Visible but Invisible: Discourses of Slavery in Discussions of Diverse Forms of Exploitation

Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the benefits and limitations of evoking the language of slavery when discussing diverse forms of exploitation. This research questions the effectiveness of homogenizing these exploitations as forms of slavery, as a method of gaining greater understanding of these exploitations. This research argues through the lens of the ‘Invisible: Slavery force of slavery discourse not only conceals an in-depth understanding of these issues but additionally limits the means in which we can address them.

Methodology

Museum Theory
“Cultural Barometer” provides a window into culture --- spatial and aesthetic analysis

Research Design
Survey of Existing Scholarship
Case Study of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center Museum ‘Invisible: Slavery Today’ exhibit, located in Cincinnati, Ohio

Question

What are the benefits and limitations of the language of slavery when discussing diverse forms of exploitations?

Background of ‘Invisible: Slavery Today’ Exhibit

This exhibition is the world’s first permanent exhibition on ‘modern day slavery’. The design and “feel” of the exhibition is metal and plastic containers - shipping cartons of human beings. Invisible most common forms of exploitation”: forced labor, bonded through various media techniques.

How We Were Changed
(Visitors’ responses from the exhibit)
“buy only fair trade chocolates”
“learn to LOVE each other”
“telling all my friends to always go with a safety buddy”

Conclusion

By discussing the listed exploitations as forms of slavery, it conceals the multi-layered socio-economic causes that are at the root of these exploitations, restricting the way in which the public can engage.