders of the first political tendency standing for the island’s independence, which emerged in 1848 on the initiative of Marie-Léonard Sénécal, undertook to steal the tree prepared for the event and *use it differently* for their benefit. They organized a parallel commemoration backed by extensive publicity in rural areas. With three quarters of the colony’s population having just been granted free person status, an increasing number of official proclamations and ceremonies took place to encourage work, respect for private property and public order, and to establish a system of social control capable of replacing the institutional framework of slavery.

While at the end of the nineteenth century, events to commemorate abolition mainly involved banquets in honour of Schœlcher, they became more politically slanted after his death in 1893. Associations for memory proliferated in Paris and the colonies. It was as a tribute to Schœlcher that the first soldiers from Guadeloupe and Martinique enlisted for the First World War left for Europe. In the meantime in 1914, the governor of Guadeloupe, Emile Merwart, established 21 July, Saint Victor’s day, as a legal holiday.

1935

In response to warnings put out about the evils that had afflicted the colonies for decades and strikes by cane sugar workers in the 1930s, not to mention difficulties in rebuilding Guadeloupe after the devastating cyclone of September 1928, the government organized a large-scale celebration to mark the Tricentenary (1635-1935) of the incorporation of the (French) Antilles and Guiana into France.¹¹ To repeat the success of the 1931 International

¹¹ The Tricentenary law uniting the Antilles and Guiana with France, the bill for which was presented on 25 February 1935, was passed on the following 25 April.

Colonial Exhibition in Paris, a programme to commemorate the beginnings of French colonization was drawn up just as movements challenging the “benefits” of the colonial process were emerging in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

The government assumed leadership of this unprecedented effort to manipulate history. In Paris, an extraordinary range of events was organized, with conferences, film productions, the staging of operas and exhibitions, and commemorative dinners. A luxury cruise carried over 300 prominent public figures to the Caribbean on the liner *Colombie*. Streets, roads, bridges and monuments in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guiana were hastily restored for the occasion. The press was urged to sing with one voice the praises and promise of the unshakeable bond formed by these colonies with the “homeland” over the preceding three centuries.

The most far-fetched historical accounts recalled the dangers facing the first settlers when confronted by the indigenous peoples, described as fearsome *cannibals*. Much was made of the skills of the first administrators, the *redemptive* nature of the slave trade and the generous treatment of the slave labour force. One of the main aims was to attract capital and traders into colonies which were failing to recover from chronic social unrest. But whereas the 1931 International Colonial Exhibition was to dazzle its visitors with the vision of a “greater France”, the purpose of events at the Tricentenary of the French Antilles and Guiana was different. Indeed, it was vital to persuade the colonial populations themselves that their dependence carried *benefits*, and to persuade the French population that these far-off lands were exotic extensions of metropolitan France, which for three centuries had unfailingly demonstrated their attachment to it. On this basis, shrewd propaganda was designed to convince investors and entrepreneurs that across the Atlantic lay the real promise of prosperity.

1948

The background to commemoration of the centenary of the abolition of slavery and adoption of the (then) very recent “law of departmentalization” was the same, namely the aftermath of the Second World War. The myth built around Schœlcher soon after formal abolition in 1848 had simply expanded. It had offered grounds for many political decisions and symbolized the republican myth in colonial affairs. During the Second World War, the name of Victor Schœlcher was invoked both in the propaganda of the Vichy authorities and the ranks of the

Resistance. On all sides, “attachment to the homeland” was feted in public celebrations of Saint Victor’s Day.

In 1946, Aimé Césaire referred to Schœlcher several times as heir to the Principles of 1789 and the First Republic, in his speech as rapporteur on the bill to “departmentalize” the “former colonies”. In 1947, Emile Merwart and Gaston Monnerville headed a Federal Committee of Persons from Overseas to organize the centenary of the abolition of slavery and the transfer of the ashes of Victor Schœlcher and of Félix Eboué to the Pantheon. The departmental committees set up in the colonies organized the local festivities and “planting a tree of liberty”.¹² The personality of Schœlcher and the date of 27 April 1848, when the abolition decrees were signed by a majority of members of the Provisional Government in Paris, were the two focal points for celebration selected by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry recommended that rectors should organize the commemoration of abolition by attaching a “biographical note on Victor Schœlcher”¹³ to the circular containing their instructions. In the Sorbonne, Gaston Monnerville, Léopold Sedar Senghor and Aimé Césaire were invited to give lectures on 27 April 1948.¹⁴

The commemorative speech was straightforward: the abolition of slavery was down to the action of one man who had revived the trend towards colonial assimilation, which had emerged in the French Revolution and culminated in adoption of the law of departmentalization on 19 March 1946. The speech was publicized effectively in the press, conferences and radio broadcasts organized by the Grand Orient de France, as well as ministerial circulars in the field of education which conveyed the intended leitmotif with no variations. Yet despite many publications produced both in Paris¹⁵ and the colonies¹⁶ –

¹² See the account of events in Guadeloupe in the pamphlet entitled *Commémoration du Centenaire de l’abolition de l’esclavage* [Commemoration of the Centenary of the Abolition of Slavery], a lecture given by Raoul Bogat in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, on 27 April 1948, Imprimerie officielle, Basse-Terre, 1949.

¹³ Circular of 16 April 1948 signed by the directeur de cabinet (principal private secretary) of the Ministry of Education, H. Viguier. The biographical note entitled “*Schœlcher et l’abolition de l’esclavage*” [Schœlcher and the abolition of slavery], written by the historian Charles-André Julien, was taken from the encyclopedic monthly review, *Le Larousse mensuel*, of May 1948.

