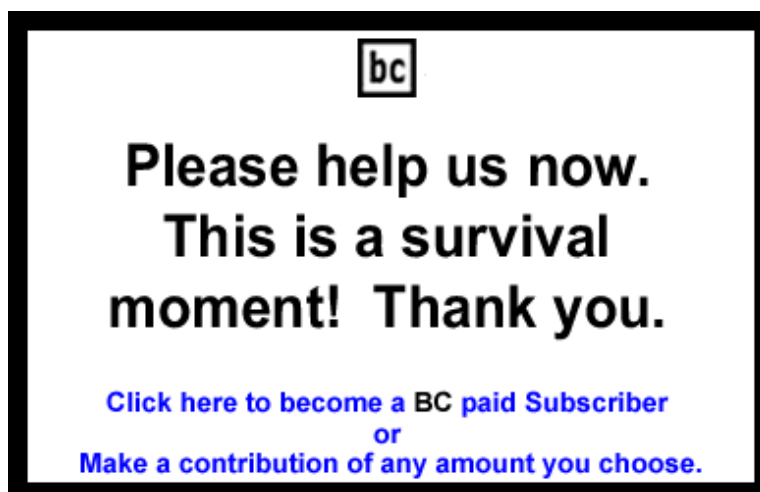


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**Reading Slavery By Another Name in the Obama-Mania Era
Represent Our Resistance
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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There is no way of conveying to the corpse the reasons you have made him one - you have the corpse, and you are, therefore, at the mercy of a fact which missed the truth, which means that the corpse has you.

-James Baldwin

You know what the motto of this country ought to be: You give us a color, we'll wipe it out!

-George Carlin

Give this country a memory of its atrocities and it will wipe it out most assuredly...

They are quiet in this darkened room. Malcolm is speaking.

"He's cute."

They move closer and listen attentively. Talk was quiet.

These young students, high school seniors, had not seen or heard *this* Malcolm before

- the Malcolm some of us know.

He might be a picture on a wall in the hallway - someone's idea of liberalism.

But he was *violent. Militant*. Malcolm wasn't someone worth introducing to Black teens with a need to know themselves, to hear someone speak about their condition as Black Americans in the U.S.

The students are watching the documentary, [Malcolm X: Make It Plain](#). And it will take three days to view it.

There was "sh-h-h-h..." on the second day *from students* whenever they heard my voice or a TAs voice in the back of class. On the third day, when Malcolm was shot, when the students saw him on the floor of the Audubon Theatre, it was as if we were there, in the audience, witnessing his death for the first time.

I turned the lights on and found students still in their seats. The dismissed and discarded, the tough-skinned with attitude, gathered their bags quietly. Some, I observed, fought back tears. I realized Malcolm had been with them in this classroom for three days. *They* did this! The country, society, their neighborhoods couldn't do this! These students, with no interference from the white supremacy, patriarchal, capitalist regime, allowed Malcolm to come alive - for them!

Now to keep hold to the experience of the Maafa, enslavement, exploitation, and injustice that he documented for Black people in the U.S. To keep hold of the Black experience in the midst of a regime built to crush it, wipe it out. Now to maintain the synapses between this Black collective experience and its living witnesses and potential revolutionaries.

Some hanged by their thumbs. Others suffered severe acid burns after water seeped into limestone quarries. Most, beaten daily, suffered from hunger, thirst, and disease. Children and teens worked along side grown men. Women worked near by, too. At night, several men slept behind locked cellar doors.

This is long, long before Abu Graibe.

Long before the official appearance of the neo-liberal *colorblind theory*: Black people began to disappear and re-appear in mass graves.

It was another era when the white community solved the *problem* of the *freed* enslaved Black and the need for *free labor* by free trade in Black people.

Caught off guard, seized, and ultimately betrayed, freed Black Americans found themselves *re-enslaved* persons.

The business of this country is to wipe out memories has tried to wipe this memory out. The government with the help of its artilleries, corporate media and academia, has tried. But Douglass A. Blackmon, Atlanta Bureau Chief for the *Wall Street Journal* has researched and documented an "account of how a form of American slavery persisted into the twentieth century," aided by the U.S. economic system and "all levels of government."

