

THE DOCTRINE OF SLAVERY

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These doctrines were taken from Lessons #159 and # in **Exegetical Lessons of Genesis** (this is an ongoing series, so it is incomplete at this time)

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Let's look at slavery objectively, from the standpoint of the Bible.

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1. Slavery, as a human institution, is not specifically condemned in the Bible. No one in the Bible is ever told to leave their master; no one is told to lead some great revolt against slavery.
 - a. In the context of our passage, Hagar is told by God to return to and submit to her mistress, who maltreated her. Gen. 16:9
 - b. The book of Philemon deals with a slave that escaped from Philemon—Onesimus—who comes to Paul in prison, and who Paul sends back to Philemon, his master. Although Paul requests that Philemon set this slave free, he does not command it. The final decision is the master. This is found in the Epistle (letter) to Philemon.
 - c. Jesus did not condemn slavery, even though He had the chance to on many occasions. Matt. 8:5–10 10:24
2. Several great men in the Bible owned slaves. For example:
 - a. Abraham in Gen. 24:35.
 - b. Isaac in Gen. 26:13–14.
 - c. Job in Job 19:15.
3. However, it is clear that slavery is not the ideal in God's eyes:
 - a. The Hebrews were enslaved to Egypt and God told the pharaoh to let them leave.
 - b. Paul suggested to Philemon that he free Onesimus. Philemon 1:8–16
 - c. When northern Israel defeated southern Israel (Judah) in a battle, they

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- took 200,000 men, women and children, many of whom would become slaves. God sent a prophet to them and told them not to do this. 2Chron. 28:8–11
- d. There would come a day when Israel would no longer be enslaved to her enemies. Jer. 30:8 Ezek. 34:27
 - e. When listing those who are opposed to God and opposed to sound doctrine, Paul includes those who are *slave-traders* (also called *man-stealers*). This would indicate that there are clearly some illegitimate aspects of slavery which some slave traders practiced. 1Tim. 1:10
4. There were a number of ways a person could become a slave in the ancient world:
- a. Foreign slaves could be captured in war. 1Sam.4:9 17:9 2Chron. 36:20 Ezra 9:7–9
 - i. As an aside, a woman taken as a captive in war could also become the wife of a Hebrew. Deut.21:10-14
 - b. Slaves could be purchased. Ex.12:44 21:2 Lev. 25:44–46 Eccles. 2:7
 - c. Slaves could be a gift. Gen. 21:10
 - d. Joseph's own brothers threw him into a pit, and traveling Midianites found him and sold him to Ishmaelites who then sold him to the Egyptians. Gen. 37:23–24, 28
 - e. One could enter into slavery or sell one's children into slavery because of debt. 2Kings 4:1
 - f. Some men are born into slavery because their parents are slaves. Gen.15:3; Jer.2:14.
 - g. As restitution for crime, a person could commit himself to slavery. Ex.22:3
 - h. A person could become a slave because of defaulting on debts. Lev. 25:14–28 2Kings 4:1
 - i. One could become a slave by means of abduction, which the Bible teaches to be wrong. In fact, this illegal act could be punished by execution. Ex.21:16 Deut.24:7 1Tim. 1:10
5. The point is, most of these ways that a person could become a slave are legitimate. The application of this institution could be sinful; but slavery, in itself, was not necessarily evil. In fact, a person with absolutely nothing could become a slave and eventually earn his freedom and walk away financially solvent. Some slaves were elevated from slavery to very high positions of authority and responsibility.
6. There was a form of slavery where a nation would be conquered and they would be taxed instead of being taken hostage and made slaves. 2Sam. 8:2, 6, 10–12 1Kings 4:21 2Chron. 17:11
- a. In some cases, this was codified where a stronger power protected a weaker country; and the weaker country would pay tribute to the stronger country. The agreement was called a Suzerain-vassal treaty.
 - b. The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2–17) are said to be in the form of a Suzerain-vassal treaty, containing a preamble (identification of the

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covenant giver), an historical prologue, stipulations, provision for deposit and public reading, a listing of treaty witnesses, blessings and curses, a ratification ceremony and an imposition of the curses.

