

Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation News

Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours



Slavery and Its Consequences

Let the memory and history of the slave trade and its abolition be forces for dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding.

#RememberSlavery
(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

The International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition is commemorated each year on August 23. This International Day is intended to inscribe the tragedy of the slave trade in the memory of all peoples.

Among the major crimes that have marked human history, the slave trade and slavery are distinguished by their magnitude, their duration and the violence that accompanied them. It is difficult to understand how a tragedy of this scale could have been ignored for so long. Historians estimate that thirty million Africans were deported from different parts of Africa and enslaved in other regions of the world. If we add the number of those who died during capture, the arduous journey towards various ports, the holding camps, and the middle passage, there were nearly a hundred million lives that were taken from Africa. ^(UNESCO)

Allow this issue of JPIC News to inscribe the tragedy of the slave trade in your own heart and impel you to confront racism and actively work to dismantle it however you can.

Racism is not just a moral question,
but the journey of the soul
after an encounter with Our Lord
in the suffering of the other.
Jesus told us that new wine will explode the
old wine skins.
What do we need to do to accept new wine?
Carolyn Woo



If racism at its core is
a soul sickness
then we need to provide a remedy
that can reach the
inner reaches of the human spirit.

Rev. Bryan Massingale

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August
JPIC Days of Remembrance

August 6 and 9
Anniversary of the Bombings of
Hiroshima & Nagasaki

August 9
International Day of World's
Indigenous Peoples

August 19
World Humanitarian Day

August 23
International Day for
Remembrance of the
Slave Trade & Its Abolition

August 29
International Day
Against Nuclear Tests

Slavery and the Catholic Church

While Catholic social teaching affirms "the right to life and dignity" of every person, the fact remains that the Catholic church egregiously violated these teachings through its participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and imperial practices of African slavery and segregation in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

In the 15th century, the Catholic Church became the first global institution to declare that Black lives did not matter. In a series of papal bulls beginning in 1452, the church not only authorized the perpetual enslavement of Africans and the seizure of "non-Christian" lands, but morally sanctioned the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This trade forcibly transported at least 12.5 million enslaved African men, women and children to the Americas and Europe to enrich European and often Catholic coffers. It also caused the deaths of tens of millions of Africans and Native Americans over nearly four centuries.

In the land area that became the United States, the Catholic Church introduced African slavery in the 16th century. In fact, at various moments in American history from the colonial era to the U.S. Civil War, the Catholic church in the United States was the largest corporate slaveholder in Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri. (Dr. Shannen Dee Williams)



Consequences of the Slave Trade



The slave trade left in its wake the tenacious poison of racism and discrimination that plagues people of African descent today. Throughout this history, black people across the world have had to confront three kinds of denials that have served to justify and legitimize the slave trade, slavery, colonization, segregation and apartheid since the 15th century. They are:

- The denial of humanity and dignity through numerous attempts to reduce black people to the status of beasts of burden, in view of dehumanizing them.
- The denial of black people's history and culture through pseudo-scientific discourses aiming at minimizing their role in human history.
- The denial of black people's rights and citizenship through all types of policies, laws, and strategies of discrimination.

Despite the extreme violence of this system of oppression, the enslaved Africans never ceased to resist. Using the full potential of their culture, they not only survived the conditions of dehumanization but also contributed to transforming slave societies through their social ingenuity and artistic creativity, which produced extraordinary cultural diversity. (Source: UNESCO)

Reflection

*How are the three kinds of denials mentioned above still present in your country?
As you advocate for various types of legislation in your country notice if this legislation helps or harms people of color.*



What You Can Do to Confront Racism

Anti-racist: One who actively opposes institutional or structural racism by advancing changes in political, economic and social policies.

1. Design and commit to a program of anti-racist formation for yourself. Each week, choose an article, a book chapter, a DVD, or a webinar to help you learn more about racism and racial justice.
2. Commit with a friend to a weekly conversation: where did you notice racism this week? In yourself? In the world? Where did you succeed/fail in addressing it?

An Examen for Racism By Patrick Saint-Jean, SJ

As we strive toward becoming antiracist, we must not only see God's presence in Black communities but co-labor with our Black brothers and sisters to enact justice. As Christians, we must recognize that we have been living with the sin of racism for four centuries in our church, and in fact, we benefit directly from it. In our political system, too, power is consolidated among white people. White people are sheltered and protected by a system of racism and inequality that is inseparable from the laws they create.

Ask yourself: *When have I failed to notice or respond to the needs of my Black brothers and sisters? Have I turned a blind eye to racial injustice? How? Why? How is my compliance, my inaction and my sense of fear directly or indirectly contributing to maintain this structure?*

Often our actions are guided by our self-interests or personal biases, which can perpetuate harm. But, sometimes, we see injustice and choose to detach from it, saying that, "It's not me, it's not my fight." Inaction is complicity, and it is wrong. For example, did you turn away from news about Black Lives Matter protests? Did you stay silent when a family member or friend said something ignorant or racist?

Ask yourself: *How have I been complicit in the suffering of my Black brothers and sisters? How have I benefited from social and systemic racism today? Think about the community you live in, the social networks to which you belong. How have Black people been excluded from those spaces?*

Antiracism work requires active training and continuous learning about systemic racism.

Ask yourself: *How can I leverage my privilege to uproot systemic racism? How can I use my privilege to make space for Black voices and other communities of color? How can I open my heart to make room for the transformation to deeper love which God calls us all to?*

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