¹⁴ The speeches given at the Sorbonne were published by *Presses universitaires de France* in 1948.

¹⁵ For example, the collection of extracts from books by Schœlcher compiled by Emile Tersen and entitled *Esclavage et colonisation* [Slavery and Colonization], published by Presses universitaires de France in 1948, the article “*Centenaire de la liberté*” [Centenary of Liberty] published by the *Revue d’histoire des colonies* [Review of History in the Colonies] in the same year, the article by L. Joubert, entitled “*Les conséquences géographiques de l’émancipation des Noirs aux Antilles, 1848*” [The Geographical Consequences of the Emancipation of Blacks in the Antilles, 1848] in the *Cahiers d’outre-mer* [Overseas Journal], or the book by Gaston-Martin, *L’abolition de l’esclavage: 27 avril 1848* [The Abolition of Slavery:

including collected texts by Schœlcher and correspondence from different contemporaries – none of these events gave birth to any research initiative or historical movement.

1998

One hundred and fifty years after the abolition of slavery, the mediators were still surprised when historians explained to them how the policy of organized forgetfulness of the past, which was implemented in 1848, had been successfully maintained for over a century. The very extensively used iconography had relied uncritically on specially prepared pictorial material commissioned in 1848-49. The picture of the slave in broken chains casting a grateful glance at the abolitionist and Republic who have freed him was still very much alive. Paintings ordered by the government of the Second Republic, such as those of François Auguste Biard (“Proclamation of the Abolition of Slavery in the French Colonies”)¹⁷ or Alphonse Garreau (“Abolition of slavery on the island of Réunion”),¹⁸ extolled the freedom granted by the Republic’s general commissioners who replaced the governors formerly under the monarchy. But major elements in these large works were also ploughing implements, outlines of sugar-producing factories, sugar cane fields and, in the distance, trading vessels awaiting their cargoes of sugar kegs and other colonial commodities. So there was no freedom without work, public order, respect for private property, and submission to the new “labour police”. Moreover, the same may be said of the famous picture “A Slave Family in Exaltation” now in the National Library of Jamaica, which was one of the most widely used representations of the emancipation period in the British West Indies. The lithograph showing the “Planting of a Tree of Liberty at Basse-Terre”¹⁹ in Guadeloupe, in May 1848, stated just as clearly who would be the mediators of republican policy in colonial affairs. Against the background of a crowd carrying pikes, bayonets, suggestive Phrygian caps and crucifixes, the scene depicts the planting of a sugar cane stem, as a tree of liberty, in the presence of the governor, his private advisers and the apostolic prefect of the colony.

As to the speech of the 150th anniversary, it was unusually ambiguous. The slogan of the main organizers of events at the national level, the Ministry of Culture and the Overseas

27 April 1848], published in the *Collection du Centenaire de la Révolution de 1848* [Series of the Centenary of the Revolution of 1848] opened by Presses universitaires de France.

¹⁶ See for example Pierre Baude, *Centenaire de l'abolition de l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises et la Seconde République française, 1848-1948* [Centenary of the Abolition of Slavery in the French Colonies and the Second French Republic, 1848-1948], Fort-de-France.

¹⁷ Now housed in the national museum at the Chateau of Versailles.

¹⁸ Now kept in the Quai Branly Museum in Paris.

¹⁹ Lithograph, National Library of France.

State Secretariat, was “Tous nés en 1848” [“All of Us Born in 1848”]. A way was thus found of denying the centuries of resistance by slaves before then, and of imparting a feeling of cheerful inevitability to 1848 as a solution to all problems of the time, in a sort of national reconciliation. It was as if centuries of slavery, the efforts of slaves to resist it, and the abolition processes about which so much historical research still had to be done, was dissolved in a speech celebrating “the creative expression of the identity” of continents brought together by the transatlantic slave trade in a joyful and positive “fusion”,²⁰ which ironed out past antagonisms. While it is only fair to acknowledge the undeniable impact that the numerous events of all kinds organized in 1998 had on public opinion and the media, no less than on research and education in the longer term, one must also conclude that the whole commemoration remained very France-centred. Except in the case of a few academic symposia, the international comparative dimension that would have enabled the events commemorated to be placed in their broad context was absent from the general approach. Yet the UNESCO “Slave Route” project had been operational since 1994.

In 1983, the law of 30 June (No. 83-550) on commemoration of the abolition of slavery identified a precise date for each former colony, with the choice linked to the most significant period in this respect in the history of each of them. The following dates became public holidays: Martinique, 22 May; Guadeloupe, 27 May; Guiana, 10 June; Réunion, 10 December; and Mayotte, 27 April. The date of 10 May was chosen for Metropolitan France, following the recommendations of the law of 21 May 2001 and the proceedings of the *Comité pour la Mémoire de l’Esclavage* (CPME) [Committee for the Remembrance of Slavery], and for celebration of the “*Journée nationale des mémoires de la traite, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions*” [“day for national remembrance of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition”].

²⁰ See the vocabulary used in the *Preamble* to the official list of events and cultural initiatives in the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in 1998, Ministry of Culture and the Overseas State Secretariat.

RESOURCES

Historical research

It is clear that historical research into the slave trades, slavery and their abolition has been changing steadily since the 1970s. However until the turn of this century it suffered from real neglect within bodies for research into the humanities and social sciences, despite the recognition and funding they could have granted it. While no chair of the history of slavery and its abolition yet exists in a French university, several research teams have however been formed.

