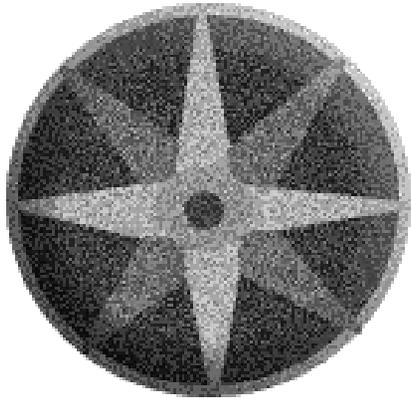


Mass Slavery Apology



We hope you will share this booklet with others.

www.massslaveryapology.org

email@massslaveryapology.org

SLAVERY & ITS LEGACY:

FACING OUR
UNHEALED PAST



With Hope for
Transformation, Justice,
&
Reconciliation

Mass Slavery Apology

Both colonizer and colonized are dehumanized, albeit in different and very distinctive ways, within a culture of domination. Therefore if domination is to end, there must be personal transformation on both sides.

~ bell hooks

(A) nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Beyond Vietnam, 1967

If you have come to help me,
you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation
is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.

~ Aboriginal activists group,
Queensland, Australia, 1970s

All truth passes through three stages:

- First it is ridiculed.
- Second it is violently opposed.
- Third it is accepted as being self-evident.

~ Schopenhauer

[We see a need] to transform the thinking that spawned racism, namely the appetite for material power and luxury in the Western nations, and the consequent reduction of human beings to the status of objects to be bought, sold, easily demeaned and killed for profit, denying the profound and noble spiritual nature of all people.

~ Ingrid Askew and Sister Clare Carter, co-founders,
Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage:
Re-tracing the Journey of Slavery, 1999

TO BE HOPEFUL in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

~ Howard Zinn

Dear Readers,

We invite you to join us in a very special project. We are a small group, all white, who, with guidance from African American and Native American activists/educators, have written this statement, an apology for slavery including commitments to restorative action. We share it with you because of our strong belief that it is the responsibility of European Americans to end the systems of racism and white privilege. People of color have told us that healing the wounds of our collective past cannot occur without a sincere acknowledgement of these wrongs.

Recognizing that **an apology is just the start** of undoing the racism that continues to devastate many communities of color, we invite people of European descent to add your signatures to this statement. (The most up to date signature list is available at **www.massslaveryapology.org/Signatures**.) **If you would like to be listed as a signer**, please email your name, town, and state (and country if you are outside the U.S.) to us at **email@massslaveryapology.org**. Your name will be added to the list on our website's soon after we receive your email.

We welcome feedback, comments, and questions from all readers. To send us your thoughts, or if you would like to receive occasional updates about this project, please contact us at **email@massslaveryapology.org**.

We hope you will share this booklet and our website with others who might be interested.

In solidarity,
Mass Slavery Apology

Some time ago, a group of us, friends brought together by a common desire to confront racism, traveled to New York City to see The Maafa, A Healing Journey.¹ The Maafa is a moving and enlightening theater piece about slavery and its vestiges through the ages. When a local friend mentioned that she hoped to stage a similar production with a focus on our area of western Massachusetts, we were prompted to think about how we, a group of whites, could contribute to this healing journey. We decided that we wanted to offer a formal apology to African Americans and all other descendants of those who were enslaved in the United States. We hope that other white folks might want to be involved in some way – perhaps by adding their names to our statement and/or joining us in working toward reparations.

Who are we? We are not anthropologists or historians; we are ordinary people who are deeply troubled by the racial inequities in our society and by the justifications our culture creates for these inequities. We address this difficult topic as a step toward resolving some of the often unspoken conflict and division between the descendants of European immigrants and the descendants of those who were enslaved. (Because we live in Massachusetts, we have included information from this state in some of the sections below.)

This statement of apology is the result of our work.

*Sharin Alpert, Shelburne Falls MA
Teegrey Iannuzzi, Pelham MA
Annie Keough, Greenfield MA
January 2009*

¹An annual production of St. Paul Community Baptist Church, Brooklyn NY; www.spcbc.com. “Maafa” is a Kiswahili word for a great calamity or disaster, and is used to refer to the African holocaust.

We invite you to join us in this effort to heal racism.

Acknowledging that an apology is just the start of undoing the racism that continues to devastate many communities of color in the United States and elsewhere, we invite people of European descent to join us by adding your signatures to this statement, if our words resonate with you.

If you would like to be listed as a signer, send your name, town, and state, and country if outside the U.S. to email@massslaveryapology.org.

What will we do with our statement - and your signatures? We are using the statement primarily as a tool to educate other white people about racism, white privilege, and reparations. We believe that the more signatures are listed, the more weight the statement will carry. We hope to bring it to state, local, and national governments to spur action at a governmental level.

