UNFOLDING HISTORY: ENDING CHATTEL SLAVERY IN THE U.S.A.

Commemorating the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of its Abolition and Concerns about the Modern Day Resurgence of Slavery

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES -- SLAVERY IN HISTORY

As far back as you wish to delve into human history, slavery, as a practice, has existed. I suspect that from man’s earliest dawn, the strong have dominated those weaker than themselves. Slavery in the ancient world did not discriminate on the basis of race, class or gender. It was based on power. In the ancient empires of the Fertile Crescent, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome -- as well as those of China, India, Africa and the Americas -- conquered people were enslaved and relegated to a condition of thralldom.

The fall of the Roman Empire left a power vacuum in Europe, North Africa the Mediterranean World. As the Dark Ages descended, centuries passed before the rise of the Mohammedans. The Muslim Empire expanded to fill that vacuum left in the Mediterranean, Central Asia and Southern Europe. It also influenced the Sahelian Empires of Ghana, Songhai, Mali and the Swahili Coast. During the Middle Ages, Muslin scholars preserved the knowledge of Alexandria, Athens, Assyria, Carthage and Rome. This knowledge laid the foundation for the European Renaissance, the Reformation, the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment.

Ships of Portugal circumnavigated Africa, and linked the Asian spice trade to Europe. The ships of Spain discovered and conquered the rich empires of Mexico and Peru, and the peoples of the forest, mountains, coasts and plains of North and South America. Throughout this profound period of social evolution, the ancient practice of slavery survived and was believed to be a part of the natural order of things.

Nevertheless, it is also true that in spite of the clear benefits of slave ownership, societies throughout history found reasons to free their slaves. In the 3rd Century BC, the Mau-rya Empire abolished the slave trade in India. In AD 9 in China, Emperor Wang Mang also abolished slave trading -- but not slavery. Sometimes, slavery was abolished only to be later reinstituted. For example, in 1102, the trade in slaves was ruled illegal by the Council of London; was abolished in Iceland in 1117; by 1200, it virtually disappeared in Japan; and in 1315 Louis X, of France, decreed that any slave setting foot on French soil should be freed.

Something important -- something unprecedented -- began to happen in England and its North American colonies around three centuries ago. That is, four Revolutions converged
that began a process that brought to an end to the historical consensus supporting slavery. The first revolution was the Reformation that sparked an outburst of religious freedom; the second was the Enlightenment with its philosophy of Natural Law and the Rights of Man; the third was the Industrial Revolution, that ended man’s dependence on animal, wind, water and muscle power and introduced steam, coal and oil as dynamic drivers of production; and finally the Political Revolutions in the form of the American, French, Haitian and Bolivarian experiences that introduced the concept of popular sovereignty over hereditary monarchies as the basis for republican government. Between 1750 and 1850, these revolutionary trends merged to form the modern world; and they, together, sounded the death knell of the acceptance of institutional slavery. So, in this era, political, economic and social values in Europe turned inexorably against the institution of slavery -- but only after millions of Africans were sold into bondage to work on the farms and plantations and in the mines and factories of the Americas and the Middle East.

THE INDIAN OCEAN AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

African slavery, as in other human cultures, had an internal and external dimension. Egyptian pharaohs demanded of southern vassal states the tribute of an annual supply of young slaves who were taken from among the Nilotic, Hamitic and Bantu peoples of the Upper Nile. There was only limited trade contact from the Nile river valley across to the western desert. However, some of the earliest examples of external African slave trading are linked to the trans-Saharan caravan trade that emerged after the Roman era. By the 10th century, camel caravans carried salt, gold, exotic animals and African slaves for sale on the Mediterranean coast and in Egypt and Arabia.

The slave trade across the Indian Ocean has a long history as well. Omani and Afro-Arab traders in the 9th century gained control of the sea routes, and the export of gold, ivory and slaves rapidly expanded. As the demand for slaves grew in Arabia, eventually, tens of thousands of slaves per year were taken from East Africa. Zanzibar became the main slave-trading port on the Indian Ocean. By the 19th century, as many as 50,000 slaves each year flowed through that city. Imagine this -- there is a former slave port near the border of Tanzania and Kenya. It is called Bagamoyo, which translates in a local dialect to, “I leave my heart behind.”