University research centres:

University of Paris IV-Sorbonne, Centre R. Mousnier – History and Civilizations (UMR 8596 of the CNRS): the Programme on “Slavery, Abolition, Slavery Abolitionists and Colonial Policies: comparative history, eighteenth-twentieth centuries” (*Esclavage, abolitions, abolitionnistes de l’esclavage, politiques coloniales: histoire comparée, XVIIIe-XXe siècles*);

University of Paris I: the Centre d’Etudes des Mondes Africains (CEMAf), UMR of the CNRS;

University of the French Antilles and Guyane: Project on “Slavery: institutions, laws and memories” (*Les esclavages: institutions, lois et mémoires*), *Centre de Recherche sur les Pouvoirs Locaux dans la Caraïbe* [Centre for Research on Local Powers in the Caribbean] (UMR 8053 of the CNRS); AIHP-GEODE group, Industrial Archeology, History, Heritage – Geography, Development, Environment in the Caribbean (*Archéologie Industrielle, Histoire, Patrimoine - Géographie, Développement, Environnement de la Caraïbe*);

University of La Réunion: *Centre d’Histoire de l’Université de La Réunion. Histoire-Politique-Patrimoines* (CRESOI) [Centre for History at the University of Réunion. History-Politics-Heritage], fields of research on “Colonization and Decolonization (nineteenth-twentieth centuries)” (*Colonisation et décolonisation, XIXe-XXe siècles*) and “Slavery and Memories” (*Esclavage et Mémoires*);

University of Nantes: Centre de Recherches en Histoire Internationale et Atlantique (CRHIA);

University of Rennes: Programme on “Coastal and Rural Societies: areas and trade” (*Sociétés littorales et rurales. Espaces et échanges*), *Centre de Recherches Historiques de l'Ouest* (CERHIO, UMR 5268 of the CNRS);

University of Bordeaux III Michel de Montaigne: Ameriber – American World research programme (*programme de recherche Ameriber – Mondes américains*), Workshop 2 – The Multifaceted Caribbean: dynamics and spheres of influence, “Caribbean societal and geopolitical dynamics (eighteenth-twenty-first centuries)” (*Caraiïbe plurielle: dynamiques et mouvances, “Dynamiques sociétales et géopolitiques caribéennes, XVIIIe-XXIe siècles”*).

Institut des Hautes Etudes de l'Amérique Latine: Centre de Recherche et de Documentation des Amériques (CREDA), University of Paris III – CNRS;

Institut de Sciences Politiques, Bordeaux, programme on “The Region of Africa in the World” (*Les Afriques dans le Monde*) (LAM, UMR 5115 of the CNRS);

Groupement d'Intérêt Scientifique – GIS – Réseau Amérique Latine (CNRS, *Institut de Recherche pour le Développement*, IRD, EHESS): the GIS, with its Latin America Network, brings together several university and research institutions in France, Mexico and Peru (www.reseau-amerique-latine.fr).

The International Centre for Research on Slavery, CIRESC, CNRS

The *Centre international de recherche sur les esclavages : Acteurs, systèmes, représentations* (CIRESC) [International Centre for Research on Slavery: players, systems and representations], has replaced the CNRS “Slavery” Priority Thematic Network (RTP). It has begun a European programme known as EURESCL (Europe Esclavage) which seeks to “put back slave trade, slavery, abolitions and their legacies in European histories and identities”. Indeed “Slave Trade, Slavery, Abolitions and their Legacies in European Histories and Identities” is the wording of the central topic.

Joint research programmes linking up several universities (in France, the United Kingdom, Canada and Senegal), are being developed and have led to symposia, seminars and workshops

organized in the different partner countries. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada is funding the programme “Slavery, Memory, Citizenship” developed within the Harriet Tubman Institute, York University, Toronto. The Agence Nationale de la Recherche (National Research Agency) in France is funding the AFRODESC programme on “Afro-descendants and Slavery: domination, identification and heritage in the Americas (fifteenth-twenty-first centuries)” (*Afrodescendants et esclavages: domination, identification et héritages dans les Amériques, XVe-XXIe siècles*) and the Agency of Universities in the French-speaking World is financing the project on “Slavery and Trafficking: communities, frontiers and identities” (*Les esclavages et les traites: communautés, frontières et identités*) at the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar.

(See the websites at <http://www.esclavages.cnrs.fr>, and <http://www.eurescl.eu>).

The Programme on the “Comparative History of Slavery, Abolition, and European Colonial Policies in the Caribbean and Americas, eighteenth-twentieth centuries” at the University of Paris IV (Sorbonne), CNRS, UMR 8596

At the University of Paris IV (Sorbonne), the multiannual research programme entitled “A Comparative History of Slavery, Abolition, and European Colonial Policies in the Caribbean and Americas, eighteenth-twentieth centuries”, funded by the academic council (*conseil scientifique*) is concerned with several topics as follows:

- the comparative history of slavery;
- the history of abolition and slavery abolitionists, eighteenth-twentieth centuries (a comparative approach to the French, British, Dutch, Danish, Spanish-speaking, Brazilian and United States colonies);
- analysis of the immigration of indentured labour following the abolition of slavery in all Caribbean island colonies and the countries of South America;
- analysis and classification of the successive reform proposals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, emanating from official bodies or elsewhere; successive measures to abolish slavery led everywhere to an overhaul of colonial policies;
- the history of European colonial policies in the Caribbean and Americas, eighteenth-twentieth centuries; the French colonies in the structure of France’s international relations in the Americas;
- the history of political movements in the Caribbean, eighteenth-nineteenth centuries.

A monthly seminar is held for students/researchers preparing a Master's degree or doctorate. An annotated publications programme with documents and unpublished or little-known books concerned with its topics, has been devised. The development of a computerized and bibliographic database on slavery, its abolition, slavery abolitionists and European colonial policies, eighteenth-twentieth centuries, has also been implemented.