You can see an up to date list of signatures at www.massslaveryapology.org/signatures.

We hope you will share this booklet with your lists or acquaintances who might be interested.

A STATEMENT OF APOLOGY AND COMMITMENT

Slavery and the years of racial hatred and violation since, encompassing hundreds of years of terror, suffering, and murder, have had a profound role in every aspect of our country's development. Slavery formed the foundation of our economic, political, and social systems. According to the authors of *The Color of Wealth*, "African slavery produced the initial start-up capital for what would become the basis for capitalism in the United States."² The wealth it created continues to enrich those families and institutions that originally profited from slavery.

Slavery's role in our history has a deep effect on us emotionally and psychologically, and this history continues to influence us all, every day, in ways both obvious and unconscious. Slavery has done immeasurable harm and, as whites, we know that the effects of it are our responsibility. Because of this, we are compelled to offer our apology to the descendents of all who were enslaved in the United States.



Sojourner Truth
lived in
Northampton MA
in the 1840s.

We hope that our government will one day hold itself accountable for the devastation wrought by slavery and its legacy of persistent, and often deadly, racism.³ In the meantime, we are writing now, as individuals, to take a step toward healing the wounded relationship between us, people of European ancestry, and you, whose ancestors were enslaved by European Americans. Recognizing that our histories and destinies are bound together, we do this in the hope that the wounds may start to mend.

² Meizhu Lui, Barbara Robles, Betsy Leondar-Wright, Rose Brewer, Rebecca Adamson, with United for a Fair Economy, *The Color of Wealth, The Story Behind the U.S. Racial Wealth Divide*, NYC, The New Press, 2006, p. 74. See www.faireconomy.org.

³ In the time since we began writing this statement, several states and the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate have issued apologies for slavery. For more information, see page 12.

History

In the early 1600s, Europeans and European Americans began kidnapping West Africans, bringing them to the Americas, and forcing them, under threat of extreme violence, even death, to live as slaves for life in conditions of utmost degradation.

Contrary to popular belief, slavery was not confined to the South. In fact, although the slave trade on this continent was begun by Europeans, colonial settlers living in Marblehead, Massachusetts launched a slave ship in 1636. Massachusetts legalized slavery in 1641, the first colony to do so.

Also unknown to many, whites in North America enslaved Native Americans years before they first brought enslaved Africans to this continent.⁴ Beginning in the very early 1500s and continuing into the 1600s, Europeans from Spain, Portugal, and England captured Native Americans by both force and deception. Some were taken to Europe or the West Indies to be sold; others were forced into slavery here in the colonies. According to the Connecticut Valley Historical Society, “This treatment of the captive Indians had a direct connection with the introduction of negro (*sic*) slavery into Massachusetts. The same vessel that carried the Indians to be slaves in the West India islands, brought back, as part of its return cargo, negroes (*sic*) to be slaves in Massachusetts.”⁵

Most of us have heard about the horrific conditions during slavery. White owners treated enslaved African Americans as less than human. Slaves had no rights. They were forced to work inhumanly long hours, and were denied their basic human needs, including decent food, medical care, clothing, and education.

⁴ Howard Clark, at 413-772-3743, has generously offered to provide resources for those wanting more information about the enslavement of Native Americans by Europeans and European-Americans.

For an introduction to the subject, see Frederick E. Hoxie, Editor, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), page 597.

⁵ Connecticut Valley Historical Society, *Slavery in the Connecticut Valley*, p. 207.

U.S. State and Federal Apologies for Slavery

U.S. House of Representatives: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr110-194>

U.S. Senate: <http://www.opencongress.org/bill/111-sc26/text?version=es>

Alabama: <http://www.legislature.state.al.us/SearchableInstruments/2007RS/Resolutions/HJR321.htm>-Florida: <http://www.flsenate.gov/data/session/2008/Senate/bills/billtext/pdf/s2930er.pdf>

Connecticut: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/TOB/H/2009HJ-00001-R01-HB.htm>

Georgia: http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2007_08/fulltext/hr1011.htm

Maryland: <http://mlis.state.md.us/2007RS/billfile/hj0004.htm>

New Jersey: http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2006/Bills/ACR/270_I1.PDF

North Carolina: <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2007/Bills/Senate/HTML/S1557v0.html>

Virginia: <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp524.exe?071+ful+SJ332ER>

THANK YOU to Dr. Enoch Page for your mentoring, inspiration, and immense patience as we wrote this statement. We are deeply appreciative of the time and energy you took to help us with this effort.

Dr. Page is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. His primary area of specialization is the scholarship of African enslavement, colonization, and global struggles for anti-racist liberation. He has studied and taught about the organization of racism in the Caribbean, Africa, and the United States and currently teaches courses like *The Anthropology of Whiteness*, *Activist Antiracism Through Film*, and *The Anthropology of Genocide*. He is currently working on a book entitled *Bamboozled by Whiteness No More*.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

This apology effort was inspired in part by the Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage (1998-1999), which was initiated by Sister Clare Carter and Ingrid Askew. Thank you.

