

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAURITIUS AS A SLAVE TRADING CENTRE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

African and Indian Slaves were the first labour workers to come to Mauritius, Réunion and the Seychelles Islands. Mauritius ultimately became a turning point for slave trading in the South West Indian Ocean.

According to maritime records, no less than 160,000 slaves were brought in from the African and Malagasy coasts to Mauritius and Réunion Islands. A number of slaves and free workers also came from the Indian sub-continent.

SLAVERY IN MAURITIUS

The practice of slavery was enforced in Mauritius from 1638 to 1835, covering the Dutch, French and early British occupations.

During the **Dutch occupation**, slaves accounted for one-third of the population on the island and were confined to the felling of ebony trees, the collection of tortoises, and to the cultivation of basic food crops. The Dutch occupation ended in 1710 as the stock of ebony and tortoises had greatly diminished.

During the **French occupation** which lasted from 1715-1810, slaves accounted for 80% of the total population of Isle de France. They were brought over mostly from Madagascar, West African coast and the South-East of Africa.

During the French occupation, the slave trade was governed under the **Code Noir**, at first better known as the Code Colbert of 1605. The **Code Noir** was promulgated in Mauritius, then Isle de France, in 1724. Many slaves worked as artisans, others as manual workers and in the construction of roads, fortifications, buildings, canals and aqueducts in the port area.

The slaves had no family life and were subject to severe punishment, sometimes for trifling offences. Many slaves preferred to elope from the domain and live as maroons. It is estimated that around 12% of the slaves' population were permanently on the run. Captured slaves could be beheaded and the person responsible for the capture was compensated by the authorities.

By the end of the French occupation, there were 80,000 slaves in Isle de France. When the British captured the island in 1810, they maintained slavery. In 1833, the House of Commons passed an act for its abolition in all British colonies. Slavery was formally abolished in Mauritius, Rodrigues and Seychelles on the 1st of February 1835.

ORIGIN OF THE SLAVE ROUTE PROJECT

The implementation of the Slave Route Project was approved in 1993, at the General Conference of UNESCO. The project was launched officially in September 1994 in Ouidah, Benin, one of the former major slave markets on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. The Slave Route Monument Project addresses not only the universal phenomenon of slavery, but also, the importance of the slave trade in the history of the Americas, the African continent and of the Indian Ocean.

UNESCO INTERNATIONAL SLAVE ROUTE MONUMENT - INDIAN OCEAN

In 2004, UNESCO launched an initiative to illustrate the links between the Mascarenes, the African Continent and India on the Slave Route in the Indian Ocean. It was opportune for Mauritius to position itself on this route, as the island is considered to have been a major hub of the Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean.

ERECTING AN INTERNATIONAL SLAVE ROUTE MONUMENT

The initiative of erecting an International Slave Route Monument significantly at the foot of the Le Morne Brabant Mountain, highlights the importance of the country in the Slave Trade at the regional level and the powerful significance of the Le Morne Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site as a focal place for the Commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery and its strong symbolism of Resistance to Slavery. The monument was purposefully erected at this particular area of the landscape because of the linear connection between the sea, the beach, a historical and legendary place called Belle Vue ("Valley of Bones") and the West Cliff face towards the beach and the 'Passe des Marrons' (now Passe de l'Ambulante) and the 'Passe de la Prairie', the two points of escape for slaves to the open sea and Madagascar. Geographically, the monument was designed facing Madagascar and Africa beyond.

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE ROUTE MONUMENT IN MAURITIUS

On the 1st February 2009, the International Slave Route Monument (ISRM) was formally unveiled at the foot of Le Morne Brabant Mountain. It is a tangible symbol of the history of slavery in Mauritius and around the world, especially with the inscription of Le Morne Cultural Landscape on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008. The ISRM consists of a central monument, surrounded by smaller stone sculptures which recall the different places from where slaves were captured and shipped to Mauritius, and onward to other destinations. The main stone and the surrounding stones were carved by sculptors from various countries. The ISRM design is an abstract one, denoting a 'compass' that conveys directions to the points of origin or destinations of slaves passing through Mauritius.