- i. See <http://www.haverhillcc.org/files/IntrotoBibleClass15.pdf> This writer suggests that the entire book of Deuteronomy is in a Suzerain-vassal treaty format.
7. Just as owning a business today with hundreds or thousands of employees is seen as a good thing today, owning many slaves in the ancient world was considered a blessing from God. Gen. 24:35 26:13–14 Isa. 14:1–3
8. God required that the Egyptians pay restitution to the Hebrew slaves for their years of labor. It should be noted that payment was made by slave-holders to the slaves themselves, and not many generations later (like the reparations being called for by some liberal Black groups in the United States today). Ex. 3:22 11:2 12:35–36
9. The slaves of Hebrews often became believers in Jehovah Elohim. Gen. 24:52 Ex. 12:43–44
10. Slaves were to participate in some of the religious celebrations of Israel. Deut. 12:18 16:10–11
11. A relative could redeem a slave from slavery. Lev. 25:48–49
12. Slaves were supposed to be released in the Year of Jubilee (every 49th year). Lev. 25:50–55
13. In the end times, even slaves would have God's Spirit poured out upon them. Joel 2:29
14. Slaves were entrusted with important tasks, material things and great responsibilities. In this way, slaves were not much different than a live-in employee. In the case of Joseph, he rose from being a slave to a great ruler in Egypt. Gen. 24 (see, for instance, v. 53) 39:1–6 Psalm 105:17–23
15. Therefore, if you envision a slave as someone who was followed around by someone with a whip who constantly beat the slave; and that this slave did only menial tasks, then you do not have a clear picture of slavery in the ancient world. Matt. 18:28–29 21:34–35 25:21–23
16. Quite obviously, many slaves did perform menial tasks as well. In many cases, this was their only function. Gen. 26:15, 19, 25, 32 Joshua 9:18–23 1Kings 9:21
17. However, a smart slave-owner would recognize potential and responsibility in his slaves, which is why Joseph could rise from being a slave to prime minister over Egypt. Gen. 39:1–6
18. Female slaves sometimes became the wives or mistresses of their masters or their master's sons. Gen. 16:1–4 30:1–18
19. The Bible provided protections for the slave in the Mosaic Law.
 - a. Hebrew slaves were enslaved only for 6 years and then they were to be freed. Ex. 21:2 Deut. 15:12–15
 - b. If another Hebrew becomes your slave as a result of their debt, you are not to treat them cruelly as a slave; but to work out a future time when they

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- c. can be financially solvent and free. Lev. 25:35–43
 - c. Such manumission occurred on other times as well. Jer. 34:8–10
 - d. A Hebrew slave could choose to remain a slave. Deut. 15:16–18
 - e. If the master of a slave purchases a woman who becomes the slave's wife, he may remain with his wife in slavery. Ex. 21:3–6
 - f. Slaves were not to work on the Sabbath. Ex. 20:10 23:12
 - g. A slave-owner could not simply kill one of his slaves without retribution. Ex. 21:20
 - h. Under some circumstances of causing injury to a slave, the owner had to set the slave free. This is more an indictment of the slave-owner, rather than a reward to the slave. It is obvious that such a man should not own slaves. Ex. 21:26–27
 - i. If a woman taken in slavery was made a wife, and then rejected, she could not simply return to being a slave. She had to be set free. Deut. 21:10–14
20. These protections for slaves in Israel provide a great contrast between slaves in Israel and slaves in Egypt. Egyptians treated the Jews with great harshness in slavery. Ex. 1:10–14 3:7–9
21. In Jesus' time, slaves clearly had independent financial transactions from their masters as well as some freedom of movement. Matt. 18:28
22. Slavery is used as an illustration for our spiritual depravity before God. Because we are born with Adam's sin imputed to us, because we have a sin nature and because we sin personally against God, we are in the [slave market of sin](#), unable to purchase our own freedom. Only Jesus Christ, from outside of the slave market (He is born without a sin nature, without Adam's imputed sin, and without personal sin), can purchase (redeem) us. The Israelites freed from Egypt illustrate this. Ex. 13:3, 14 Deut. 6:12 7:8 15:15
23. Slaves were a part of several of our Lord's parables:
- a. The parable of the sower. Matt. 13:18–30
 - b. The slaves waiting for their master. Luke 2:37–48
 - c. The man having the great supper sends out his slave with the invitations. Luke 14:16–24
 - d. In the prodigal son parable, the slaves prepare for the return of the son. Luke 15:22
 - e. The slaves being left with money with the intent that they invest this money. Luke 19:11–26
 - f. The farmers who beat the slaves who come on behalf of their master for the fruit of the field. Luke 20:9–16
 - g. This was not a complete listing of parables which featured slaves.
24. The human race is born into slavery, 1Cor.7:21-23. The unbeliever is a 3-fold slave.
- a. The unbeliever is spiritually dead, a resident of the slave market of sin.
 - b. The unbeliever is a slave to the old sin nature.
 - c. The unbeliever is a slave to human viewpoint.
25. The believer can become enslaved. Enslavement to the sin nature is basic soul