Thank you also to:

Howard Clark for his valuable assistance with research on the enslavement of Native Americans

Brother North Star for his steadfast guidance, encouragement, and support

Dwayne Brewington and La Wanza Lett-Brewington for editorial contributions, and

Our fellow members of European Dissent/Uprooting Racism in Our Community for beginning the conversation which led to this statement.

Husbands, wives, and children were often forced to live separately and even sold to separate owners. While some received better treatment than others, it was common for whites to rape, beat, brand, and kill those who were enslaved.

From the moment they were enslaved until abolition, Africans and their descendants fought against slavery. Their resistance included, but was by no means limited to:

- ◆ written protests like Frederick Douglass' anti-slavery newspaper
- ◆ public speak-outs in the form of sermons and lectures like those of Sojourner Truth
- ◆ court proceedings like those of Joseph Cinqué and Elizabeth “Mum Bett” Freeman, who used the legal system to gain their freedom
- ◆ civil disobedience like the Underground Railroad, which succeeded because of the many individuals, of both African and European descent, who risked and sometimes lost their lives to help others escape to freedom; and
- ◆ acts of violent rebellion like Nat Turner’s uprising.

African Americans were never alone in this fight. Some white supporters were also involved in anti-slavery efforts, both in the United States and in Europe.

In 1865, the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment⁶ to the United States Constitution made slavery illegal. The decade that followed, called Reconstruction (1867-1877), was a time of great gains and losses. There was a movement toward racial equality as African American men gained the right to vote and many who had formerly been enslaved were elected to the U.S. Congress

⁶ The Thirteenth Amendment reads:
“Section 1: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment or crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist in the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.
Section 2: Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

See http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html

and other prominent positions in the South. There was also a vicious backlash. Fear-filled whites started white supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan during this period, which also saw an increase in violent race-based crimes like lynchings. The first Jim Crow laws, in 1881, legalized discrimination against people of African descent.



Elizabeth Freeman lived in Sheffield MA in the 1700s.

In the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the mid-twentieth century, African Americans and their allies worked to change unjust conditions in this country. The Civil Rights movement focused on ending racial inequality, such as segregation and the denial of voting rights, and in the 1950s and '60s Congress passed a number of laws which made most acts of racial bias illegal. The Black Power movement worked for cultural, economic, and political self-determination for Blacks, and for a distinct and dignified Black identity. Participants in both movements were persecuted by means both legal and illegal; many were exiled or killed, and many more were jailed temporarily or imprisoned for decades.

We celebrate and honor the courage and strength of all who, over hundreds of years, took a stand for equality and justice.

Our current situation

Despite consistent resistance, and many moments of progress, serious injustices continue. More than four hundred years of horrific treatment, much of it lawful, has left an immeasurable wound, not just in the psyches of the enslaved and their descendents, but in the nation as a whole. Citizens of color are frequently treated as inferior to whites in our country's institutions, from the courts to the employment offices to the schools. Citizens of color are at constant risk of being harmed by hate crimes, police brutality, and inadequate health care. Young African American men are jailed in disproportionately high

A note from the writers:

This statement of apology was conceived and completed between 2004 and 2008. Writing it has been both meaningful and difficult for us. We struggled with many parts of this statement because the topic is so complex.

Here are some examples:

- ◆ *This statement does not adequately address Native American history or the need for reparations to descendents of enslaved Native Americans.*
- ◆ *Many descendants of slaves come from mixed heritages, and we have not addressed this subject at all.*
- ◆ *Some forms of slavery still exist today. According to the American Anti-Slavery Group,¹⁵ more than 10,000 individuals are trafficked into the United States every year and kept captive as, for example, sex slaves, domestic servants, and agricultural and sweatshop workers. While some are European, most are people of color from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.*

Rather than avoid this whole conversation for fear of being incomplete or wrong in our presentation, we have taken the risk to proceed anyway.

¹⁵ www.abolish.org
For more information, see also:
-http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/09/23_16691.shtml
-<http://www.polarisproject.org>

Why reparations?

African Americans have made incalculable contributions to this country and have also suffered immeasurable losses. As whites, we assert fervently that we are accountable for those damages. We also assert that the ways in which reparations take place must be determined by descendants of those who were enslaved.¹⁴

We commit ourselves to working individually, collectively, and politically toward payment of the debt owed by whites to descendants of the enslaved in the United States. We believe that, while the amount of time and resources this undertaking will require are enormous, it can be done. Achieving this just goal would benefit all members of our nation, in ways that, now, we can only begin to imagine.

numbers when compared to young men of other races who commit the same crimes.⁷ This is an intolerable state of affairs. In fact, many believe that conditions in our African American communities are best described as genocide.⁸ They warn that this situation is likely to worsen as our society becomes increasingly politically, economically, and environmentally stressed in this era of global warming.