UNESCO

The website of the UNESCO "Slave Route Project" offers a very comprehensive set of information documents and teaching resources. Also available for consultation are "The Slave Route Project" Newsletter, *From Slavery to Freedom ... , 2004: International Year for the Commemoration of the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition*, special issue, and the brochure *Struggles against slavery: International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition*, UNESCO, 2004.

In 2004, the French National Commission for UNESCO set up an expert committee to organize research, symposia and publications in liaison with the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network in the "Breaking the Silence" programme. The aim was to consider and discuss how the slave trade, slavery and their abolition were taught at all levels, and to provide teachers with the results of the exercise in published form, as well as concrete examples of the treatment of the topics concerned at school. A seminar on the teaching of these topics was organized with teachers in the foregoing Network. Its proceedings were published in 2005 and entitled *How should one teach the slave trade, slavery, and its abolition?*

See also the publication, which appeared in 2011, entitled *Breaking the Silence. Teaching the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives. Final report of the interregional online consultation of the UNESCO Associated Schools (ASPnet), 30 November-16 December 2010*, UNESCO Associated Schools, 2011. This is the final appraisal of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TST) programme of the Network of Associated Schools.

The Committee for the History and Remembrance of Slavery (CPMHE), Paris

Established in January 2004 in compliance with the law of 21 May 2001 which declared the slave trade and slavery to be a crime against humanity, the Committee for the Remembrance of Slavery, which in 2009 became the Committee for the History and Remembrance of Slavery (Comité pour l'Histoire et la Mémoire de l'Esclavage, or CPMHE), brought together some dozen persons from the world of scholarly research, associations and the arts. In its first years of existence, it campaigned to promote the topics of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition, as subjects at the various levels of education, and for the initiation of research programmes more intensively focused on these issues. The Committee also recommended improving and increasing the resources available for accessing relevant knowledge at all levels, and has begun to compile a record of museum collections on the subjects concerned, in collaboration with the Directorate of Museums in France.

The CPMHE is committed to the commemorations on 10 May, the date it proposed in 2005 as the “day for national remembrance of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition”. Its website provides a summary of all these activities: www.cpmhe.fr

Archaeological research

Archaeological research has taken up the topics of human trafficking and slavery quite recently. For a long time, archaeological excavations in Guadeloupe, no less than in Martinique and Guiana, amounted to a spate of looting or were the work of amateurs unable to carry out their activity or forward their results with the scientific rigour and continuity required. Today, such research is subject to strict supervision. It is conducted by archaeologists whose research reports are prepared for the Regional Directorates of Cultural Affairs or the regional or departmental councils.

For long limited to pre-Columbian sites, such research has quite recently become concerned to locate and in some cases recover remains of slave plantations and cemeteries. Work is also being carried out in the field of underwater archaeology.

Information on the most frequent archaeological research on the site of a former plantation in Guadeloupe may be accessed on the website of the *Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives*, INRAP (www.inrap.fr/archeologiepreventive/actualite/les-dernieres-decouvertes/2010), the French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research. The work relates to activity on the development site of the “Cité de la Connaissance” (Knowledge Complex) University in Saint-Claude, in which the remains of a former plantation in the Espérance quarter have been uncovered. Several sites of *habitations* have been located and are being – or will be – excavated. The same applies to cemeteries such as the one in Sainte Marguerite in which several hundred tombs were revealed following sand sampling. It appears to have been a slave cemetery first used in the middle of the eighteenth century, and use of which was continued until after 1850.

In addition, the Lesser Antilles Archaeological Association (AAPA) has opened several sites for both underwater and land surface archaeological excavation (www.aapa.e-monsite.com). In Martinique, archaeological research is carried out in collaboration with the AIHP-GEODE team at the University of the French Antilles and Guyana.

Since 1990, the *Groupe de Recherche en Archéologie Navale* (GRAN) [Naval Archaeology Research Group] has compiled a record of the underwater archaeological heritage in Martinique, with the assistance of the regional and departmental councils, and the Ministry of Culture. It is collaborating in the Guadeloupe and Martinique archaeological mapping programme.

At present, the Regional Archaeological Department has listed over 500 plantation/sugar-producing sites and 78 underwater sites in Martinique, excluding pre-Columbian or fortified sites (www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/archeo/martinique.htm).

In Guiana, the regional archaeology department has financially supported research on the site of the Loyola plantation (Rémire), and that of the Poncel habitation (Rémire-Montjoly).

In Réunion, a regional archaeology department is due to be set up soon within the DRAC. Underwater archaeology: the most recent research in this area is concerned with the Île des Sables, more commonly known as Tromelin Island, in the Indian Ocean. Archaeological excavation campaigns were carried out on these small islands in 2006, 2008 and 2010 by the

GRAN in order to reveal the signs of survival of some 60 castaway slaves when the East India Company slave vessel, the *Utile*, was shipwrecked in 1761. They had been taken aboard for transport from Madagascar to Mauritius. Eight of them were found alive when the *Chevalier de Tromelin* came in search of them in 1776. An account of the work of successive missions of the “Forgotten Slaves” project may be accessed on www.archeonavale.org/tromelin.

Places of memory

Efforts to upgrade many places of memory are increasingly attracting public historical recognition, along with funding to enable the preservation and promotion of several sites. The quaysides of slave ports such as Nantes, Bordeaux, Lorient, La Rochelle, Saint Malo, Le Havre, Honfleur, Marseille and others – as well as the port sites in Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Sint Maarten, Saint Barthélemy and Réunion, plantation sites and sugar-producing factories in Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and Réunion – are the focus of archaeological surveys or excavation, and measures for protection and renovation. The same applies to the places concerned, in the east of France, with the “*Route des Abolitions de l’Esclavage et des Droits de l’Homme*” [Road to the Abolition of Slavery and to Human Rights] (see the heading “Documents published by museums or for exhibitions. Places of Memory”, in the bibliography).

Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and Réunion possess a great many places of memory or, as one might say, historical locations. Each of these territories is in fact itself, in its entirety, a place in the history and memory of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition. Indeed, for over three centuries, human trafficking and slavery left their mark on each of these lands, ports, villages, towns, streets, forests, hills and rural districts.

On some sites, monuments and statues have been erected to commemorate certain events that belong to this history. The sites in the following list, which is not exhaustive, are confined to – and date from – the period of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition.

In Guadeloupe:

The *Marches des esclaves* [Pathways of the Slaves], Petit-Canal;

The Matouba site, Saint-Claude;

The Beausoleil *Habitation* (plantation or “home”), Saint-Claude;
The Louis Delgrès Fort, Basse-Terre;
The La Grivelière *Habitation*, Vieux-Habitants;
The *Indigoterie de l'anse* [Indigo Manufactory in the Cove] at la Barque, Vieux-Habitants;
The slave dungeon in the Belmont *Habitation*, Trois-Rivières;
The *Fleur d'Épée* [Sword Flower] Fort, Gosier;
The La Mahaudière *Habitation*, Anse Bertrand;
The La Ramée *Habitation*, Sainte Rose;
The Slave Cemetery at Anse Sainte-Marguerite;
The Néron *Habitation*, Le Moule;
The Morendais coffee *Habitation*, Vieux-Habitants;
The Pirogue *Habitation*, Marie-Galante;
The Murat *Habitation*, Marie-Galante;
The Roussel-Trianon *Habitation*, Marie-Galante;
The Schœlcher Museum, Pointe-à-Pitre.

In Martinique:

The Anse Latouche *Habitation*, Le Carbet;
The Pécoul *Habitation*, Basse-Pointe;
The Clément *Habitation*, Le François;
The Céron *Habitation*, Le Prêcheur;
The Beauséjour *Habitation*, Grand'Rivière;
The Lajus *Habitation*;
The Acajou *Habitation*, Le François;
The La Frégate *Habitation*, Le François;
The La Sucrierie *Habitation*, at Les Anses d'Arlets;
The Château-Gaillard *Habitation*;
The La Gondeau *Habitation*;
The O'Mullane *Habitation*;
The Case Paul *Habitation*;
The Leyritz Plantation, Basse-Pointe;
La Pagerie, Trois-Ilets;

The Château Dubuc, Trinité;
The Poterie, Trois-Ilets;
The Schœlcher Library.

In Guyana:

The Eléonore *Habitation* near Cacao;
The Loyola *Habitation*, Rémire;
The Vidal *Habitation*, Mondélice, Rémire;
The Moulin à vent (Windmill) at Rémire;
Mana;
The fugitive slave villages of Tonnégrande.

In Réunion:

Les Hauts (the Heights), refuges for fugitive slaves;
The Villèle museum, Panon-Desbassayns *Habitation*.

The “Road to the Abolition of Slavery and to Human Rights”, Pontarlier (Doubs):

A number of locations in the east of France are involved in this networked association as follows:

the House of Abbé Grégoire in Emberménil;
the Chateau de Joux near Pontarlier (where Toussaint Louverture died in deportation);
the house of Anne-Marie Javouhey at Chamblanc;
the Victor Schœlcher House at Fessenheim;
the House of Negritude and Human Rights at Champagney.

In Nantes:

“The Shackles of Memory” association has published a leaflet entitled “*Sur les traces de Nantes port négrier*” [Rediscovering the slave port of Nantes].

Historical societies

The Centre for Research on the Caribbean and the Americas (CERCAM), Paris:

Members of the Centre for Research on the Caribbean and the Americas (CERCAM) which was initially set up in 1982 as a priority research area at the University of Paris X – Nanterre, formed the committee “*De l’oubli à l’histoire*” [From Oblivion to History] and decided on a multidisciplinary programme of activity and meetings/workshops to promote knowledge of the history and cultures of the peoples who had been subjected to slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas.

The CERCAM, which has already extensively written and published scholarly and educational textbooks on these topics – with the *Centre national de documentation pédagogique* (CNDP) for example – organizes seminars, study days, symposia and exhibitions. Among its publications are the following: *Catalogue de l’exposition Victor Schœlcher* [Catalogue of the Victor Schoelcher Exhibition], CERCAM, in collaboration with the Ethnology Laboratory at the Museum of Mankind, in Paris, 1994; the *Cimarrons* series, in collaboration with Editions Jean-Michel Place, Paris, and *Espaces Caraïbes* [The Caribbean], University of Paris X – Nanterre. This varied output is intended for researchers, teachers in some of the programme, and a wider public (see the bibliography); www.cercam-leblog.com.

The Shackles of Memory, Nantes:

The association that organized the exhibition “The Shackles of Memory” in 1992 at the Castle of the Dukes of Brittany in Nantes has since 1999 published the annual review *Les Cahiers des Anneaux de la Mémoire* [Journal of the Shackles of Memory]; the website is www.anneauxdelamemoire.org.

The Association for the Study of European Colonization (1750-1850) – APECE, Paris

The Association pour l’Etude de la Colonisation Européenne (1750-1850) (APECE) pursues activities concerned with the history of slavery and its abolition. It holds a monthly seminar at the Sorbonne and publishes proceedings (see the bibliography).

The Guadeloupe History Society, Departmental Archives of Guadeloupe. Publishes a newsletter.

The Martinique History Society, Departmental Archives of Martinique. Publishes a newsletter.

