

By Libbie Snyder

For the past 800 years, child slaves in Mauritania have been as invisible in their own community as the country's institution of slavery has been to international eyes. In Mauritania today, an estimated one million of the population live as slaves and approximately half of slaves are children. Slavery in Mauritania is unique not only for its centuries-old continuation, but also for its deep-rooted acceptance in the minds of the slaves. Child slavery is fundamentally ingrained into a hierarchical social structure whereby slaves are born, raised, and die all the while accepting their inherited status. Unlike the Atlantic slave trade, little violence is necessary to maintain Mauritanian slaves' subordination, as few question their position or even contemplate escape. As a result, child slaves in Mauritania experience greater independence and less violent treatment than slaves in different societies, such as Sudan. However, Mauritania's slavery is unique for its quality of acceptance among all members of society so that escaped or freed slaves are not welcomed and face limited to zero opportunities for success or advancement. Ultimately, enslavement in Mauritania is more of a mental mindset than a physical constraint. This paper will analyze the various forces that maintain child slavery; these include the country's social structure, corruption in the government, religious doctrine, racism, heredity, and attitudes of the slaves themselves. The combination of these factors interacting in an 800-year old system results in what one abolitionist described as "what the American plantation owners dreamed of—the breeding of perfectly submissive slaves".

To read the full paper click [here](#)