So, it is estimated that between 11 and 18 million African slaves crossed the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and Sahara Desert from 650 AD to 1900 AD. Some of them underwent intermarriages that allowed them to assimilate into new cultures in Iberia, North Africa, Egypt, Arabia, India and the Levant. It is important to know that the majority of Africans enslaved in this period were young women and girls. They were usually trained as servants, forced into prostitution or became women of a harem. Few young women over the age of ten reached Egypt or Arabia with their virginity intact. In comparison, African men enslaved in North Africa, Iberia and the Middle East became servants or soldiers -- not often laborers. Commonly, many of these enslaved African and European men were castrated to serve as eunuch guardians for a Muslim prince’s harem.

THE ATLANTIC TRIANGULAR SLAVE TRADE
The Spanish were the first Europeans to use enslaved Africans in the Americas -- primarily on the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola -- soon after Columbus’ fateful and historic voyage to the New World in 1492. Native Amerindians were first enslaved by Spain, but they suffered alarming death rates which led to efforts to protect them from extinction -- which were unsuccessful, in the end. The first enslaved Africans arrived in Hispaniola in 1501 to replace them.

Colonization of the Americas by Spain and Portugal stimulated great demand for labor in Central and South America, primarily for farming and mining. Slave-based economies quickly spread to the Caribbean and colonial North America. Initially, the institution of slavery did not exist in the English colonies of North America. Indentured servitude was the norm in the New World colonies. The first African slaves in English colonial America, 30-40 Angolans, landed on a Dutch ship in Virginia in 1619. They joined about 1,000 English indentured servants already in the colony. However, by the time of the American Revolution in 1776, the enslavement -- for life -- of black Africans had become normalized.

Three centuries of European imperialism, mercantilism and colonization generated an almost insatiable demand for African slaves. This led to war after bloody war among the most powerful nations of Europe as they fought for control of the highly lucrative African slave trade.

The Atlantic slave trade reached its peak in the late 18th century. About half of all slaves that crossed the Atlantic were captured by inter-tribal military conflicts. As such, the slave trade in West Africa increased the character and intensity of warfare and instability. Some slave captives might have been criminals, heretics, the mentally ill, the indebted -- or they had somehow fallen out of favor with their leaders.

Captives were sold and purchased locally for metal blades, iron pots, glass beads, colorful cloth, rum, and firearms. Many captives died from ill treatment, disease and depression in the "slave castles" of the Gold Coast. But, conditions of the slave ships were immeasurably worse -- in the Middle Passage -- crossing the Atlantic Ocean, where around 12% of the slaves died before even arriving in the Americas.

The growth of the Atlantic slave trade had little effect on the local African and Arab export slave trading economies. The British Navy could suppress trade in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, but could do little against the land-based intra-continental trade. In fact, the Islamic trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades increased as new sources of captives became available to meet the demand in new markets.

HISTORICAL EFFORTS TO END SLAVERY

This presentation does not allow for a comprehensive review of the many societies that chose to end the slave trade and abolish slavery. Nevertheless, from the end of the American Revolution up through the Civil War, these former colonies produced committed religious activists, inspired by their British counterparts, who fought hard to raise the profile and influence of the anti-slavery debate.

Here is why: From the 16th to the 19th centuries, an estimated 12 million African slaves were shipped to the Americas. Of these, around 645,000 went to what is the United States.
By the 1860 Census, the slave population in the United States had grown to four million. To many Americans, this was a travesty -- one that threatened the constitutional order of the Republic.

Abolitionism in Western Europe and the Americas sought to end the slave trade and set slaves free. In the 17th century, Quaker and evangelical religious groups condemned slavery as un-Christian; and in the 18th century, philosophers of the European Enlightenment criticized it as a violation of the Rights of Man. Though anti-slavery sentiments were widespread by the late 18th century, the slave system in the West Indies, South America, and the Southern United States continued to expand, generating wealth that contributed to the economic transformation of Europe and provided the capital that spurred the industrial revolution.

