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American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice

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The ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in December 1865 abolished slavery in the United States. In the years that followed, southern planters and their allies proved extraordinarily

resourceful in inventing new forms of labor extraction and racial oppression, but try as they might, they could not resuscitate chattel bondage. Yet, almost a century and a half later, the question of slavery again roils the water of American life. Indeed, the last years of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first have witnessed an extraordinary resurgence of popular interest in slavery, which has stimulated its study and provided the occasion for a rare conversation between historians and an interested public. Slavery has a greater presence in American life now than at any time since the Civil War ended. The intense engagement over the issue of slavery signals—as...

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