

JEAN-ROBERT CADET

RESTAVEK ORGANIZATION



Jean-Robert Cadet is an advocate for children enslaved in the Haitian Restavek system (spelled *restavec* in French). He is an author, husband, father and onetime member of the UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. He has collaborated on several documentaries and has testified before the United Nations and the U.S. Congress regarding his experience as a survivor of slavery. Cadet has been featured on Oprah, 60 Minutes, and CNN.

Born in 1955 to a wealthy, white father and impoverished, black mother, Cadet was given to another Haitian family for their use upon the death of his mother. He was four years old. In this way, Cadet became a restavek, or child servant, forced to work long hours in the home of his master. Physically, verbally, sexually, and emotionally abused by his masters, he was often lent out to neighbors and friends so that he might work for them as well. Excluded from all family, cultural, civic, and religious activities, Cadet describes himself as an "observer, rather than a participant, in my Haitian culture and society."

When Cadet was 15 his owners emigrated to the United States and he joined them, again as their domestic servant. He was turned out of the house when his owners realized that domestic servitude was stigmatized in American society and that he would be required to attend school alongside their own children.

Despite this abuse within his own culture and the racism he faced from American society, Cadet went on to finish high school, join the United States Army, finish university, get married, and start a family. He earned a Masters degree in French Literature from the University of Cincinnati.

Published in English in 1998, Cadet's memoir, *Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American*, contributed significantly to the slim body of literature written by survivors of modern-day slavery. Especially striking is Cadet's bravery in so frankly describing his experience since, "In Haitian society, [being a restavek is] the lowest possible status. It's like being a dog. And no one wants to reveal that he once was a dog." The book depicts the lasting psychological and social damage inflicted on those held in slavery and the suffering that persists from constant abuse. Cadet's overwhelming sense of not belonging is the most acutely painful reminder that he, in his own words, "never had a childhood."

The Restavek system (from the French term *Reste-Avec*, meaning 'to stay with') has continued since Haitian independence (1804) despite Haiti's own constitution, its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its 1984 Child Labor law. Attention to the Restavek system began to increase in the late 1990s with the publication of Cadet's book. Marked improvement for children caught in the Restavek system remains difficult due to Haiti's struggle in addressing its root causes such as poverty, overpopulation, lack of access to education, and both political and societal acceptance of this form of child slavery.



Jean R. Cadet Restavek Organization
PO Box 43414
Cincinnati, OH 45243
Contact email: info@jeanrcadet.org

<http://www.jeanrcadet.org>

AWARDS:

- Northern Kentucky University, Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, 2010.
- President Clinton Global Initiative Commitment Award, 2009.
- Everyday Freedom Hero, presented by Pepsi-Cola and The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, 2005.
- 1st place Diversity Award for Teaching Excellence, Raymond Walters College, 2001.

EDUCATION

- M.A., French Literature, University of Cincinnati, August, 1994.
- B.A., International Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa, June, 1980.

PUBLICATIONS:

- *Restavec : From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American*, University of Texas Press, Houston, Texas, 1998.
- *My Stone of Hope*, University of Texas Press, Houston, Texas, 2011.
- Contributing author: *The Butterfly's Way*. Soho Press, Inc, New York, N.Y., 20001.
- Contributing author: *Sélection du Reader's Digest Enquête et Témoignage*, Paris, France, 2002.
- Contributing author: *Les Fondements de la pratique de la Domesticité des enfants en Haïti*, Geneva, Switzerland, 2001.

SELECTED NATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- "60 Minutes" segment on child slavery with Scott Pelley, 3/2010.
- CNN hero documentary with Anderson Cooper, 2/2010.
- CNN documentary on child slavery with Dr. Sonjay Gupta, 7/2009.
- Oprah Winfrey Show, 6/2006.
- National Public Radio, a discussion on child slavery, 2005.
- France - Antille, Guadeloupe, France, No. 810, 4/2005.
- Le Nouvel Observateur, Paris, France, No. 2072, 7/2004.
- El Semanal, Spain, No. 863 5/2004.
- France - Antille, Guadeloupe, France, No. 789, 4/2004.
- France-2 TV documentary, Les Petits Esclaves d'Haïti, Paris, France, 2003.
- Satya, Magazine, 1/2003.
- La Vie, Paris, France. No. 2997, 3/2003.
- Child Domestic Labour in Haiti, Institute for Applied Social Science, 10/2003.
- National Public Radio, a discussion on child slavery, 2002.
- CNN Documentary, Nobody's Children, 2001.
- University of South Florida, Magazine, Volume 43, No. 2, Spring 2001.
- Rapportage, The Journal of the Lancaster Literary Guild, Fall 2001.
- The Cincinnati Magazine, spring 2000.
- The Cincinnati Post three part series on restaveks. Haiti's Forgotten Children, Volume 119, June 2000.

Advocating to end child slavery in Haiti.