

Why Is Georgetown University Rewriting History?  
Posted On:December 31, 1969

Cherry-picking is no way to benefit from historic insight. Suddenly, it has become chic to revisit history and try to undo what was done. There is no way we can undo slavery, and this mode of rewriting history is of no benefit to the descendants of a very bad institution.

Georgetown University was financed in 1789 by the sale of slaves owned by the Jesuit fathers. The university wants to find descendants of those slaves and give them special access to attend Georgetown. Put them in the front of the line, they say. What if they are not college material? Should we just admit people based on their ancestry? How is this helping the ongoing problem with institutional inequality facing the Black underclass? But what about those Blacks who are successful in every walk of American life today (including our President)? Why are we not recognizing and mending the real problems in less successful Black lives?

May I acidly note that nobody has ever proposed reparations for the Chinese, who built our railroads and were then hunted down, lynched by mobs, or deported back to China in the 19th century? Who is proposing to admit every person with Native American blood to universities, ready or not? And has anyone noted that the oldest institution of slavery (much before Black slavery) is that of women, a slavery that only ended in modern Western society and those Asian societies influenced by the West? Is anyone proposing reparations for 10,000 years of female servitude?

When the UN "abolished" slavery in 1952, they didn't notice that in Muslim-majority countries (the worst being Saudi Arabia), women are de facto slaves who have no rights beyond those given them by their masters. Furthermore, just saying that slavery is illegal does not stop that institution. Human trafficking and chattel slavery are still alive and well in Africa and India.

We can rename buildings in universities named for founders who happened to own slaves, although slavery was legal in their day. Should we rename Washington, DC, and refuse to recognize in history all the presidents who lived before Lincoln abolished the institution of slavery? Are we ready to do that? Are we ready to rewrite history as the half-educated students of Ivy League schools want to do by eliminating the study of western civilization (because it is White), Shakespeare's plays, and American history because they are not about women and people of color? Such students, if listened to, will remain half-educated. Should Hip-Hop replace Bach? Why are their professors cowering instead of being the grownups in the room?

How about addressing the problems of our human society's long practice of slavery and inequality intelligently and in a way that will make a real difference? Rather than personal reparations for descendants of slaves (many of whom do not need this any more), spend the money on good schools, helpful mentoring, and admission to jobs and institutions to which the young are then qualified. A helping hand is far better than a handout.

It is certainly important for us to understand our history, and to recognize that some of our ancestors' institutions are no longer acceptable today. I want my free, competent, and completely equal granddaughters to know that their lives owe something to people in the past who made this happen. I want inner city Black children to learn about people, both White (Quakers) and Black (civil rights heroes and founders of schools) who wanted to end inequality.

We women owe our emancipation to white men, as well as to our foremothers who fought for it. If the men hadn't voted for it, we would still be chattel. Black slavery was ended by white men (Lincoln and all the senators who voted for emancipation).

However, ending an institution does not immediately end its terrible effects. We are still dealing with the consequences of institutional inequality for some of our Black (or female) citizens. We would be wise to address what is needed, rather than engaging in the meaningless activity of rewriting history more in accord with our current taste.

680 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.