In 1787, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in Britain. In the following year, in 1788, Parliament passed laws regulating the conditions on British slave ships. Momentum against the African slave trade grew directly as a result of the rapid growth of the slave trade between 1750 and the turn of the 19th century. By 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act banned slave trading within the British Empire. In that same year, the Royal Navy’s West Africa Squadron was established to suppress slave trading. Over the succeeding fifty years, by 1865, nearly 150,000 Africans had been freed by these operations.

British policy sought to achieve an international consensus on this matter, and in the 1815 Congress of Vienna, the eight victorious powers declared their collective opposition against slavery. After that diplomatic success, Britain embarked upon negotiations with other countries aimed to end the global trade in slaves.

British abolitionists attracted adherents throughout much of the Empire and beyond. In 1793, Upper Canada, abolished the importation of slaves and Lower Canada followed in 1803 by also abolishing slavery. In the former British Colonies of the United States, leaders in the northern states began to oppose slavery at the same time that the southern plantation economy was rapidly expanding.

American abolitionism began well before the American Revolution in 1776. Rhode Island passed an early law abolishing slavery -- but not indentured servitude -- in 1652. As a result of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the Congress of the Confederation prohibited slavery in territories northwest of the Ohio River. One year following the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Vermont Republic banned slavery. Two years later, Pennsylvania freed the future children of slaves, while keeping those born prior to the Act as slaves-for-life. In 1783, Massachusetts followed suit, ruling slavery illegal, and immediately freed all slaves within its jurisdiction. The following year, Connecticut and Rhode Island began the gradual abolition of slavery, freeing all of their slaves by 1785. New York, in 1799, called for gradual emancipation, and in 1804, New Jersey also began to gradually abolish slavery.

So, by 1804, abolitionists had passed legislation that emancipated slaves in every state north of the Ohio River and the Mason-Dixon Line. By 1805, all of the northern states had abolished slavery within their borders; and in 1808, the United States Congress banned the
import and export of slaves. But this was a long, slow process. Emancipation was so gradual that both New York and Pennsylvania, which had ended slavery by the 1830s still listed slaves in their 1840 census, and 18 black slaves were still in New Jersey in 1860.

After the 1807 act banning the international trade, slaves were still held, though not imported to, the British Empire. In fact, on plantations in the southern U.S., the Caribbean and South America, slave populations grew -- from the intensification of systematic breeding programs -- that fed a brisk internal trade.

The Second Great Awakening in religion of the 1820s and 1830s inspired many social reforms. The immediate abolition of slavery became a battle cry because many believed it was a sin to hold slaves and an equal sin to tolerate slavery. Some reformers called for immediate action, but that action could well have been just a program of gradual emancipation. Activists who did not consider slavery a sin still viewed it as an evil, and they did what they could to limit or to end it where possible. One historian characterized the deep beliefs of the abolitionists as follows: "All people were equal in God's sight; the souls of black folks were as valuable as those of whites; for one of God's children to enslave another was a violation of the Higher Law, even if it was sanctioned by the Constitution."

In the 1820s, the abolitionist movement campaigned against the institution of slavery itself. The movement was not limited to the British Empire and its colonies. Indeed, the French Revolution banned slavery in French dominions, despite Emperor Napoleon’s reinstatement at the turn of the 19th century as he sought to re-enslave Dominique/Haiti. Haiti, the second revolutionary republic established in the Western hemisphere, declared independence in tandem with the abolition of slavery in 1804. These developments also spread through the Spanish colonies -- with Mexico declaring the abolition of slavery in 1810 (though it officially ended after its revolution in 1829), while Spain, in 1811, abolished slavery at home and in all of its colonies except Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo. Before the end of the second decade of the 19th century, Britain had signed treaties with Spain and Portugal to abolish the trade in slaves; while in the U.S. the 1829 Compromise prohibited the expansion of slavery into the western frontier.