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- slavery, Rom.6:20. Advanced soul slavery is reversionism, where the believer becomes indistinguishable from the unbeliever.
26. As believers, we ought to see ourselves as slaves to God. Paul and other communicators of God's Word saw themselves as slaves as well. Luke 1:38, 46–48 Luke 2:29 Acts 4:29 Rom. 1:1 Gal. 1:10 Philip. 1:1
 27. Jesus differentiates between believers who are slaves of God and believers who are friends of God. John 15:15
 28. Paul uses slavery to illustrate positional and temporal sanctification in Rom. 6:15–23
 29. When a person becomes a believer, he should not look to suddenly change his status—even if he is a slave. 1Cor. 7:17–23
 30. There are no human distinctions which are carried over into the spiritual life, including being slave or being free. The idea is, a believer who is a slave is equal in the eyes of God to a believer who is free. 1Cor. 12:13 Gal. 3:28 Col. 3:11
 31. Paul saw even himself as a slave to the Corinthians for their spiritual growth. 2Cor. 4:5
 32. Paul uses this real life illustration of Abraham's children by a slave woman (Hagar) and by a free woman (Sarah) to being under the Law of Moses or heirs to God's promises. Gal. 4:21–31
 33. Paul mandates the believers who are slaves obey their masters. Eph. 6:5–8 Col. 3:22–24 1Tim. 6:1–2 Titus 2:9–10
 34. Similarly, masters were to treat their slaves justly. Col. 4:1
 35. By application, we can take much of what is said in the Bible about slaves and masters and apply this to employees and employers.
 36. When Jesus became a man, He was taking upon himself the form of a slave. Philip. 2:7
 37. So, like it or not, apart from abduction slavery, the Law of Moses sought to regulate slavery and to protect those who were slaves. The Bible did not seek to end slavery.

Some points were taken from <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/slavery.html>

There are several applications from the Doctrine of Slavery.

Lessons from the Doctrine of Slavery

1. There are social evils in this world that we cannot solve; nor is God calling for His people to lead this or that social movement to fix this or that social problem. This includes slavery. At no time does God call upon His people to end slavery.
2. The believer in Jesus Christ is not called upon by God to fix social evils in this world.
3. We have already studied how the Black church became corrupted by social action. Their lives, in many ways, became worse, because of social action. What good is freedom if that freedom is squandered? If you use your freedom to take

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drugs, to commit crimes and to have children without caring for them, is that a good thing?

