Christianity Owns US Slavery

Religion has always played a dominant role in the slave industry.

Legal black slavery existed for about a thousand years, beginning in the 9th century and ending in the 19th century. Over 25 million Africans were taken by force. Some 5 million of them were killed during transport. The first wave (called the *trans-Sahara* wave) involved 10 million slaves between the 9th and 15th centuries. The second wave (called the *trans-Atlantic* wave) began in the 15th century when Portugal established slave-trade posts along the western coast of Africa.

Muslims were responsible for the first wave, and Christians were responsible for the second wave. Blacks were responsible for both waves in the sense that the first step of the process was Africans preying on fellow Africans. Without that, there would have been no African slave industry.

The Spanish, Dutch, and English had been heavily involved in the slave industry for some time before the American colonies were established. Selling and owning slaves was protected by international law. Black slavery was introduced into the new world by the Spanish in 1503, and by the English in 1562. The English came to dominate the slave trade, so it is no surprise that slavery became well established in the American colonies.

For the few of us left who know something about American history (which excludes most recent public high school graduates), we are familiar with the Dutch ship that landed on the American Atlantic coast in 1619. It is usually described as the first group of black slaves to arrive in America. But that is misleading. The ship arrived uninvited. The Africans on that ship were not slaves -- they were indentured servants. Many of them did become slaves, but colonists preferred European indentured servants for many years, even if they happened to be criminals fresh out of English jails. Gradually the distinction between indentured servants and slaves eroded, and by the 1660s Americans looked to black slavery as their primary source of forced labor.

By the time of the American Revolution, slavery was deeply entrenched in the American economy and culture. Since Americans were overwhelmingly Christians, it would seem that American Christians would speak out loudly and clearly about the evils of slavery. After all, the *peculiar institution* went against the Ten Commandments and all the teachings of Jesus and everything that Christianity stood for, did it not? Prior to the Revolutionary War, England was calling the shots in the colonies, so abolitionist sentiments may have been overruled by the English monarch. But there is no indication that Christians made any serious coordinated attempt to put an end to slavery during the colonial era.

After the Revolution, however, Americans could no longer blame England. Still, there was no coordinated Christian attack on the institution of slavery. In fact, New England preachers got the crazy idea that the Bible teaches slavery, and God sanctions slavery. Hard as that may be to comprehend, the Christian church did have a history of embracing slavery instead of opposing it. The medieval Church owned slaves. It was good, devout Christians that got slavery off to a good start in the New World. Christopher Columbus wasted no time enslaving Native Americans, and the Spanish built on that tradition with their conquistadors. Indians were enslaved and killed by the thousands -- all in the name of

Christianity. It was only when Christians killed off the Indians that they turned to Africans for forced labor.

So, it is no exaggeration to say that Christianity owns American slavery. It was Christians who got it started, and it was Christians who kept it going. Had Christians stood up for their values and principles and religious convictions, based on the teachings of Christ, there never would have been a slave industry in America. There could not have been, because virtually all Americans were Christians.

Eventually, there were some serious abolitionists, but their numbers were few and their collective voice was largely ignored or ridiculed. Many of them did not speak out based on Christian principles, but on political convictions. For example, some abolitionists used the threat of abolition to help force the South into going along with Northern policies. Other abolitionists were involved in colonization movements, organized efforts to ship blacks back to Africa, or another country or island. Anywhere but America. (Abraham Lincoln was a leader in the Colonization Movement).

Slavery was not just a Southern problem, as we are led to believe. It is true that the North had few slaves, because they were not as economically viable in the industrial North as they were in the agricultural South. But the North was still heavily involved in the slave industry. They just focused on a different aspect of it. While the South profited from slave labor, the North profited (probably even more) from the slave trade. Slave ships were built in Northern ports, and they were used to carry rum, which was traded for slaves, which were traded for molasses, which was used to make rum. Yankees made a nice profit at each step. Even though the slave trade was illegal in the US, Yankees still thrived on the slave trade right up to the Civil War. Much of the wealth in the Northeast today was derived originally from the slave trade.

We are also led to believe that it was pure-hearted Yankees who were determined to end slavery in the South, but those evil, lazy Southerners refused to give up their slaves, forcing Abraham Lincoln to step in and free them. Pure fiction. Lincoln did not free a single slave. The Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave. That was not its purpose. It was directed only at slaves in Confederate states, where the Proclamation had no authority. It specifically excluded the thousands of slaves then in the North, the territories, in the border states, and in Union-occupied territories in the South. Lincoln could easily have (and should have) freed those thousands of slaves, but he did not.

Why not? Lincoln, who was a good Christian, at least judging by all his references to God in his sanctimonious (and disingenuous) speeches, was not crazy about slavery. But that is not why he started the Civil War. He said in his First Inaugural Address, just before he started the war, that the only slavery issue was bringing slaves into the new territories. He was dead set against that. (And rightfully so.) But why was that more important than ending slavery everywhere in the US? Because Southern slavery served one very important service for the North. It kept slaves in the South. That was the most important thing to Yankees. They didn't particularly want blacks to be slaves, but they were perfectly content with that as long as blacks stayed in the South where they belonged.

Why was that so important? You'd think Yankees would welcome escaped slaves and free blacks into their Northern states. We've heard about the Underground Railroad, a system of safe-houses in the South used to help slaves escape into the North. But what you've probably never been told in school is that those escaped slaves didn't go to Northern

states for safety. They had to keep going all the way to Canada. The North didn't want them, and they had state laws (or constitutions) to make sure blacks were not allowed to move into Northern states and stay there.

Why? Two reasons. One, Yankees were racists. They did not like blacks, and they didn't want them in Yankee neighborhoods, schools, or churches. Which brings us to the second reason -- Yankees did not want blacks competing for jobs. Which is also why Lincoln was determined to keep slaves out of the territories. He, and all Yankees, wanted to make sure the territories remained free of blacks, because that was (they believed) white man's territory, and any jobs there were strictly for whites.

So, there is the picture of Christianity in the early 1860s in America. The Northern half of the country despised blacks and excluded them from Yankee society. The Southern half got along with blacks just fine. They were slaves, but that was okay with God (they believed), and it placed upon slave owners the Christian responsibility to take good care of their slaves. Plus, it just made good business sense to take care of their slaves, because they were valuable assets. Contrary to what we are led to believe, the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* portrait of Southern slave cruelty was pure fiction. Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author, had never been on a Southern plantation, and had probably never met a slave. For the most part, Southern slaves were treated like family.

Of course that changed after the war. Why? Because during Reconstruction, Yankees imported their racism into the South, where it had never existed on a large scale. When Yankees moved into the South and took over, they took their racist attitudes with them. That's why the South had such problems with segregation, although they were never any worse than segregation policies in the North.

American citizens during this time were overwhelmingly Christians. As much as Christians want us to believe today that their religion is a force for good in the world, and that without it, American morals would decay and disappear, the history of Christianity is hardly one to promote as a force for good in the world. This is just one example.

Christians own the ugly, evil history of American slavery.