Now, the decades leading up to the American Civil War -- which was in large measure fought over the institution of slavery -- and the Emancipation proclamation, saw several important developments that formed precedents that added momentum to the anti-slavery movement. For example, in 1833, the British Slavery Abolition Act entered into force. This Act did end slavery throughout most of the British Empire -- including over 700,000 slaves in the West Indies, 20,000 in Mauritius, and 40,000 in South Africa. Between 1835 and 1836, treaties were signed between Britain and France and between Britain and Denmark to strengthen the system for abolishing the slave trade; while in 1836, Portugal abolished the transatlantic slave trade. It is important to note that slavery was also abolished in most of Latin America during the Bolivarian Independence Wars (1810–1822), but remained in practice up until 1873 in Puerto Rico, 1886 in Cuba, and 1888 in Brazil. However, in some parts of Africa and in much of the Islamic world, slavery persisted as a legal institution well into the 20th century.

Following these historical precedents, by August of 1838, enslaved men, women and children throughout the British Empire were finally to become technically free -- that is,
after a period of forced apprenticeship -- as a result of the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act. Within the following decade, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society -- now called Anti-Slavery International -- was founded and worked to outlaw slavery in other countries. It also put political pressure on the British government to enforce the suppression of the slave trade by declaring slave traders pirates and pursuing them. As a result, the Royal Navy assigned additional ships to the Anti-Slavery Squadron, making it one of the largest fleets in the world. The West Africa Squadron captured 1,600 slave ships between 1808 and 1860 and freed over 150,000 Africans who were aboard. Action was also taken against African leaders who refused to agree to British treaties to outlaw the trade, and anti-slavery treaties were signed with over 50 African rulers.

THE LAST PHASE OF U.S. SLAVERY

Slaveholders and the valuable commodities produced on southern plantations had great influence over the politics and economy of the early U.S. For example, in the seven decades between the elections of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, a slaveholder served as the President of the United States for five of those seven decades... Indeed, during that period no president was elected for a second term who was not a slaveholder.

Slavery was a hot political topic from the 1770s through the 1860s. It was also a critical issue in the debate on drafting the Constitution. In order to gain the support of southern slave holding elites, the U.S. Constitution protected the slave trade for 20 years. To mollify southern concerns regarding their representation in the Congress, the American founders allowed slaves in the south to be counted as three-fifths of a man for the purposes of southern Congressional apportionment. As a result of the three-fifths compromise, elite southern planter class gained power in Congress, and a far larger number of electoral votes, that were out of proportion to the total number of white Southerners. After the 1854 election, less than a decade before the Emancipation Proclamation, the pro-slavery Democratic Party gained control of two of the three branches of the Federal government.

When the national capital was moved from Philadelphia in 1800, slavery was legal in Washington, D.C. Pro-slavery forces in the Congress were so strong that slavery was not outlawed in the District of Columbia until 1862. In fact, the White House itself, owned many slaves who served the president and his family. Because of its strategic position straddling both the upper and lower South, Washington, D.C. became an important center for the domestic slave trade, passing thousands of slaves through to the plantations of the Deep South.

African slavery was so deeply structured into the politics and economy of the young Republic that its influence was omnipresent. For example, in the early 19th century, cotton superseded tobacco, by far, as the U.S.’s largest export crop and the major earner of foreign exchange. In fact, cotton was transported by northern ships, and was financed by northern investors and insurance companies. Shipbuilding exploded under the influence of the cotton trade as did shipping, maritime enterprise, banking, and insurance. All of these enterprises were in the North; and so were the early factories which transformed raw cotton into textiles. So, it is clear that the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of northerners depended inextricably on slavery, due to the economic importance of cotton.
Not surprisingly, African slaves did not accept their condition without protest. Many slave rebellions were known to Americans, even in colonial times. These rebellions were not confined to the South. In fact, one of the earliest slave uprisings was in 1712, in Manhattan. As African Americans in the colonies increased in number, white settlers became preoccupied with the fear that a violent rebellion could occur. It was this fear of rebellion that led each colony to pass a series of laws restricting slaves' movements and behaviors, known as Slave Codes.

I wish to emphasize here that the end of the slave trade and the movement toward its abolishment did nothing to temper the demand for more slaves in the southern slave states. American abolitionism was perceived by the planter elite as a threat to their way of life and to relations between North and South. The abolition movement leaders -- white radical social reformers, former slaves and free blacks -- had limited success until the Civil War.

