

## **Slavery in Modern Sudan**

*Merida P. LaBohne*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Slavery. Groups of chained Africans herded unsanctimoniously onto cargo ships bound for the long trek over the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas to toil in the hot cotton fields of the South is the picture that most of us envision. Though that concept of slavery is valid, it is also dated and no longer applicable. The face of slavery in the new millennium has changed. The location and the players involved in this travesty have changed. The suffering of those enslaved has not. There is yet another tragic story waiting to be told. Unlike the obligatory black mark that fills a page or two of the history books in the American classroom, the new slavery is neither extinct nor adequately recorded. No mention of its existence is found in the history or geography texts of today because the reality of the slavery in Sudan is not well publicized. It is now just beginning to gain the media spotlight in what is considered legitimate news publications. In Sudan, the largest and poorest country in Africa, slavery is alive and well.

### **OVERVIEW**

High school students often feel detached from events which do not affect them directly or which take place outside their limited world let alone on another continent. Globalization is not only a catchword for the new millennium, but is also a reality that should be addressed in the learning environment. Many do not view distant political crises as particularly relevant to their everyday lives. Teenagers, probably more so do not make the connection. The politics of a small foreign country can result in far ranging repercussions for a small town or neighborhood if its sons and daughters are part of a military exercise there. It becomes more poignant if these same military personnel do not come back alive or healthy.

The role of the teacher should never be confined to the required text or curriculum. It should always be a work in progress. Challenges for the students should also include a focus on the events that are happening in the now as opposed to those in the past where the story has already reached its conclusion. Students can study and analyze events that are currently taking place and can realize that history is not confined to the pages of a required textbook. History is not a stagnant concept; it is happening everyday.

The school where I am teaching has a majority urban minority population with varying income levels. However, most of the students would be classified in the lower income tier. The majority of the students dwell in apartment-type housing. Reaching these students is always challenging. Incorporating current events into the geography curriculum is not only prudent but necessary. Material is best absorbed and retained by the student if a practical application can be associated with it. The student needs to feel that the curriculum has a deeper value than merely a grade on the report card. By getting the student involved on a personal basis in what is going on in the Sudan, student interest in a very serious topic is assured.

A curriculum that brings to life the issue of modern day slavery in a classroom that is mostly made up of African American students can make the study of the geography of the African continent more significant and meaningful. However, any student, regardless of ethnicity, would find this topic relevant and interesting. Young people are often the torchbearers in this society for injustices dating back to the Civil Rights Era. Perhaps their youth gives a new perspective on issues that many have perceived as the norm or even hopeless. This unit would go beyond the basic study of demographics, climate, terrain, religion, natural and economic resources that is so typical of a geography chapter. The purpose of this unit would be to tie all these factors into a coherent explanation of why slavery exists in this particular African nation.

## **THE CIVIL WAR**

To understand the present civil war in the Sudan, a history of the troubled region is needed. The land was inhabited peacefully by both Christian and Muslim occupants during the Middle Ages. The Turkish leader of Egypt in the nineteenth century invaded the Sudan and joined with the Muslim Sudanese traders called the Jellaba to dominate both the northern and southern region. The Jellaba were Arab and were considered the elitist group in the Sudan. Mohamed Suliman in his paper on the impact of ecological degradation of the Sudan states his assessment of that part of Sudanese history:

The Jellaba and their private armies collaborated with the Turkish rulers in the penetration and plunder of the South. The memory of the brutal slave trade conducted mainly by mercenaries of the northern Jellaba has lived on in the culture of the South. The experience of Arab Muslims against black Africans gave rise to southern resistance to Islam and embrace of Christianity. To this day there is a tendency (by the Northerners) to refer to Southerners as “slaves.”