- a. As an aside, Oprah Winfrey first went to some American Black children to see about setting up her school in the United States. They wanted sneakers and other material things; so she set up an educational institution for girls in South Africa. There, they appreciated what an education would do for them.
4. It is clear that slavery can be a social evil in the way that it was practiced. However, nowhere in the Bible are believers called upon to correct this social evil. If they were slave owners, then they were called upon by God to treat their slaves justly and honorably.
5. Laws from God to Israel were cognizant of slavery yet did not call for the out-and-out removal of slavery as an institution.
6. This suggests that there aspects of slavery which were not necessarily evil. With the correct relationship between a master and a slave, the slave was to be taken care of and treated justly; and the master received the service of the slave. Col. 3:22 **Slaves, obey the lords according to flesh in all respects, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.** Col. 4:1 **Lords, give what is just and equal to the slaves, knowing that you have a Lord in Heaven also.**
7. If a person was born again while a slave, they were not to expend effort trying to secure their own freedom. 1Cor. 7:21–23 **Were you called as a slave? It does not matter to you. But if you are able to be free, rather use it. For the one called while a slave in the Lord is a freed man of the Lord. And likewise, the one called while a free man is a slave of Christ. You were redeemed with a price; do not become slaves of men.** This final statement has to do with becoming a slave to human viewpoint, not with some sort of resistance to becoming a slave in some way. There would be some instances where one believer might petition another to request the freeing of an individual slave, as Paul requested of Philemon. The spiritual duty of Onesimus was more important to the plan of God than was his labor to Philemon.
8. Meaningful decisions are made by individuals or corporations based upon Bible doctrine. A corporation can be a married couple, a family, or some other organization of people.
9. So, in the Bible, it is legitimate for Philemon, Paul's slave-owning friend, to manumit Onesimus from his own free will; however, it would not be right for Paul to demand that he do this. It was legitimate for Paul to ask Philemon to manumit Onesimus.
10. David, as leader of his country, originally developed a friendship with Ammon (2Sam. 10:1–2) and put Moab into slavery (2Sam. 8:2). He did not decide that Israel needed some more slaves, so he enslaved Moab. David originally had a friendship with the King of Moab (1Sam. 22:3). Moab had simply become hostile to Israel, so David soundly defeated them, killed 2/3rds of their males, and enslaved the nation (after that, they paid Israel tribute). We, in the United States,

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- do not grasp that some countries and some leaders are implacable and hate us and only understand military might. In fact, the only reason 50 or so countries have not attacked us is, our military would destroy them. Moab was right next door to David and he had to act. Therefore, after Moab was defeated militarily, it was legitimate to make Moab pay tribute (David was essentially taxing them for being overtly hostile towards Israel).
11. In our own history, it ought to be clear that, forcing the manumission of slaves is quite costly—if memory serves, 600,000 men died in the Civil War and the South was devastated for another 100 years following the Civil War (not because of the manumission of slaves, but the north devastated the south in the war, and then continued to do so via legislation from Congress). This was not an issue that needed to be forced, particularly in a democracy. England freed their slaves legislatively, as a matter of course, discourse and debate. Even the abolishment of slavery took place over a period of time in Great Britain, after the Abolishment of Slavery Act in 1833.
 12. Israel had been enslaved to Egypt for 400 years; and this slavery was illegitimate. Jacob and his sons had moved to Egypt for legitimate reasons, his son Joseph was the Prime Minister of Egypt, and the Jews were not hostile to the Egyptians. In fact, the Jews always had it in their souls to return to the land of Canaan, the Land of Promise. They did not want to take over Egypt. Therefore, enslaving the Jews was a matter of paranoia on the part of the Egyptian king; and not on the basis of any legitimate principle (the Jews were not, for instance, organizing uprisings in the land of Egypt).
 13. God did call upon Egypt to set His people free and to reimburse them for their time of slavery. Because the Egyptians resisted this, God punished them (the 10 signs or judgments). However, even this was done according to God's timetable and could have been accomplished without loss of life, had the Egyptians been willing to recognize that Moses was operating with God's authority.
 14. In conclusion, social evils are not what a believer ought to focus on. The believer focuses on Bible doctrine and allows himself to be guided by Bible doctrine.

10 or 20 lessons from now, we will examine the history of [slavery in the United States](#).

Because of the way slavery has been incorrectly presented historically, we tend to view slavery as some great evil which the United States practiced more onerously than others, as if this is somehow a specific sin to the United States.

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15. Slavery existed as far back as Abraham's time (circa 2000 B.C.) and certainly before that.