In the first decades of the 19th century, slave breeding became a common practice. Following the end of the international slave trade in 1808, the domestic trade in American born African slaves expanded between the older slave states -- Virginia and Maryland -- and new territories -- Mississippi and Alabama. As cotton, tobacco, sugar cane and rice production moved westward, new plantations demanded ever larger numbers of slaves.

In the lower South the majority of slaves lived and worked on cotton plantations. Most of these plantations had fifty or fewer slaves, although the largest plantations have several hundred. Cotton was by far the leading cash crop; but slaves also raised rice, corn, sugarcane, and tobacco. African slavery existed in many different forms on small farms, large plantations, in cities and towns, inside homes, out in the fields, on boats at sea, in the mines and forests, as well as in industry and transportation.

Despite the wide variety of labor performed by slaves, the core concepts remained the same. Slaves were property. They were property because they were Black. Their status as property was enforced by violence -- actual or threatened. The drivers, overseers, and masters maintained discipline on the plantation. Slaves could be punished for any perceived slight or indiscretion. The punishments might have including whippings, torture, mutilation, imprisonment, and being sold away from the plantation. Slaves were even sometimes murdered. Nevertheless, plantation agriculture depended upon regimented slave gang labor. Slaves -- valuable, movable property that they were -- represented the indispensable factor in the production of these lucrative cash crops.

By 1830, the archetypical image of Southern slavery was of a large plantation with hundreds of slaves. In fact, such situations were rare. Around 3/4 of Southern whites did not own any slaves. Of those who did, 88% owned twenty or fewer. Whites who did not own slaves were primarily yeoman farmers, though some could afford a “breeding pair.” Though non-slave-owning whites gained few personal benefits from slavery, they identified with and defended the institution -- even while resenting the wealth and power of the large slaveholders. In fact, many aspired to own slaves themselves in order to join the privileged ranks.

In pre-Civil War America, pro-slavery advocates went from defending slavery as a necessary evil to arguing that it was a positive social good. Racist attitudes of that era
presumed that Africans possessed a child-like ignorance. As such, Africans needed protection -- from themselves. Slavery provided the civilizing influence they longed for. Others argued that Africans were so inferior that they could never succeed in a free society. Still others, maybe a bit more honest, believed that slaves were necessary to maintain the progress of white society.

Of course, slaves resisted their treatment. They slowed down their work pace, disabled machinery, feigned sickness, destroyed crops. They argued and fought with their masters and overseers. Some burned forests and buildings. Some learned to read and write, a practice forbidden by law. Thousands of slaves ran away. Some left the plantation for days or weeks at a time and lived in hiding. Some even escaped to the North and Canada. Even when slaves acted in a subservient manner, they were often practicing a type of resistance. By fooling the master or overseer with their behavior, they resisted additional ill treatment. There were also numerous cases of slave revolts. Some slaves killed their masters outright - - some by using weapons, others by putting poison in their food. Some slaves even committed suicide or mutilated themselves to ruin their property value. Subtly or overtly, enslaved African Americans found ways to sabotage the system which controlled their lives.

So, despite the expansion of the international abolition movement, and a home grown movement within the United States, abolition of slavery in the U.S. remained an elusive goal. In addition to the authority practiced on individual plantations, slaves throughout the South lived under a set of restrictive Slave Codes. The key requirements of these codes included the following ideas -- Slaves were property, not people, and were to be treated as such. Slaves could not testify in court against a white man, make contracts, leave the plantation without permission, strike a white (even in self-defense), buy and sell goods, own firearms, gather without a white person present, possess any anti-slavery literature, or visit the homes of whites or free blacks. The killing of a slave was almost never regarded as murder, and the rape of slave women was treated as a form of trespassing. In fact, by 1850 the Fugitive Slave Law strengthened the property rights of slave owners by requiring that escaped slaves be returned to their masters. In the eleven Southern States slavery remained an accepted institution that was integral to the agricultural economy.

**THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION**

According to the 1860 Census, the U.S. slave population had grown to over four million. Under President Abraham Lincoln, in 1862, the United States signed the African Slave Trade Treaty Act with Britain for the suppression of the slave trade.