The French Society for Overseas History:

Publishes the periodical *Outre-Mers: Revue d'Histoire* [Overseas: a review of history], and its special issues, sfhom.free.fr.

The Road to the Abolition of Slavery and to Human Rights, Pontarlier:

A group focused on five places: the House of Abbé Grégoire in Emberménil; the Chateau de Joux near Pontarlier; [the Anne-Marie Javouhey House in Chamblanc](#); the Victor Schœlcher House in Fessenheim; and the House on Slavery and Negritude in Champagny (www.abolitions.org and www.chateaudejoux.com).

The Naval Archeology Research Group, GRAN:

This association has among other things carried out excavations on Tromelin Island (Indian Ocean, the “Forgotten Slaves” project). It has also investigated the Havre de Trinité site in Martinique, French Polynesia, traces of the La Pérouse expedition, the vicinity of Gorée Island and in Valparaíso (Chile) (archeonavale.org).

Mémoire St Barth:

The association offers online resources about the history of Saint Barthélemy: the slave trade, slavery and their abolition; www.memoirestbarth.com;

History in Pictures, 1789-1939:

The “History in Pictures” (*L'Histoire par l'Image*) website, in association with the Directorate-General for the Heritage, the Joint Association of National Museums and the Ministry of Education, “explores the history of France through the collections of museums and documentary records”; www.histoire-image.org; the “*Esclavage*” [Slavery] web page;

Historun:

This association contributes to a website, in liaison with the departmental archives of Réunion, and organizes conferences and seminars on the history of Réunion and Indian Ocean cultures; www.historun.com.

Educational and teaching resources

Since the 1980s, several official bodies and some cultural associations have started to produce a variety of materials for teachers and their students on the subject of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition. The National Centre for Documentary Teaching Resources (CNDP, or the *Centre national de documentation pédagogique*) did much to initiate the trend through the publication of several issues in the well-known set of “*Textes et Documents pour la Classe*” [Texts and Documents for Classroom Teaching] – “*Esclavage*” [Slavery], No. 350, 1984, by Oruno D. Lara, “*Les abolitions de l’esclavage. Une longue marche*” [The Abolition of Slavery: a long crusade], No. 663, 1993, by Oruno D. Lara and Nelly Schmidt, and a film on Victor Schœlcher, produced in 1981.

The commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in 1998 and then the adoption in May 2001 of the law declaring that the slave trade and slavery were crimes against humanity stimulated fresh efforts to make available working documents for teaching. The CNDP and several regional centres became involved in producing teaching aids for various levels of education. The same applied to several museums with the resources to organize exhibitions and publications on these topics.

In a circular of November 2005, the Ministry of Education asked rectors to require teachers to arrange a session on the subject of slavery, in primary and lower secondary schools. A circular from the Prime Minister dated 29 April 2008 (*Journal Officiel* No. 0130 of 2 May 2008) then recommended that *académie* rectors and inspectors should, under the heading of “educational actions”, promote the resources available in regional centres for documentary teaching materials “to teach the history of slavery” and urge public records facilities, museums and other commemorative locations to support their efforts. A list of these resources was then compiled and can be accessed at <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid45786/memoire-de-la-traite-negriere-de-l’esclavage-et-de-leurs-abolitions.html>.

The CIDEM, the Centre for Civic Information (www.cidem.org), prepared a special report in the series “*Itinéraires de citoyenneté*” [Routes towards citizenship] on the topic “memory of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition” (<http://itinerairesdecitoyennete.org>). Under the heading “Memory and History“, it contains a particularly well-chosen set of texts, documents and illustrations.

The CIRES (International Centre for Slavery Research) is working with training staff at the Créteil-University of Paris XII IUFM to develop teaching materials. The EURESCL programme (<http://www.eurescl.eu>) is circulating resources prepared by teachers which contain annotated information and historical texts pertaining to various periods. And it will be recalled that a symposium *Enseigner les traites négrières et les esclavages* [Teaching the Slave Trade and Slavery] was held at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (Paris) in May 2011.

Several reports were prepared on the subject of teaching the slave trade, slavery and their abolition in France. For example, mention should be made of the detailed study carried out by the CPME in 2004-05 and entitled *Mémoires de la traite négrière, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions* [Memories of the slave trade, slavery and their abolition], report of the CPME, Paris, Editions La Découverte, 2005, or the report of the *Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique* (INRP), *L’enseignement de l’esclavage et des traites dans l’espace scolaire hexagonal* [Teaching Slavery and Trafficking in Schools in Metropolitan France] which appeared in 2011 (see the bibliographical references) and can be accessed online at www.inrp.fr.

Research at regional centres for documentary teaching resources:

Several centres have produced resource packages on the slave trade, slavery and their abolition, for the purpose of teaching history and French. They are listed in the bibliography (see “Finding out More” below).

The heritage and education

Slaves were often depicted by artists. Painters and sculptors from Michelangelo to Delacroix, Géricault and David d'Angers, viewed them as particular sources of inspiration. The abolition of slavery proclaimed twice by the French Government in 1794 and then in 1848 resulted in works meant to extol the decision. The same works also served a political purpose. Such was the case in 1848 of two paintings produced to order by the painters François-Auguste Biard ("*Proclamation de la liberté des Noirs aux colonies*" [Proclamation of the Abolition of Slavery in the French Colonies]) and Alphonse Garreau ("*Proclamation de l'abolition de l'esclavage à La Réunion*" [Abolition of Slavery on the Island of Réunion]),²¹ in which, in front of a group of slaves who had just been freed from their chains, the commissioners of the Republic were shown holding in one hand the emancipation decree, while displaying in the other the implements of agricultural toil to which those freed would be condemned without delay.