I purchased [Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II](#) three months ago. I bought it home and read the first sentence: "On March 30, 1908, Green Cottenham was arrested by the sheriff of Shelby County, Alabama, and charged with 'vagrancy.' *Arrested for vagrancy!*"

My grandfather might have seen something of this hell in Shreveport or in New Orleans. My father's brother would have met with hell face-to-face. I imagined what hell it was for my grandfather in New Orleans or my father in Arkansas. What was he thinking when they stopped in his car and "arrested" him? "What did he think when he realized that he won't arrive at the church as the deacon. He wouldn't arrive as the father of three young children. His wife would wait and wait. She'd know, but never be able to speak his name again.

Slavery By Another Name was must read - but not just then.

But another form of slavery is operating now. It feels like an impending storm coming. Yet, I see Black Americans refusing to employ common sense and come in. They can't seem to remember the dangers of a storm! While the storm's threatening conditions point to the very real possibility of great devastation to a community experiencing a constant down pour of hell from above and below, Black Americans dismiss the warnings and denounce any thought of an impending storm! We, the Left, have documented the storm's warnings: no single payer health care, no end to war and war profits, no public financing after all, no anti-NAFTA position after all, and no anti-vote on FISA's warrantless wiretapping program.

Black Americans are whispering that a "Black" man will be president. A "Black" man will be president. Keep the boat steady, silent, for he has to do this because... he has to do that because... of some indiscernible change that will come when he takes the oath of office at the Big House.

OBAMA-MANIA is coming! No storm!

But Obama-mania is the storm roaring and coming closer each day!

I returned to Blackmon's *Slavery By Another Name*.

Closing doors prevent many Black writers from researching and documenting our history - and the history of the U.S.'s capitulation to systematic violence against Black Americans - but Blackmon has done the work of the courageous and brave. His account of how railroad, iron ore, lumber, turpentine, mining companies, along with the un-justice system and local, state, and federal governments, makes clear that the re-enslavement of Black Americans after Emancipation further laid the foundation for the privileges of individual and corporate wealth today. However much Black Americans today are sleepwalking into whitestream "innocence," the legacy of this era killed Malcolm, removed Martin Luther King, infiltrated the Black Panthers and destroyed them, and continues to obliterate our Black children one mind at a time. We can see in Blackmon's work that Empire has been at work carefully constructing the destruction of people of color.

Blackmon charts privatized incarceration, particularly when it comes to Black Americans. The sheriff becomes the new slaveholder in this new world order. Working in conjunction with the justice *system* of *injustice* and industry, the sheriff turned the *leasing* of Black convicts (vagrants or unemployed laborers) to local farmers or contractors to repair roads into a business. The laws were different for whites and Blacks. "The sheriff brought charges of vagrancy and of trading goods between the hours of sunrise and sunset - an 'offense' that would increasingly be used to prevent freed slaves from buying goods from anyone other than their white landlords" - against Blacks who most often couldn't pay the fines or court fees. It didn't take long for sheriffs to discover a business - a market - turning over large numbers of Black Americans to private companies - with court approval.

"Soon, labor agents [check that - *labor agents*] for the mining and timber companies were scouring the countryside to make arrangements for acquiring able-bodied black laborers," Blackmon writes. (Today, they scour the elementary and high school classrooms or streets for able-bodied Black prison labor). For example, the Pratt mines, later the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, and other companies and factories received their labor from the "law enforcement" authorities and judges who always ruled in favor of re-enslaving the Black defendant.

In the new system, people had to be found guilty of something, writes Blackmon; consequently, the "arrests" of Blacks had little to do with "law enforcement or public safety." It guaranteed fees and claimed bounties! (Do you hear an echo? Do you hear the Iraqi mother wondering what happened to securing safety in the streets of Baghdad? But fees, big fees and bounties are everywhere to be had by contractors).

A Black man named Note Turke is leaving his home. He walks down a dirt road outside Dadeville in Alabama. As Blackmon records, Turke encounters Burancas Cosby, son of W.D. Cosby, baron of Lowndes County, Alabama.

Cosby wants to know where Turke is headed.

To the depot.

"Do you want a job?"

Turke answers that he has one. Cosby wants to know where Turke lives, and Turke reveals too much - too many names of family and white people who know him.

Cosby, writes Blackmon, *hears* that Turke is "worth having."