The British had become prominent in the area in the 1870s. Their domination of the area was viewed as a colonial arrangement, and they took steps to end the slave trade there. However, many of the southern Sudanese still remained in an economic system that mimicked the prior arrangement. Sudan was ruled jointly by Britain and Egypt from 1899 to 1955. During this time a division of the northern and southern areas occurred, and the two areas were governed differently. This division was done ostensibly for administrative purposes. The majority of the resources were allocated to the development of the North by the “Anglo-Egyptian” colonists. The South was not a major focus of this development and remained indigent. In 1956 the North and South were united with the capital being Khartoum. The rejection by the South of the tenets of the North began the civil war.

In 1958 a military coup led by General Ibrahim Abboud overthrew the government. This martial law government was replaced in 1969 by another coup led by Colonel Jafaar Mohammed al-Nimeiry. He was elected president in 1972. He signed the Addis Ababa Accord in order to bring peace between the North and South. This agreement provided for home rule for the south. The southern region was redrawn again, and the Bentiu oil area became part of the north. Oil

domination is often cited as a reason for the continuation of the civil war. The rejection of the policies of Nimeiry led to another eruption of the civil war in 1983.

The Sudan is the largest country in Africa even though it is sparsely populated. The population numbers approximately 33 million. It is located in eastern Africa with one border being the Nile River. It is under the rule of Islamic fundamentalists. In 1989, Lieutenant General Omar al-Basher backed by the Islamic Liberation Front seized control of the then democratic government. Omar al-Basher is now the president and has put into effect *Sharia*, or strict Islamic Law. The unfortunate history of the Sudan is one of bloody civil war and strife.

## **BACKGROUND**

The southern Sudanese religion is either Christianity or animist or tribal. The resistance to the government in Khartoum is based on the Arab influence of both language and religion which is being fiercely proselytized. The issue of race is also very real. The northern Sudanese are Arabic while the southern Sudanese are black. There is some argument that the Arabs are viewed as being black as well. More than a million Sudanese have died since the fighting began again in 1984. Four million more have been displaced. Because the fighting is not done by an organized military, the present government encourages slavery as a mode of payment for services rendered. Women and children are most prized since they offer the least resistance. Many of the women are used as concubines or household servants. Most of the men are killed. Those who are not killed are used as herdsmen. The treatment of these slaves is often brutal and demeaning.

The very issue of the existence of slavery in these countries is itself an item of dispute which only exacerbates the problem. The government in the Sudan for the most part denies the existence of chattel slavery. Issues have been raised including particularly why has the African American community in America has not been more vocal. There are those who feel because of the past history of African enslavement in this country, there is a moral obligation for African American leaders to be proactive against the present day slavery. In the case of Louis Farrakhan, a leader in the Nation of Islam, a statement of total denial of the situation was issued.

Another African American writer, William Reed, also suggests that the issue of slavery in the Sudan is a farce. His basic position is that one of the groups working against slavery, Christianity Solidarity International, is there only to provide support to the British oil firms engaged in business in Sudan. The author further states this foreign business group is against the black (Arabic) government Khartoum, the capital. Their purpose is to discredit the present government so they can gain more power and influence. Some would equate the Arabic government as black while others do not. This is also another source of confusion. Mr. Reed also admonishes Johnnie Cochran for aligning himself with the Free Sudan Movement. (Johnnie Cochran along with Ken Starr are representing three notable individuals who were arrested for chaining themselves to the Sudanese embassy in Washington D.C. in protest of the slavery issue.) Some would want to make the issue a racial issue entirely, instead of a human rights issue. The rhetoric used in such volatile and sensitive situations is often used to cloud and confuse the issue.

There are some credible reports on the situation in the Sudan. Two reporters from the *Baltimore Sun* were able to sneak into the country and document the existence of slavery. They were even able to buy the freedom of two slaves. Their report on their experiences is documented in a series of articles entitled "Witness to Slavery." Also, journalists from the news program *Dateline NBC* were able to conduct interviews with freed slaves for broadcast. In addition, there has been a multitude of articles published in the *New York Times* about the plight of the southern Sudanese being enslaved.