Today, many museums via their education services have opened thematic workshops, using artistic items held by them on human trafficking and slavery as a means of addressing these topics.

Public records facilities, museums, libraries, government bodies and recent exhibitions

Public records:

In 2007, the National Archives published a *Guide des sources de la traite négrière, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions* [Guide to Sources on the Slave Trade, Slavery and their Abolition] (Paris, Archives Nationales, La Documentation Française). This is a working resource which supplements existing records of resources on these topics, which are preserved in the National Archives, the National Overseas Archives and various centres for departmental archives.

²¹ The first of these two paintings is kept in the museum at the Chateau of Versailles, and the second at the Quai Branly Museum in Paris.

As a contribution to their educational services, some of the centres for departmental archives have published documentary materials for teachers. The following are worthy of note:

The Guadeloupe departmental archives:

- *Esclavage et traite négrière en Guadeloupe du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* [Slavery and the Slave Trade in Guadeloupe from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries], double package + CD-ROM.
- *Les immigrations en Guadeloupe au XIXe siècle* [Immigration to Guadeloupe in the nineteenth century].

The Martinique departmental archives:

- *L'habitation, domaine terrien des Antilles avant et après la révolution industrielle* [The plantation as land property in the Antilles before and after the industrial revolution].
- *La Martinique au temps de la Révolution française 1789-1794* [Martinique at the time of the French Revolution 1789-1794].
- *L'immigration indienne à la Martinique* [Indian Immigration to Martinique].

The Réunion departmental archives:

- Bourbon, les archives de l'esclavage, 1665-1848 [Bourbon, the records of slavery, 1665-1848].

Museums

An inventory of national and regional collections of items relating to the slave trade, slavery and their abolition, in museums in France, was begun by the CPME in 2005 and 2006. The first results have been placed online with texts by Nelly Schmidt and Françoise Vergès (www.comite-memoire-esclavage.fr/inventaire, section Culture/Patrimoine, “*L’inventaire muséographique sur le site du CPME*” [Display of museum resources on the CPME website]).

Among the museums that possess artefacts and works of art concerning these topics – whether permanently on display or in their reserve collections – the following are of special note:

- The Regional Museum of History and Ethnography, Fort-de-France, Martinique;
- The Maison de la Canne (Cane Sugar Museum), Trois Ilets, Martinique;
- The Site de Fond Saint Jacques (Fonds Saint Jacques Cultural Centre), Martinique;

- The Rivière-Pilote Eco-museum, Martinique;
- The Schœlcher Museum, Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe;
- The Museum of Guyanese Culture, Cayenne, Guiana;
- The Musée Villèle (Réunion History Museum), Saint-Gilles, Réunion;
- The Quai Branly Museum, Paris (collections of items and, in particular, Victor Schœlcher’s donation to the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography, which became the Museum of Mankind;²² special collection of illustrations; activities on the topic of slavery), see <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/fr/actualites/journee-annuelle-des-memoires-de-la-traite-de-l-esclavage-et-de-leurs-abolitions/le-musee-du-quai-brantly-et-l-esclavage.html>;
- The Dapper Museum, Paris, Cinematographic Festival “Images of Slavery: live remembrance” [*Regards sur l’esclavage: Mémoire vive*];
- The Aquitaine Museum, Bordeaux, rooms used permanently since 2009 for the exhibition on “Bordeaux, the Atlantic trade and slavery” [*Bordeaux, le commerce atlantique et l’esclavage*];
- The Castle of the Dukes of Brittany Museum, Nantes (temporary exhibition *De l’esclavage à son abolition* [From Slavery to its Abolition], catalogue of the exhibition produced at the museum (1992-94) by the association *The Shackles of Memory*) and permanent displays;
- The New World Museum, La Rochelle (publication: *L’esclavage dans les collections du Musée du Nouveau Monde* [Slavery in the Collections of the New World Museum] by Thierry Lefrançois, Editions des Musées d’art et d’histoire);
- The Museum of the Indian Company, Lorient;
- The Loire Navy Museum, Châteauneuf-sur-Loire;
- The Natural History Museum, Nîmes;
- The African Museum, Lyon.

Libraries

- The National Library of France, Gallica website;
- Library of the former Paris Arsenal, Paris, National Library of France;

²² See Nelly Schmidt, *Victor Schœlcher*, Paris, Editions Fayard, 1994, annexe: *Les “dons Schœlcher”* [Schœlcher donations] and Inez Fisher-Blanchet, *Catalogue de l’exposition Victor Schœlcher au Musée de l’Homme* [Catalogue of the Victor Schœlcher exhibition at the Museum of Mankind], based on the Schœlcher donations, Centre for Research on the Caribbean and the Americas, 1994.

- The Schœlcher Library and Martinique Departmental Archives, Fort-de-France, Martinique: website on “*Histoire et Patrimoine. Autour de la correspondance de Victor Schœlcher*” [History and Heritage: a review of the correspondence of Victor Schœlcher], written by Nelly Schmidt;
- University Library, University of La Rochelle, exhibition on “The Road to the Abolition of Slavery and to Human Rights” [*Route des Abolitions de l’Esclavage et des Droits de l’Homme*], produced by the association of the same name.

Government bodies

- The National Assembly: “History and Heritage” [*Histoire et Patrimoine*], “Abolition of Slavery” [*Abolition de l’Esclavage*], www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/esclavage/abolition.asp;
- The Senate: the www.senat.fr/Evenements and Senat-in-Junior websites contain “*Victor Schœlcher (1804-1893). Une vie, un siècle*” [Victor Schœlcher (1804-1893): a life, a century], written by Nelly Schmidt.