~

Because we grew up immersed in our racist society, we have been grossly unaware of the extreme disadvantages suffered by people of color at every turn. We have also been oblivious to the unearned benefits and privileges daily enjoyed by whites like ourselves. Since examining the nature of this grave reality, we realize that we are overprivileged at the expense of others who are underprivileged. We are beginning to understand how much white privilege is an integral part of racial oppression. We can see that the economic, educational, employment, and other gaps between the races are not due to the shortcomings of people of color, as many whites believe. Rather, these gaps are created by whites, intentionally or not, as a way to produce and perpetuate our own privilege.

Moore; Randall Robinson (see <http://www.randallrobinson.com/>); the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) (see www.ncobra.org); and the Honorable John Conyers, Jr., U.S. Congressman and sponsor of the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-40>)

¹³ The documentary *Traces of the Trade* (www.tracesofthetrade.org) follows white descendants of slave traders as they explore their family history of privilege and discuss the ways they will support reparations for slavery.

¹⁴ Here are a few more of the many excellent sources of information about reparations:

- All For Reparations and Emancipation (AFRE), www.allforreparations.org
- Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation (CURE), www.reparationsthecure.org
- Global Afrikan Congress, www.globalafrikancongress.com
- Restitution Study Group, www.rsgincorp.com
- Transafrica Forum, www.transafricaforum.org
- International People's Democratic UHURU Movement, <http://inpdum.org>

⁷ For more information, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, <http://www.newjimcrow.com>

Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New Press, 2001), quoted on National Association to Save Young Black Men website, www.sybm.org.

⁸ Here are a few examples:

- Daniel Bakker, *Black Genocide: The Hypocrisy of America Exposed*, KB Publishing, www.bakkerblackgenocide.com
- Robert Johnson and Paul Leighton, *Black Genocide? Preliminary Thoughts on the Plight of America's Poor Black Men*, *Journal of African Men*, v1 #2, fall 1995
- Vernellia Randall, J.D., *Dying While Black, An In Depth Look at a Crisis in the Health System*, Seven Principles Press.

OUR APOLOGY AND COMMITMENT

The institution of slavery was both a crime against humanity and a profound moral wrong, yet the historic and present-day wounds of slavery have been largely unacknowledged by whites. Even after slavery ended, legal segregation, systematic terrorism, and murder continued. Socially sanctioned discrimination, genocidal behavior, and white privilege persist to this day.

We whites benefit materially from the system of privilege, which we created at the expense of our fellow citizens of color. At the same time that we benefit materially, we are harming ourselves spiritually. If we truly value dignity, respect, and equal rights for all, we must work hard to change the system of white privilege, rather than continuing to participate in it unquestioningly.

Words cannot express our remorse for the long history of unrelenting violence caused by our collective white ancestors. Nor can words describe our sorrow for the pain and suffering that continue today because of our destructive attitudes and behaviors and our failure to stop this ongoing devastation. We have a sacred responsibility to right these wrongs.

For all of this, we apologize to people of African descent in this country, to the communities in Africa from which their ancestors were abducted, and to the descendents of all others who were enslaved in this country.

We have lost any right to your trust. We realize that it will require many consistent, positive interactions and actions over a long period of time until we are able to earn your trust and forgiveness for our grave violations and wrongdoings.

Because we know that an apology is meaningless if not coupled with appropriate action, we commit ourselves to act. Taking our direction from people of color, we will continue our work toward justice and reconciliation.

The ways we will do this include the following:

1. We will seek mentors to guide us to a deeper understanding and healing of our racist ways and to help us end the system of white privilege.⁹
2. We will educate others about how the systems of white privilege, racism, and internalized superiority create the extreme power imbalance that exists between the races.
3. We will acknowledge and celebrate both the inherent differences that exist among people and the commonalities that result from our shared humanity.
4. We will promote a fair telling of all people's histories and contributions.¹⁰
5. We will embrace membership in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-faith global community that strives for just and respectful treatment of all. In this way, we will free ourselves from the "white" identity, which is based on domination and privilege,¹¹ and begin to assume a new identity as global citizens.
6. We will support reparations for descendants of the enslaved, and we will support the leadership of the African Americans who are working to define what forms these long-overdue reparations will take.¹²

⁹ Dr. Enoch H. Page, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA.

¹⁰ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (NYC: Plume, 2000).

¹¹ Thank you Rita Hardiman for these ideas from *Reflections on White Identity Development Theory*, Chapter 5 of *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development*, Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe and Bailey W. Jackson III, editors (NYC, New York University, 2001)

¹² Some leaders in the reparations movement: the late Queen Mother Audley