There are many political implications to the unrest in Sudan. Various groups have an interest there. Sudan has been classified by the United States as a country with state-sponsored terrorism. The Canadian oil companies Talisman and Andarkis are drilling there. There are also British oil companies interested in the region. Christian organizations trying to provide relief effort there clash with the Islamic point of view. Egypt, in close proximity, is wary of the influence of the radical Islamic groups. To adequately address the problem there must be a consensus not only in the antislavery movement that is gaining respectability throughout the world, but also in the various world governments and in the greater community that this is a genuine problem. The overwhelming list of the aforementioned factors makes the situation complicated, dangerous and very political. The limited response of the media and even of the American government in publicizing this tragedy is contributing to the continuation of this modern day slavery. The United States government has now begun to focus more attention to the situation in the Sudan. The BBC news analysis on April 28, 1998 offered this explanation:

The UN will not step in because it does not have the consent of the warring parties necessary for the dispatch of a peacekeeping force, and a military intervention under Chapter VII of the UN Charter is considered to be untenable in military and logistical terms. The experience of the UN in Somalia has increased skepticism over the role that such a mission can play.

Also, the lack of success in Somalia is a constant reminder to the American people and even to the government just how tenuous any military operations or any engagement can be in that region of the world. The geography of the Sudan with the Nile River in its boundaries and the Red Sea on the east poses many logistical problems for any outside involvement. Without the support of the American people, very little is accomplished in matters of foreign encounters.

The House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of the state of Texas, while being interviewed in *Meet the Press* on Sunday, March 25, 2001, stated the United States should get involved on some level in the civil war that is being fought in the Sudan. His concern was highlighted by his notation that the Christian population is being subjected to oppression by those of the Islamic faith. If the American government is considering involvement in this volatile region, it may be indicative that there is real justification in exploring this African country in more detail. The root causes of slavery do have their basis in this long civil war.

The Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who promised to make Africa a priority, is in the process of starting new initiatives to intervene in the civil war. A special envoy will be named to

outline and propose new plans to aid in resolving the conflict. The two warring factions have been approached in the past by the Clinton administration to discuss resolution, but the failure of both groups to attend the meetings ended that reconciliatory effort. Powell has requested that the bombings by the government in Khartoum end. By the continual bombing of the south, Powell fears the present drought could turn into another famine in Sudan. Robin Wright of the *Los Angeles Times* reports the following:

Powell said the United States will provide 40,000 tons of emergency food aid to be sent to areas in both the North and the South where food stocks have been depleted. About 17,000 pounds are scheduled to arrive in the next two weeks. This will be the first time the United States has provided aid to the North since a 1989 coup brought an Islamic government to power. After negotiating a truce the United States will work to achieve “peaceful reconciliation” of the sides in a war that has brought “so much distress” throughout Central and East Africa.

These efforts are a first step in resolving the issue of slavery, which is essentially a by-product of the civil war in that country.

While the Arabs are perceived as the aggressors in this situation, there is a military group called the Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA) also active in the area. This group is made up of Christians and animists. Many in this organization are from the Dinka tribe in Southern Sudan. This army is led by Lieutenant Colonel John Garang, a former Sudanese army commander. He is a western educated Christian and also a member of the Dinka tribe.

The goal of the SPLA is to have a democratic government in Southern Sudan void of Arab and Islamic influences. Some of the actions of the SPLA are suspect as well. Both sides have been accused of unethical and brutal practices. Allegations have made that the United States is secretly funding some of the SPLA operation in an effort to override the present government in Khartoum. The United States has denied this claim, however Colin Powell has requested the Khartoum government to stop bombing the SPLA in the south. The Khartoum government has agreed to this measure only on a temporary basis.

The northern part of Sudan is Arab dominated and mostly Islamic. The part of the southern part of the country is populated by the Dinkas tribe. They are the largest ethnic group in the southern Sudan, and their population total close to one million. The religions are mostly Christian and tribal. It is the people in the southern part of the Sudan who are captured and taken into slavery. This situation also raises the question of religious domination. The reports coming out of the region state the invocation of the Shari has caused a fervor in the Muslim Arabs to convert the Christians to Islam. Some of those interviewed who have been freed stated they were told to convert to Islam and to speak Arabic. The refusal brought brutal treatment.

