

# *Slavery: Not Just a Relic of the Past*

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

During Black History Month, many people like to focus on slavery. I, on the other hand, prefer to focus on what we Black people have done, as opposed to what has been done to us. Be that as it may, slavery is a crucial part of history, and no aspect of history should be ignored or downplayed.

Many African Americans still become furious when we think about the horrors of what our ancestors experienced. In the 1970s, when the mini-series “Roots” had taken the U.S. by storm, some African Americans became enraged about the treatment of Kunta Kinte, Chicken George, and other enslaved characters from that historical television program. Some African Americans violently attacked Whites in the streets, threw stones at their cars, etc. all the while yelling “Roots! Roots!”

Reactionary Black Nationalists, Afrocentrists and others often rail about the enslavement of Black people throughout the centuries. However, sadly, and ironically, these angry, hostile people either ignore or downplay the enslavement of their fellow human beings today, or go so far as to *defend* slavery in the present day.

For example, members of the Nation of Islam (NOI) routinely complain angrily about the brutal ways in which African Americans were enslaved by Whites. Yet, for years, NOI members have served as apologists for bigoted slave owners in Sudan.

With the French invasion of Mali has come news that Black people are enslaved in that African nation. Prior to the invasion, the Tuareg ethnic groups had defeated Mali’s army with the aid of Arab religious fanatics associated with al-Qaeda. Tuaregs are a somewhat nomadic people from the Sahara Desert. For years, many Tuaregs have owned Black African slaves.

According to an article in *USA TODAY*:

Though slavery was outlawed in 1960, Mali is one of the countries in the world where the practice of human servitude flourishes with as many as 200,000 Bella (“slave” in the Tuareg language) living a life of hereditary enslavement.

Not all Tuaregs own slaves, and not all slave owners are Tuareg. There are also black Malian ethnic groups who own Bella slaves. (“Slavery goes on in Mali even as Tuaregs flee: French invasion can’t wipe out country’s generations of servitude,” February 15, 2013, p. 4A.)

Mohammad Yattara, a Black ex-slave, pointed out that the masters control every aspect of the lives of their slaves. “You can marry, but if the master wants to have sex with your wife, he will....” said Yattara. Yattara had never gone to school, and is not even sure of his age due to the fact that Tuareg masters do not file birth certificates for their slaves.

Slavery also exists in other parts of Africa. Though Mauritania *finally* outlawed slavery in the new millennium, it still persists in that nation. In Cote d’Ivoire, children are forced to work on

chocolate plantations. In Sierra Leone, employers force children to work in garment and embroidery workshops.

However, slavery is not only an African problem. According to the Anti-Slavery Society, <http://www.anti-slaverysociety.org> children are being forced to work in sweatshops all over the world, and slavery in other forms exists in many nations throughout the globe.

An especially pernicious problem is sex trafficking. Women in the U.S., Cambodia, Italy, Nigeria and other nations far too numerous to mention are forced into sexual slavery. Complicating matters, while society denigrates prostitutes, in many communities, pimps are envied and glorified. Indeed, “Big-pimpin” has become a popular expression, particularly among many young African Americans pursuing a life of materialistic acquisition.

What complicates the situation even more is the fact that religious texts condone female subjugation *and* slavery. For example, the Bible condones slavery in passages such as 1 Timothy 6:1-4, Luke 12:47-48, Colossians 3:22, and Ephesians 6:5-7. The text condones sexism in such passages as Ephesians 5:22-23 and Genesis 3:16.

All of this does raise the question as to why African and Arab nations had taken so long to finally make slavery officially illegal. Though most people talk about what a disgrace slavery has been to the West, Western nations were among the first to make the practice illegal in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Conversely, Saudi Arabia, like Mali, did not make it illegal until 1960!

What the world needs is more and better laws against slavery, and better law enforcement to combat the practice. Moreover, rather than spending so much time railing against the crimes committed against enslaved people from centuries past, more people need to direct their rage at the scourge of slavery as it exists today.

There is nothing that can be done to get true justice for enslaved people that have died. The best way to honor them and to cherish their memories is to fight against slavery in all of its forms today. Indeed, as a wise man once said, “to live in the past is to rob the present. To forget the past is rob the future.”