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16. Slavery was the modus operandi of the world for several millennia.
17. Whereas the United States practiced slavery, its practice was no less humane than that practiced anywhere else in the world.
18. Many southern plantations taught their slaves to read and write and presented them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. A believer in Jesus Christ is going to share his faith. Some may argue that this made a slave more valuable and less likely to rebel—and that is true—but it also showed a recognition that slaves were valuable before God as well.
19. Some missionaries brought the gospel to southern slaves in particular. Unbelieving masters allowed this, some hoping that this would make the slaves more obedient.
20. Negro slaves were allowed to go to worship services, and were very much a part of the “second awakening” of the United States (which refers to a spiritual awakening) in the early 19th century.
21. Gospel music was first codified in the book "Slave Songs of The United States" (by Allen, Ware, Garrison, 1867). We know from their history as slaves, they sang work songs, gospel songs, and songs about freedom (depending upon what was allowed in the field).
22. Slave owners knew that the abuse of their slaves brought about a diminished production. Beating slaves did not result in greater obedience or greater production. Abusive slave owners were more likely to have slaves run away or, worse yet, rebel against them.
23. Because tending to cotton fields was so labor intensive under a very hot sun, it was not unusual for slave owners to limit working hours, grant frequent holidays and to provide long rest periods in the middle of the day for their slaves.¹
24. There were Black confederate soldiers (a fact of history which is ignored in our history books).
25. During the Civil War, many slaves were left with the farms and the women and children. In many cases, this was their responsibility.
26. Both Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, the 2 great confederate generals, set their slaves free prior to the Civil War, so that no one would mistakenly think that they were fighting for the right to keep slaves.
27. This is not to assert that slavery was not an institutionalized evil nor that there were not acts of abuse and cruelty done to slaves.
28. This is also not to say that slavery was not an issue in the Civil War. The Confederate Constitution sought to codify slavery in its constitution. The constitutional convention specifically left the practice of slavery out of our United States Constitution.
29. There were moral failings on both sides of the Civil War. The North functioned with great self-righteousness; and the South attempted to codify the immoral practice of slavery in their constitution (immoral because it involved taking free men and enslaving them, which the Bible teaches as being wrong).
30. It is a false notion that our Constitution treated Blacks as 3/5^{ths} of a person.
 - a. This represents a great misconception, and something which is continually

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- mis-taught in our schools.
- b. Slave states wanted to count slaves as an entire person, so that they would have a better representation in Congress.
 - c. Free states argued that, if slaves were merely property, than they ought not be counted at all, thus giving slave states less representation in Congress.
 - d. So, slave states wanted slaves to count as a full person. Free states wanted slaves to count as property and not as people.
 - e. The 3/5th compromise codified this fundamental disagreement in such a way that, Black slaves ought to be recognized as people; however, as long as there is slavery, slaves could not be counted as a complete person, thus reducing the South's representation in Congress.
 - f. Reducing the South's representation in Congress would likely eventuate in the abolishment of slavery, which is what the non-slave state representatives wanted.
 - g. Black freedmen, in the north and in the south, counted as an entire person.
31. Today, American Blacks who are descended from slaves could, at any given point in time, choose to renounce their American citizenship and move to any African country they desired. Any Black person in American can, after saving up for a year or two, be financially able to do this. Although I am certain that there must be one or two which do this each year, 99.9% of American Blacks have no interest in becoming the citizens of some African country (I just made that percentage up; but we have no mass exodus from the United States to Africa).
32. Our current president, Barack Obama, has been back to Kenya, the birthplace of his father. He had the wherewithal at any point in time to live in Kenya; the country of his father. Like any rational person, he chose to remain a United States citizen.
33. On the other hand, there are millions of Blacks in Africa who would move here to the United States in a moment's notice if given half a chance (and many do, moving here both legally and illegally).
34. One of the great contrasts is our President Barrack Obama and his Kenyan half-brother. The President makes millions of dollars a year because of royalties from his books; on the other hand, his half-brother in Kenya makes less than \$25/year. Fundamental to the difference between these two half-brother is, where they were born. While such a contrast is not typical, but it is certainly illustrative, and we would be hard-pressed to find examples where such income disparity is reversed.
35. In what is one of the great classical cases of irony in American history, many Blacks have adopted the religion of Islam (particularly in the 70's and 80's) to show their disconnect with Christianity and Americanism. Many adopted Muslim names to give an outward show of their severance from Christianity and the United States. These converts ignored the fact that, Muslims were the slave dealers who captured and sold the slaves who were brought to the United States. They also ignore the fact that many slaves were saved because their masters (or