Also, since it is perceived that it is the Christians who are being oppressed and enslaved, various religious groups have gotten involved in the area. The Swiss based organization, Christian Solidarity International (CSI) is perhaps the most vocal. They have a presence on the Internet and

have been chastised by the Sudan Foundation as depicting the slavery issue as a by-product of the Islamic culture. The oppression of the Christian population also raises the eyebrows in the western world. Amnesty International and other human rights groups are actively involved in these issues. Another problem arises as when these groups procure the freedom of slaves through monetary means and then publicize it, the question is raised are they inadvertently aiding in the proliferation of the very practice they wish to halt.

## **STRATEGIES**

The situation in the Sudan is very complex. In teaching a curriculum unit based on such an explosive issue as slavery, objectivity is needed. It is an extremely formidable task when human life is involved. The goal of any lesson taught is not merely to learn new information or to learn the necessary procedures to calculate a particular answer. It is to get the student to think. Generalization is a tool that needs to be learned throughout life. Getting the students to examine and question information given to them is an objective that helps to develop a well-rounded individual. This curriculum is an exercise that attempts to reach that goal.

A major difficulty arises in researching the issue of slavery in the Sudan. Much of the information on the subject is found on Internet sites. The validity of these sites can be questionable because the obvious slant of the information given is provided many times not by independent journalists, but by groups for or against a particular view of the political turmoil in Sudan. This exercise in itself is an excellent opportunity for the students to learn how to use the Internet. There are many search engines that can be used to access information. This would not be only helpful in this project, but for others the student will be doing. In exploring various sites for specific information, the student will learn how to refine his search so that one can become more proficient in using the computer.

This lesson also provides a chance for analysis of news articles and reports that show bias, flagrant or subtle, versus objectivity. By looking at the source of the information and the use of inflammatory rhetoric in various articles, students can learn to differentiate between opinion and fact based reporting. A comparison can be made of articles from the Internet and one from a media publication such as the *New York Times*, a local newspaper or a newsmagazine such as *Newsweek*. The style of writing would help the student to decipher objectivity of the article.

In teaching geography, regions or continents are studied in a block. The text always introduces each country or region in several sections. The natural resources, the ethnicity of the people, the climate of the area, and the various cultures are among the items studied. In some instances the religious preference of the country's people is also part of the analysis of the particular region. Physical and political maps are completed. All of these factors have an influence on the existence of slavery in the Sudan.

For many students, studying a particular country is reduced to filling in the worksheet, completing the maps, and labeling rivers, mountains, lakes and other information deemed important for the impending exam. A way to make various topics germane to the student is always

a struggle for the teacher. Many students just do not see the relevance of studying about places and peoples so far away.

The continent of Africa would be introduced in sections. After reviewing the required coursework for the overall continent, the focus would be shifted to the study of the Sudan. The religions of the region would be analyzed. Islam, Christianity, and the tribal religions would be the main focus. The students would be divided into groups where each group would have the responsibility of making a presentation on their specific topic. In having the students do this exercise, hopefully a tolerance for beliefs that are dissimilar to one's own can be developed. The student will make an oral presentation based in factual data. This would reinforce the ability of the student to be an objective reader. The unit is on slavery, but opportunities should be made available to teach corresponding learning objectives.

Teaching the unit will include the customary information on natural resources, climate, and other basic geographical information. This will cover the course requirements. The next phase will be one that requires thought, collaboration and research on the part of the students. There are varying schools of thoughts concerning the best way to be proactive about the situation in the Sudan. There are religious groups who are raising money for the purchase of slaves. School children across America have done this also. It has given those students a sense of accomplishment and has enlightened them to a moral consciousness that many adults have yet to realize.

Although the option of raising money to free a slave is not allowable in my school district, the pros and cons of that measure would be analyzed. This may be something that the student may want to do independent of the classroom. It would be necessary to examine several issues. There is ambiguity in choosing this course of action. The opinion among some is that by buying slaves and enriching the slaveholders, one is indirectly perpetuating the practice. It becomes financially lucrative for the raids to continue in Southern Sudan since it has become a source of income to those holding the bounty. The dilemma is evident.