Recent exhibitions

- Town of Houilles (Yvelines, 78), exhibition on *Victor Schœlcher, ses voyages, ses combats, ses passions* [Victor Schœlcher, his travels, his combats, his passions], 2004 (catalogue available);
- Departmental Council of Yvelines, Versailles (Yvelines, 78), Orangery on the Estate of Madame Elisabeth and the Town of Houilles, *Combats pour une abolition*. [Struggles for Abolition], 2010-11 (catalogue available);
- The Mazarine Library, Paris, “The Antilles in Paris: treasures of the Mazarine Library” [*Les Antilles à Paris: Trésors de la Bibliothèque Mazarine*], 2011;
- The Schœlcher Museum, Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, exhibition of photographs on “Places of memory, remembrance of places: rediscovering the slave trade and slavery” [*Lieux de mémoire, mémoire des lieux. Sur les traces de la traite négrière et de l’esclavage*] (Philippe Monges), 2009;
- On the UNESCO website: the French language version of the exhibition “Lest We Forget”, Schomburg Center, New York;
- The Quai Branly Museum, Paris (exhibition of special items in 2011 during the Year of the Overseas Regions);

- The Nantes IUFM, exhibition on “Teaching Resources concerned with Trafficking and Slavery” [*Des outils pédagogiques autour de la traite et de l’esclavage*], The Shackles of Memory Association, 2011;
- Overseas State Secretariat, *Traite négrière, esclavage, abolitions. Mémoires et Histoire*, [The Slave Trade, Slavery and Abolition: memories and history], an exhibition devised by Nelly Schmidt, Marcel Dorigny and Marie-Hélène Dumeste, Paris, May 2008, publication of the report-catalogue in 2009.
- The Museum of Angoulême, an exhibition on “The Paths of Slaves” [*Chemins d’esclaves*], 2010.

Issues and debates

The colonial prism is especially revealing as regards what remains unspoken and the persistent gaps in any consideration of subjects concerned with colonization and the historical incidence of enslavement in history. Pre-conceived ideas are still innumerable not just in education but also in the media and even some research circles. The over-hasty generalizations made recently – since the start of the twenty-first century – on the subject of so-called “memorial” laws have thrown into sharp relief the yawning gaps still separating research from the means used to convey its content to the widest possible audience.

One of the effects of the take on the past that developed after the abolition of slavery in France and in the French colonies in 1848 is still clearly apparent in the reactions of surprise and sometimes denial when a previously watered down, often toned down, sometimes falsified version of history is elevated to the status of a national commemoration. This occurred when, after adoption of the French law of May 2001 declaring the slave trade and slavery to be crimes against humanity, a national day of commemoration was set for 10 May. The debates sparked off, for example, by article 4 of the law of 23 February 2005 on teaching about the “benefits” of French colonization (an article since repealed), are evidence of the difficulty that France and some other European countries have in confronting their colonial past, with its human trafficking and the enslavement of millions of individuals.²³

²³

I am referring in particular to the debates arising from this article of the February 2005 law adopted by the French National Assembly, requiring that “university research programmes should accord the history of the French overseas presence, particularly in North Africa, the emphasis due to it” and that “school curricula should acknowledge in particular the positive role of the French overseas presence, especially in North Africa, and should confer on the history and sacrifices of the French army combatants from the territories concerned the eminent position to which they are entitled”. See also, with regard to British historiography, the article by Seumas Milne, “*Réhabilitation du colonialisme*” [Restoring Colonialism to Favour] in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Paris, May 2005.

Indeed, it still seems very hard to bring the issues behind the realities of French colonialism and slavery out into the open, when certain leitmotifs exalting colonization are apparently reappearing both within the French parliament and some European academic circles, and when the media have barely emerged from a long period of self-censorship on these subjects. How is one to understand that, while some historians rightly considered that we were dealing here with whole swathes of human history which should be studied, criticized and transmitted, others viewed as entirely obsolete or misplaced the description of the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity? How can one accept that some people think it totally unjustified to acknowledge the existence of a long-term trauma, which stemmed from these events and today still affects all who have inherited this history? How can one admit that it was possible to misjudge to such a degree – and occasionally deny – the scale and longevity of the after-effects of a colonial system so many of whose aspects remain sensitive today? Have the policy of disregard for the past, which was implemented in 1848, and the manipulation of memory really achieved their aims to this extent?

For further information

The following is a select bibliography of items mainly in French. For an international bibliography, which is essential for situating and comparing the themes referred to, see the bibliographical references mentioned elsewhere in this work and on the corresponding website, the UNESCO DVD “Slave Routes. A Global Vision”, and educational materials in PDF format: “Enslavement” and “To know more”.

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Projects by the *Académies* (the regional education authorities) and the CRDPs:

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Centre de Recherches Caraïbes-Amériques: www.cercam-leblog.com

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Historun, Réunion: www.historun.com

Centre de recherche sur les sociétés de l'océan Indien de l'Université de La Réunion (CRESOI): www.centre-histoire-ocean-indien.fr

All the folders and texts of international conventions on the site of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Geneva): www.ohchr.org (/law/slavery; /law/abolition; /law/slavetrade; /law/trafficpersons; /law/forcedlabour; /law/protocoltraffic; /law/childlabour)

Anti-Slavery International: www.antislavery.org

Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org

End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, ECPAT: www.ecpat.org

International Labour Office: www.ilo.org

UNICEF: www.unicef.org

Comité contre l'Esclavage Moderne [Committee against Modern Slavery] (France):
www.esclavagemoderne.org

Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org

European Commission, Daphne Project, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Against modern slavery and human trafficking:
www.victimnes-of-trafficking.org