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- members of their family or by missionaries to the slaves) led them to Jesus Christ.
36. And, despite turning their backs on their Christian heritage, very few U.S. Muslim Blacks have chosen to return to whatever country of origin that they believe is theirs. Even an American Black practicing Islam in the United States recognizes that he is far better off in the United States than trying to find a place in a Muslim country.
 37. The strongest forces against the American institution of slavery in the 1850's were Christians. Christianity believes that Jesus Christ died for all mankind, and that color is not an issue when it comes to salvation.
 38. While there are still some Blacks today who are desirous of reparations (welfare on steroids), they fail to take into consideration that 600,000 men died in the Civil War; in part, to secure their freedom. Having someone die so that you might be free is something which American Blacks ought to be taught is a true sacrifice, offered on their behalf, and far more significant than reparations.
 39. Some base their claim of reparations on the Bible, where the Egyptians paid reparations to the Jews. However, these reparations were paid directly by the masters to the slaves, not to their descendants who had never been slaves.
 40. Most argue that slavery would have died a natural death in the United States (as it had in Britain) without the Civil War. Britain began, in the late 1700's, to deal with slavery in the courts, and then, in the early 1800's, legislatively with the 1807 Slave Trade Act and the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act (Christian groups like the Quakers played a very active part in this). It is not just possible, but likely, that slavery in the United States would have died out on its own, as was occurring all over the world.
 41. National, institutionalized slavery died a natural death in many nations during this time period. However, because this is the devil's world, many forms of slavery still exist in this world.
 42. We have a different type of slavery today, where whites are enslaved to Black women. Huge portions of our tax dollars—federal and state—are given over to fatherless Black families. So, for decades, we have been, in a sense, enslaved to the state and federal governments, working the first half of the year in order to pay our taxes, much of it going to people who could work, but do not.
 43. In the ancient world, if Israel, say, defeated Moab, then Moab would pay tribute (taxes) to Israel for the next few decades.
 44. One might define slavery as you working and someone else takes and enjoys the remuneration for your work.
 45. For all intents and purposes, we have people working and paying inordinate taxes (inordinate by Biblical standards), and a large percentage of this money is distributed to those who are not working (most of whom could work²). This is a form of institutionalized slavery. However, it is not our job as believers in Jesus Christ to disobey the law in order to throw off these bonds of slavery.

The Bible accepts slavery as an institutional fact (it has been a fact of human history for no less than 4000 years). Paul urges those who are saved while in slavery do not seek to be free; but, if freed, to use their freedom wisely for Jesus Christ. When dealing with a runaway slave, Paul tells the slave to return to his master; yet, in the letter sent to his master, urges him to set his slave free (1Cor. 7:21 the book of Philemon).

Christianity is not a faith designed to make the devil's world better. It is a faith which ultimately separates the believer from this world (which is the cosmic system under Satan's control). We will be associated with the newly established earth in the Millennium.

Therefore, individual Christians may be involved in various political movements or have various political points of view (apart from revolution). However, the thrust of Christianity is not to change the world in which we live. Christianity changes the believer from the inside out. The mature believer is changed by his thinking (Rom. 12:2). Although Christianity can affect great social change (which includes the abolition of slavery), that is never to be the thrust of Christianity. We are not put on this earth to improve the devil's world; or to rearrange the furniture on the deck of the Titanic.

¹ Dictionary of Afro-American slavery; Randall M. Miller, John David Smith; p. 150.

² In my life, I have known dozens of people who receive assistance from the government in a number of ways—social security benefits paid to those in their 30's; housing benefits paid to people in their 20's, 30's and 40's; and welfare and food stamp benefits. In very few of those instances can I identify a person who would have gone hungry and homeless if their benefits had been cut off.

Other references include:

<http://www.negrospirituals.com/> accessed November 1, 2011.

<http://www.everystudent.com/features/truth.html> accessed November 1, 2011.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade accessed November 1, 2011.

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