The Swiss group, Christian Solidarity International, has led the way in the monetary procurement of slaves. There has been conflicting points of views even when the slaves are bought. It has been stated that some of those ransomed were not really slaves at all. They were just a set-up used to make money. Again the means being used to save some slaves may be inadvertently adding to the perpetuation of this practice. It would be an opportunity for the students to role-play. One group would be a family in the Sudan with a daughter in captivity. How would they explain their need to get their child back? The other group would be the average American family. How would the American family explain to that Sudanese family that it cannot be done because it propagates the slave trade? This exercise would hopefully bring the reality of how difficult it is to solve this problem.

The goal is for the students to learn that there are often no easy answers to difficult problems. Also, they will recognize the problems involved when dealing with cultures that may have different ideas from themselves. There are students from many parts of the world in our

classrooms. They are often able to give a different perspective of life in other countries. If the opportunity is present, their knowledge and experiences can be invaluable in discussing how life in America differs from the other students' homeland. Some of the students may be from the continent of Africa; this would be an added bonus. Our school has many students from Africa so even if there were none in the particular class, it would be possible to interview someone to get their views of how life is different in America.

Another alternative that has been used is to increase public awareness of the plight of the Sudanese slaves. One strategy includes letter writing, e-mailing or telephoning government officials or philanthropic organizations and persons who would help publicize the situation. One plausible explanation for the continuation of slavery is a general lack of knowledge of what is actually going on. The lack of knowledge about this subject lends itself to its continuation. It is in the best interests of those in power in the government in Khartoum to confuse the issue or merely pretend the issue is a fabrication or to use some other means of distracting the world from the reality of the actual circumstances that is currently occurring there.

There is also an option of using a national petition to aid in the awareness of the situation of the Sudanese slaves as a petition for basic human rights. Other schools have used this as a means to direct attention to the cause of slavery in the Sudan as well as in other locations across the globe. Sudan is not unique in being the only country engaged in promoting and condoning chattel slavery. The students can then do research to find what other countries have slavery. They would discover that Sudan is only one of many countries that deal in chattel slavery.

I would encourage the students to generate ideas on their own on how to be proactive against this struggle of slavery. It would be an incomplete task to study and learn about this modern day atrocity and do nothing. It would also be a disservice to the students to give them a formula to follow. Young people are very perceptive and imaginative. The teacher may best function as a facilitator in this exercise. Letting the class take the lead in this case would give rise to very unique and hopefully practical ideas that everyone can benefit from.

The best case scenario would be for the United States to lead an international effort to end the civil war in Sudan. There must be a joint endeavor of the world's leading powers to put pressure on the militia-led government to end the fighting. The secretary of state has met with leaders of other African nations such as Kenya and Uganda to discuss the problem. The words of Colin Powell must not only be simple rhetoric. They must have a tangible effect. In a speech to congress he stated, "There was perhaps no greater tragedy on the face of the earth than Sudan." This is a good start, but this is a challenge that will take more than one country alone, no matter how powerful, to resolve.

The students I teach are primarily urban based African Americans teenagers. Many times the view of geography for these students is just another mandatory class. I feel exploring slavery in the modern era will give all of my students an eye opening experience that what appears in the history and geography books is not just in the past. There is a certain amount of discomfort when the subject of slavery is brought up. This



must be overcome to get an objective analysis of the present subject matter. By studying the causes of the slave trade and analyzing the dysfunctional climate of the African continent, it will give students a perspective on how this atrocity could still exist today.

By exploring options that the students can participate, I hope they will gain a feeling of empowerment. Letting them initiate their own solutions or plans of actions make the lesson more relevant to them. Students need to know what they are studying has validity to them and to their future. Another purpose of the lesson is to let them realize that they are not always powerless. There are things that can be done, no matter how small, that may end up changing an injustice.