"You are a good nigger. You better stop over with me."

Turke resists. He tried to walk on toward the train depot. He tries to ignore Cosby. Then Turke hears - "Turn around and go back with me."

Turke is taken to a George Cosby's farm where he was locked overnight in a corncrib. The next morning, Cosby Sr. informs Turke that he will need a bond. Turke was "flabbergasted."

"I have not done anything for you to go my bond."

Cosby suggests that Turke plead guilty in court!

"Plead guilty of what?"

Cosby insists that Turke plead guilty.

Later that night, a mob arrives to take Turke to a "warehouse" where the matter is "discussed" in the presence of a "judge." The "judge" pronounces Turke "guilty." But it isn't "clear of what crime." Turke, the new "convict," is fined \$15, but, of course, he can't pay it. Turke is returned to the corncrib and its iron lock. He is *in* the system.

Turke would have encountered the system the way many before him had, and he would have endured the conditions, if he survived. "Squalid living conditions" in the forced labor camps made it impossible for many to survive the disease, poor medical treatment, and the frequent floggings, writes Blackmon. "Mine explosions, rock falls, fires, neglect" killed! Recurring outbreaks of disease left those who survived the camps

"physically shattered." Captives (enemy combatants?) were exposed to "carbon monoxide and other gases," and others were often naked and shoeless in cold weather, writes Blackmon. Torture was matter-of-fact.

And this: The prisoner is physically restrained. Water is "poured in his face on the upper lip, and effectually stops his breathing as long as there is a constant stream." Waterboarding! (And the innocence chorus in America is shocked about the practice of waterboarding in Bagram and Gitmo!). The death penalty is operative for the innocent - victim of this atrocity! Originally charged for petty crimes, lack of fee money, vagrancy or the bad luck of encountering a sheriff or his bounty hunters, Black laborers in these camps died miserable deaths by the thousands. And, of course, the sheriff, judges, and governmental politicians at the local, state, and federal level didn't recognize the criminality of their enterprise. Nothing new here. Innocence is a valued cultural production in the U.S.

But the narratives of the law enforcement, factory and company heads, and judges were the same, writes Blackmon. The "convicts" were *convicts* and were "properly convicted of crimes." As Blackmon adds, these *criminals* claimed that the "convicts"..."freely agreed to be leased as laborers...and they were never physically abused." Cover-ups before scandalous TV cover-ups! Capitalist denial of wrongdoing! Many Blacks were never allowed to give testimony to their treatment and those who did were considered liars. Documents and records "of false charges" and the money that changed hands, of course, disappeared.

Black Americans, Blackmon noted, found that the larger society accepted the narrative of innocence - the innocence of the *criminals*!

Blackmon ends *Slavery By Another Name* with this insightful observation: He suggested that linking the era of Jim Crow, defined by abject brutalization of a people, with the image of a "largely forgotten white actor's minstrel performance" is yet another atrocity. Instead, Blackmon writes:

Let us define this period of American life plainly and comprehensively: It was the Age of Neoslavery. Only by acknowledging the full extent of slavery's grip on U.S. society - its intimate connections to present-day wealth and power, the depth of its injury to millions of black Americans, the shocking nearness in time of its true end - can we reconcile the paradoxes of current American life.

Now, we live in the Obama-Mania era - another Neoslavery era. There'll be a cost for saying "get over it." There'll be a cost for missing the opportunity to say *no* to those who want to relinquish our right to justice for these ancestors. There'll be a cost for collaborating in the disappearance of Black America's humanity.

While the American public, Black people in particular need to wrestle with the revelations of concrete documentation by Blackmon and others, most Americans and Black people in particular are shamefully spinning in Obama-mania.

Slavery By Another Name is a painful reading because it not only documents *what happened* but also points to *what's happening* and what's being marginalized and repressed by the government's educational and judicial - corporate - institutions today in collaboration with Black Americans!

Malcolm predicted the calamity of integrating too fast into whitestream America before we knew who and what we are and where we needed to go. We of the Left, know that

no matter what happens, Malcolm didn't lie then and he's not lying now!

Think of the investment of energy and of capital by Empire to demoralize Black Americans. Think of Black Americans passively waiting on *the* savior, himself a worshiper of Empire. Then think enslavement - in another form - forty years after the Civil Rights era.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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