Abraham Lincoln harbored a moral opposition to slavery. As a candidate for President, he had hoped to bring about its eventual end by halting its expansion into any new U.S. territory. Though his wife was from a prominent slave owning family, Lincoln was a leading opponent of the "Slaveocracy." In January of 1863, at the height of the civil war, President Abraham Lincoln used the war powers of the presidency to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. He declared "all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free" -- but he exempted border states and those areas of slave states already under Union control. By this Presidential Order,
Lincoln proclaimed the freedom of 3.1 million of the nation's 4 million slaves, and immediately freed 50,000 of them, with the rest were freed as Union armies advanced.

The Proclamation made abolition -- in addition to reunification -- central goals of the war. It outraged white Southerners and angered some Northern Democrats. It energized anti-slavery forces and weakened forces in Europe that wanted to intervene to help the Confederacy. This proclamation, however, did not in-and-of itself, end slavery in the South. Nor did it free all slaves in the U.S. However, most slaves in states bordering the Confederacy were set free by this action, with separate laws following to free slaves in Washington, D.C. It also served as a powerful legal precedent which became the foundation of the culminating act that formally abolished slavery in the United States -- the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution -- which led to about 40,000 remaining slaves being freed.

The former slave and educator, Booker T. Washington, was a boy of 9 in Virginia, when Lincoln freed him and his family. He wrote about his recollections:

> As the great day drew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom.... Some man who seemed to be a stranger (a United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing that she would never live to see.

Total abolition of slavery was finalized by the Thirteenth Amendment which took effect in December 1865. The Emancipation Proclamation also allowed for the enrollment of freed slaves into the United States military. During the war nearly 200,000 blacks, most of them ex-slaves joined the Union Army. Their contributions gave the North additional manpower that was significant in winning the war. The Confederacy did not allow slaves in their army as soldiers until the final months before its defeat.

Lincoln and the Proclamation were immediately denounced by those who opposed the war and advocated restoring the union by allowing slavery. A candidate for the governorship of New York, called the Emancipation Proclamation – “a call for slaves to commit extreme acts of violence on all white southerners.” He said it was "a proposal for the butchery of women and children, for scenes of lust and rapine, and of arson and murder, which would invoke the interference of civilized Europe." Others saw the Proclamation as an unconstitutional abuse of Presidential power. One newspaper editor wrote, "In the name of freedom of Negroes, [the proclamation] imperils the liberty of white men; to test a utopian theory of equality of races which Nature, History and Experience alike condemn as monstrous, it overturns the Constitution and Civil Laws ..."

SLAVERY BY ANY OTHER NAME
Lincoln was lauded in the years after his death, as was his actions in the proclamation. The Free Blacks celebrated its anniversary for the next half century. African Americans in other states created the holiday “June Teenth” to honor it. On the 50th anniversary of the Proclamation, in 1913, large celebrations were held throughout the U.S. Those 50 years were for the vast majority of African Americans a purgatory-like existence. Slavery was not replaced with freedom, but with a near century of institutionalized racism and discrimination. The slave codes were replaced by Jim Crow laws that purposely and systematically inhibited African Americans from full citizenship and participation in the broader society. Murders of Black men by white lynching mobs were rarely punished in the courts. American life continued to be deeply unfair, leading to deep cynicism by African American intellectuals regarding Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, describing it as worthless.

That, of course, is not the whole story, neither in the U.S. or other parts of the world. This presentation has shown that events in the United States did not occur in a vacuum. They were just one part in one place of a fundamental transformation in human social evolution as a whole. Each country and culture proceeded on this journey at different rates and with variable results. For example, in the latter half of the 19th century, a number of countries, riding the wave of global trends, took historic steps to limit or end slavery: i.e., Columbia in 1851; The Hawaiian Kingdom in 1852; Argentina in 1853; Peru and Venezuela in 1854; Moldavia in 1855; British occupied India in 1960; Cuba in 1862; the Dutch colonies in 1863; the U.S. Emancipation Proclamation in 1863; the U.S. 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1865; Portuguese Africa in 1869; Brazil and Puerto Rico in 1873; Gold Coast/Ghana in 1874; the Ottomans of Egypt in 1882; Cuba in 1886; Korea in 1884; Madagascar in 1896; and Zanzibar in 1897. This pattern continued into the 20th century and was reinforced by the introduction of human rights concepts into the commerce of nations. In the last century, additional states moved into conformity with this global consensus, including Siam (1912), Nepal (1921), Morocco (1922), Afghanistan (1923), Iraq (1924), Iran (1928), Ethiopia (1935), Nigeria (1936), Qatar (1952), Tibet (1959), Niger (1960), Saudi Arabia and Yemen (1962), United Arab Emirates (1963), Oman (1970) and Mauritania (1981). These global historical developments were cemented in the 20th century in the form of the 1924 League of Nations Temporary Slavery Commission, the 1926 Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery; and the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, with Article 4 banning slavery globally.