This lesson would apply to all young people from varied backgrounds and cultures. The curriculum will include both history and geography exercises since in this case neither topic of study is independent of the other. Even after slavery is ended in Sudan, there are other countries where slavery is alive and well. There are other causes, not just modern slavery, which the student may become interested in. If they can feel they do have a say in the politics of the world, then they will also believe that they can make it a better world.

I intend for the students to take a thoughtful and hopefully a participatory approach to the issues raised in this curriculum unit. By trying to find real solutions to real problems, students can begin to understand the enormous difficulty that arises when trying to affect situations thousands of miles away, situations where different religions, culture and race all clash. It will give them an opportunity to work in groups and to do research that would lend itself to meaningful and realistic courses of action.

One exercise, for example, would give the students an opportunity to be a high-ranking government official in the cabinet of the United States under the present administration. They will make decisions considering the most effective steps to take to solve the problem. One of the objectives of this unit is to aid in letting the student that there are ways to change the world for the better. This cannot be done if one is not aware of the issues in the first place. It also cannot be done if one is not aware of the “how “ of getting things done. This curriculum is designed to address these issues.

The role of the international community in the Sudan is unclear except for the major countries of United States, Canada, Britain and now China. The western nations are concerned with issues of diplomacy to end the fighting. Canada is accused of furthering the civil war by drilling for oil and enriching the government in Khartoum. Now China is reported to have troops in the region to protect their oil investment there. There are also reports that the Sudan government has obtained Shenyang jet fighters from China. As more attention is focused on the Sudan, more countries may emerge as players in this troubled area.

Finally, this curriculum unit is intended to be a guide to the teacher to enrich the study of geography by highlighting an issue that has applications inside and outside the classroom. This unit focuses specifically on the problems in the Sudan because of the serious nature of the topic, and the need to enlighten the students on current events related to their curriculum. Colin Powell,

Johnnie Cochran, Ken Starr and numerous others whose names are well known cannot solve this issue in isolation. The use of this unit will be useful for the students as they begin to really understand how an internal problem in a foreign country can have far reaching results here in America.

This unit can be modified to accommodate different grade levels and can also be modified for use in the special education classroom.

## **LESSON PLAN ACTIVITIES**

### **I: Map Skills**

**OBJECTIVE:** To locate and recognize countries, major rivers and mountains on the African continent.

**ACTIVITIES:** Students will label a blank map of Africa with the following: Counties, mountains, lakes and rivers using colored or map pencils.

Students will use an atlas as a guide.

### **II: The Sudan**

**OBJECTIVE:** To research the culture, politics and geography of the Sudan.

**ACTIVITIES:** Students will form three groups. One group will research  
a) The cultural aspects of the Sudanese, b) the political structure of the country and c) the terrain and natural resources.

### **III: Pros and Cons**

**OBJECTIVE:** To discuss the merits of using monetary resources or not to free a slave.

**ACTIVITIES:** The class will be divided into two groups. One for using monetary resources and one for not using money. They will present orally, well thought out reasons for their particular position. (In this instance it would best to give students a choice for which position they would take to get a more genuine presentation. A chart can be used to record reasons.

#### **IV: Family Role Play**

**OBJECTIVE:** To give students an opportunity to present the slavery experience in form of theater.

**ACTIVITIES:** A selection will be made of a cast. One to represent a Sudanese family and one an American family. They would discuss the issue of freeing the Sudanese family's daughter by monetary resources. The American family is against using money. (Each would have a daughter the same age.) Costumes could be worn and props used.

#### **V: If I Were President**

**OBJECTIVE:** To let students use their ideas on how to solve this situation as if they were government officials.

**ACTIVITIES:** The class would elect a president who would appoint a committee of high ranking members, secretary of state etc. to solve the problem. They will be reminded that they have the force of the United States behind them, but also are responsible for all policy decisions made. (It may be election year.)

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"Women Children Taken Away as Booty."

<http://southsudanfriends.org/issues/ANASlaveryReport>

"Save Up to Free A Slave."

<http://www.mg.co.za/mg/news>

"Brutal Facts about Life and Death in Sudan."

<http://www.angelsinsudan.com>

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