



US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking



Human Trafficking and the Legacy of Racism

January 11, 2021

Land Acknowledgement

**Who are the ancestral
indigenous communities
of the land you currently
reside on?**





USCSAHT

Mission

We are a collaborative, faith-based national network that offers education, supports access to survivor services, and engages in advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery. We work to inform the public, prevent this assault on human dignity, and assist survivors to live fulfilling lives.



USCSAHT

Members and Structure

- ❑ **15 members of the Board of Directors, 2 Staff**
- ❑ **110+ congregations of women religious**
- ❑ **30+ partner coalitions, parishes, and individuals**
- ❑ **4 working groups with member volunteers**
- ❑ **Part of Talitha Kum – 50+ national networks**



Catholic legacy of racism and slavery

- It is not our fault, but it is our responsibility
- Creation of “race” had theological meaning, racial bias and white supremacy still present in culture, theology, rituals, etc.
- Catholic hierarchy and individuals complicit in slavery and genocide, economic incentives
- There were also some Catholic individuals who opposed these practices, fought for abolition



Brief Timeline of Colonization

- 1492: Columbus encounters modern day Bahamas, Cuba, and Hispaniola
- 1493: Pope Alexander VI issues a papal bull "Inter Caetera," in which he authorizes Spain and Portugal to colonize the Americas and its Native peoples as subjects. The decree asserts the rights of Spain and Portugal to colonize, convert, and enslave. It also justifies the enslavement of Africans.
- 1500s: Portuguese colonization of Brazil, Spanish and French colonization of North America and Spanish colonization of Central/South America
- 1600s: English arrive to North America and establish colonies, followed by Dutch, Swedish, Scottish, German. Beginning of the North Atlantic Slave Trade, first African slaves brought to the English colonies (1619).



Guiding Beliefs

Doctrine of Discovery

- In 1494, the Treaty of Tordesillas declared ***only non-Christian lands could be colonized*** under the Discovery Doctrine. This was later expanded to the U.S. and used against native populations' rights to the land they inhabited.

Manifest Destiny

- An irresistible destiny to accomplish this essential duty.
- Seen as Israelites entering the “promised land.”

The Great Commission

- “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:16-20)



Evolution of Slavery

- 1400s - Indigenous populations enslaved, raped, murdered during colonization and colonial expansion.
- 1619 - first enslaved Africans brought to the English colonies. Forced labor, torture, rape, sexual exploitation, separation of families
- 1865 – Legal abolition of slavery with 13th amendment – EXCEPT as punishment for crime (i.e. those who are incarcerated)
- Slavery / Trafficking continues even though illegal, supported by larger culture of white supremacy, economic incentive toward exploitation



Underlying drivers of slavery / trafficking

- Economic incentive
 - Slavery was economically beneficial for slave owners and slave traders
 - Trafficking continues to bring in billions of dollars a year
- Exploitation of power differentials – binary and hierarchical thinking
 - Patriarchy / Sexism
 - Classism
 - White Supremacy and Colonialism
- Dehumanization and Commodification of bodies



Types of Human Trafficking

Sex Trafficking --

Women, men or children are manipulated or forced to engage in sex acts for someone else's commercial gain and are held against their will by force, fraud or coercion.

Forced Labor –

Victims are forced to work for little or no pay, under the threat of violence, often manufacturing or harvesting the products we use and consume every day.

Organ Trafficking --

The recruitment, transport, transfer, harboring or receipt of living or deceased persons or their organs by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion.



Types of Trafficking cont.

Bonded Labor --

Individuals that are compelled to work in order to repay a debt and unable to leave until the debt is repaid. It is the most common form of enslavement in the world.

Forced Marriage --

Women and children who are forced to marry another without their consent or against their will.

Domestic Servitude –

Victims are forced to work in isolation and are hidden in plain sight as nannies, housekeepers, or other domestic help. They may be working in private homes, feeling like they have no option to leave.



Risk Factors

- Bullying or being bullied
- Sexual abuse / trauma
- Problems at home
- Addiction
- Living in poverty
- Lack of education
- Escape from war, persecution and other forms of violence
- Migratory status
- Natural disasters
- Lack of job opportunities



Take Aways

- As Catholics, we must honestly look at our historical complicity in slavery and racism and decide to act to challenge these systems of oppression today
- Modern-day slavery of human trafficking is rooted in historical slavery of African and Indigenous peoples – both for sex and labor
- Long history of dehumanizing and commodifying bodies for economic gain and personal pleasure, rooted in binary and hierarchical thinking