In December, 1948, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 4 states:

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

In the modern period, successes of the movement to abolish slavery have been commemorated in many different ways in different places. The U.N. General Assembly declared 2004 the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and its Abolition. This proclamation marked the bicentenary of the birth of the Haitian Republic.

Five years ago, in 2007, British museums and galleries marked the anniversary of the 1807 abolition act – “1807 Commemorated.” In 2008 the U.K. also marked the 201st
anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the British Empire; as well as the 175th anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire.

We should be proud and we should honor these accomplishments. They are meaningful and significant. But we must not rest on our laurels. There remains much work to be done. For, although we have outlawed slavery in most countries, it continues to be practiced secretly in many parts of the world. Modern slavery occurs even in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, as well as parts of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Human rights advocates estimate that there may well be over 27 million victims of slavery suffering the loss of their liberty in the world today in places like the Sudan. There is compelling evidence that in Mauritania as many as to 600,000 men, women and children -- or 20% of the population -- are living in thrall to their masters as slaves -- today.

Modern-day abolitionists have again taken the field, as revelations of secret enslavement become known. We see the emergence of NGOs such as Anti-Slavery International, the American Anti-Slavery Group, International Justice Mission, and Free the Slaves taking up the challenge of ridding the world of slavery -- again. In the U.S., a coalition of NGOs, foundations and corporations -- The Action Group to End Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery -- advocate a policy agenda for abolishing slavery and human trafficking.

A decade ago, the United States passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) "to combat trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude." This Act also "created new law enforcement tools to strengthen the prosecution and punishment of traffickers, making human trafficking a Federal crime with severe penalties." The United States Department of Justice takes action to publicize and prosecute modern human traffickers who hold men, women and children in virtual bondage.

While it remains illegal everywhere, slavery or slavery-like conditions exist today in many countries throughout the world.

So, I honor Abraham Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation. Because of this action, my great-grandparents woke up one day in 1863, and their world had changed for the better. It was not perfect, but nothing is. I admonish my children, from their lofty digitally wired 21st century perspective, not to judge too harshly the perceived shortcomings of people who lived in a different age and historical context. I remind them that their perspective is as clear as it is because they stand on the shoulders of millions who have gone before -- who fought and died for the liberty that they take for granted.

And in historical retrospect, I believe Lincoln deserves fair credit. Yes, he was an imperfect man in an imperfect world who proclaimed an imperfect result that was applied imperfectly. That, my friends, is the lesson of history. For me, it is not so much who Lincoln was, or what Lincoln did, than it is to recognize his place in history as one contributor in the long parade of people who contributed to changing the world as it regards rejecting the institution of slavery.
I have sought in this presentation to put into context the long history of slavery and the many instances in which leaders have sought, for various reasons, to end that practice of man’s inhumanity to man. Lincoln did not create his world. He was born into it. It is significant that during his short and violently interrupted life, when it mattered, he did something important that helped to change the world and expanded the range of freedom and liberty. He helped to emancipate both black and white America. We should not forget that.

I believe it takes a great deal of courage and bravery to do what you think is right, especially against potent and organization opposition to the contrary. It takes a strong force of will to do what you can with the power that you have -- at the time. Without intending to do so, Lincoln’s brave gesture did indeed help to change the world that we live in today. To me, that is more than worthy of commemoration and celebration.

HAPPY EMANCIPATION PROCLAMAION DAY

THANK YOU.