

January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

President Barack Obama has declared January National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month by signing a Presidential proclamation. The President condemns slavery and human trafficking, not only in the U.S., but worldwide.

The month is also referred to as Human Trafficking Awareness Month, and January 11th was Human Trafficking Awareness Day. The celebration culminates on February 1st with National Freedom Day. People everywhere are encouraged to be on the lookout for human trafficking and to recognize the need to get involved and combat it.

Throughout the U.S., individuals and organizations have worked this month to promote awareness of human trafficking. It is especially sad that children are being trafficked throughout the world. Predators are increasingly using the Web and social media to dupe unsuspecting young people into sexual slavery, in particular. Young people have been drugged, threatened, beaten, and in some cases, killed, by callous traffickers.

Two of the main myths about trafficking is that it does not exist on a large scale in North America and Europe, and that all children caught up in trafficking are runaways. Trafficking is not just a social and economic phenomenon taking place in Africa, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and other parts of the world; and traffickers often lure unsuspecting young people into their web with false promises of love, romance, money, material objects, and so forth. According to James Spero of Homeland Security in Buffalo, "The victims of human trafficking are living right in your neighborhood or working right down your street." (*The Buffalo News*, January 16, 2015, p. D2)

This special month also gives us a chance to reflect upon slavery, past and present. We are all aware that chattel slavery has left an indelible stain on the U.S. and the world in general. As the great 19th century freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll noted, "The Bible is the real auction block upon which the Negro stood during slavery." In his pamphlet titled *A Christmas Sermon*, Ingersoll brilliantly demonstrated how the Bible was quoted during every phase of slavery.

In recent years, large numbers of Blacks were enslaved in Mauritania, Sudan, and to a lesser extent, in some of the Gulf nations. Indeed, it was not until the 21st century that Mauritania finally outlawed slavery. In Sudan, slave drivers received unflagging support from the likes of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Throughout the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, Minister Louis Farrakhan and other leading NOI representatives served as apologists for Sudanese slave drivers. At the same time, the Reactionary Black Nationalists routinely railed against the fact that Blacks were enslaved in the U.S. in centuries past.

Sadly, much of the Black press in the U.S. was duped by Khartoum. Sudanese government officials invited many members of the Black press to Sudan for a carefully arranged "fact-finding" mission. Most of the journalists complained that they were not allowed to travel on their own to investigate reports of slavery in Sudan. Though some of the newspapers excitedly ran stories promising to return to the U.S. with the facts, probably feeling ashamed, they dropped the story altogether.

According to some Black Sudanese, Osama bin Laden's people were in Sudan backing the Khartoum regime and slavery. This is not surprising. As Jesse Christopherson wrote in the August/September 2011 issue (Volume 1, Number 2) of *The Human Prospect*, [bin Laden] "went to Khartoum, Sudan for five years where he plotted a revolution against Riyadh, dodged Saudi assassination attempts, decried the Arafat/Rabin/Clinton Oslo Accords, arranged for mujahedin veterans to travel to Somalia, and nearly succeeded in assassinating Egypt's president, secular Arab Nationalist Hosni Mubarak." (p. 21) (Osama bin Laden was also a known racist. Like his partners in crime in Khartoum, he referred to Blacks as "abd," or slave.)

In 1989, when I was the executive director of African Americans for Humanism (AAH), I spearheaded a campaign to establish a Monument to the Unknown Slave in Washington, D.C. The campaign attracted such luminaries as actress Ruby Dee and her actor husband Ossie Davis, jazz and classical trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, sports personality Bryant

Gumbel, Congressmen Pete Stark and John Conyers, public intellectual Cornel West, and many others. However, the drive for the monument was lost due to more pressing government matters.

This month everyone should educate themselves about slavery and human trafficking. If you haven't seen it already, see the film *12 Years a Slave*, which won the Oscar in 2014 for best picture. Support organizations that combat human trafficking. And remember the words of Helen Keller: "There is no king that has not had a slave among his ancestors. And there is no slave who has not a king among his."