

# AMERICA'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL CRIME

*Cacique Rich-Martinez\**

Some may be thrown off when they see a foreword detailing the experiences of Black Americans in a scholarly journal of international law. However, the experience of Black Americans in this country is founded on international theft—of heritage, culture, and generations of free people. The persistent threats to the rights of Black Americans have always been—and will always be—tied to the egregious violation of international human rights that was the international slave trade. The rights of our ancestors may not have been codified when they were violated, but those violations continue to echo through the halls of American power and influence. These echoes reverberate through the international community, shaping how Americans interact with the world, and how the world interacts with us.

Slavery is called America's original sin, but it was also a gross violation of international human rights that still has not been remedied. The Black experience in America is an ongoing cautionary tale of what goes wrong when countries turn a blind eye to ethics in favor of economic gain. Government-sanctioned slavery ended in 1865.<sup>1</sup> The international slave trade ended even earlier, in 1808.<sup>2</sup> Using these dates as counterarguments to modern Black Lives Matter protests is poetic, because it ignores one of the central messages of the book that many of those who discount Black Lives Matter hold dear. In the Book of Matthew,

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1. THE LEGAL UNDERSTANDING OF SLAVERY: FROM THE HISTORICAL TO THE CONTEMPORARY 133 (Jean Allain ed. 2012) (ebook).

2. *Id.* at 121.

Jesus cautions his followers against building a house on a weak foundation: "Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house in the sand."<sup>3</sup> Foolish Americans think that when the foundation of an entire subset of the population is built on wholesale kidnapping, fifty years of "equal rights" will bring that subset to parity with the rest of the United States.

Of all of the great migrations to the United States since its birth, only one has been involuntary. Black Americans did not come here by choice. They did not seek to escape war, poverty, or famine for the promise of the new world. They were stolen or sold, sometimes by their own countrymen, and worked to death. They were betrayed. Generation after generation, they were forcefully separated from their families, raped, beaten, and robbed of ancestral knowledge. They did not establish "Little Africa" Towns in bustling cities. They were not allowed to open small shops and build generational wealth. They were not permitted to open food shops offering their new neighbors a taste of the motherland. They were encouraged to give up their agency and build wealth for the glory of white Americans. And when they finally were given control over their own lives, their wealth was robbed, their rights were refused, and they were strung up in trees for fun summer getaways. How could this foundation ever be expected to lead to Black Excellence? How could the experiences of twelve lost generations be overcome in two?

With these dynamics in mind, the Houston Journal of International Law plans to highlight the experiences of Black Americans in every issue of Volume 43. Each of our publications will include a foreword by a Black law student at the University of Houston Law Center. These messages will focus on human rights, economics, and the inadequacy of existing U.S. and international law from the Black perspective. With these forewords, we intend to lift the voices of members of our community. These frames of reference need to be amplified throughout the international law community so that their messages of empowerment and equality can be used to challenge

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3. Matthew 7:26.

existing paradigms of international relations and build a better world for all of us.