THE INTERNATIONAL SLAVE ROUTE MONUMENT WITHIN LE MORNE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE





Voile de la Liberté / Sail of Liberty
Mr. Ndary Lo (Senegal)

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Emerging hands: an expression of freedom or the request by prayer. The door in the stone symbolizes a destination of no return. Slaves were stacked in the holds of slave ships to be transported to America to work on coffee and sugarcane plantations. The symbol of the boat is also linked to Senegal, as the name of origin 'Senegal' signifies a boat. The door with no return thus becomes, in this representation, a door of hope. This sculpture connects the past, the present and the future and fosters discussion, sharing of knowledge, the fight against oblivion and respect for history.



Central Rock: Escape
Mr. Jean Michel Hotentote (Mauritius)

1

The central rock shows a slave emerging from the stone trying to escape from bondage in the direction of his country of origin, Madagascar. The slot at the top of the stone shows a group of abstract human figures representing slaves jumping from the mountain.



Résistance / Resistance
Mr. J. Rabemananjara (Madagascar)

3

The design of the rock shows a man in traditional clothing, a *lamba*. The clothing represents resistance to slavery. The sitting position and his enchained hands and feet also give us the impression that the man defied slavery, while his culture and tradition remain unaltered.



L'Homme a prié pour que la chaîne soit brisée / Prayer to break the chains
Mr. Fritz Laratte (Haïti)

5

The sculpture symbolizes liberation from slavery. It tells the story of a slave who looks asleep, praying to God to be liberated. And at the end of his imploration, his hands were suddenly liberated from the chains that kept him in servitude.



Phénix Rouge / Red Phoenix
Mr. Lionel Sabatté (France)

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The design of the sculpture, made of 5 cent coins of Mauritius, represents a bird, the Phoenix, flying from the rock towards liberty, a theme in harmony with this site linked with maroonage and. The Phoenix, a mythical bird, is a symbol of liberty and rebirth. This sculpture pays tribute to all those who fought for the abolition of slavery, but the fight for liberty is an endless strive. The "Red" is an allusion to the red-coloured earth of Mauritius.



Down with Slavery / abaixa a escravatura
Mr. Jorge Jose Munguambe (Mozambique)

4

The sculpture represents a slave woman. She is standing and dancing. It is one of the means of expressing resistance, while finding relief from slavery. The smile on the woman's face, as she dances freely and expresses her emotions, is a unique moment of liberation, while she jumped off the mountain top for freedom. Now, in the ISRM, she is in contact with her ancestors.



New Born
Professor Nanpeng Zhuang (Republic of China)

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This rock was sculpted in line with its natural shape. The main theme of this sculpture is Love, which is depicted through the symbolic figure of a Mauritian mother with her child in her arms. She is surrounded by clouds of happiness coming from the east. This image depicts an atmosphere of warmth, happiness and peace, which reminds us that Mauritius is moving forward after the abolition of slavery. The figure of the Mauritian Dodo and the Phoenix of China recalls the dynamic relationship between China and Mauritius.



Flight for Freedom
Professor Pandeya Rajivanayan (Rep. of India)

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The significance behind the sculpture is the quest for freedom for slaves. The lower part of the sculpture represents the mountain. The middle part symbolizes a man flying as a free bird. The upper part of the sculpture is a frail roof signifying the struggle or liberty. His struggle is that of humanity in search of freedom so that the huge mountain barrier in front of him becomes insignificant. After struggling, the man is free.



Porte de la Liberté / Door of Liberty
Mrs. Dolaine Fuma Courtis (Réunion Island)

2

The rock by mere chance has the natural shape of the roof of a straw hut. At the threshold of the door, a woman is sitting, calm and serene; her bangles are no more enchained and they are now mere jewelry. The chain that used to keep her captive has now been converted into a decoration, reminding us of the cruel past. The symbol of servitude is used as a simple object.



The caves (Al-Kafi)
Mr. Zul Bin Idris (Malaysia)

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The sculpture shows three caves and inside each one of them, human figures are sculpted. The figures represent slaves who were trapped in a place where, as human beings, freedom was denied to them. The sculpture is the remembrance of agony, suffering, fear and anger that fugitive slaves on the run had to go through while seeking shelter in caves. Being fugitives, they were invariably unable to move as free men.

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