

Editor's mailbox

Dear Editor

I read with considerable interest Linda Ali's carefully researched 'Black abolitionists ...' article in the Spring 2007 edition of *ACT Now*. This item contained information I did not previously know.

Whilst I share Linda's concern about the attitudes and mindset of Christian leaders of that period, I think it is important not to paint this complex period of history in purely black and white terms. Maybe we should remember that Black African rulers also played a part in collecting slaves and selling them to European slave traders. In fact, the transatlantic slave trade would probably not have been possible, let alone profitable, if it were not for the willing participation of Black African slave traffickers in the first place. The slavery issue was never about good Blacks versus bad Whites.

Secondly, how meaningful can my repentance be for the evils of slavery perpetrated by people who lived long before I was born? Of course slavery is evil and, from my 21st century standpoint, I can say that I would never have taken part in such a business. But who am I to speculate how I might have reacted in an 18th century context? I think we need to be very careful how we express our repentance for wrongs done by other people at another time. I sincerely regret the racist attitudes of my forefathers, and am resolved never to allow their sinful thinking to spoil my fellowship with my Black brothers and sisters today.

On 29 March 2007, a BBC *Question Time* panel – including Lord Carey – agreed that a national apology for Britain's role in the slave trade might be regarded as 'patronising' and would, in any case, be 'meaningless'. They felt it was more important to act to end modern forms of slavery.

David Edgington

Subject: Black abolitionists
ACT Now issue: Spring 2007
Item responded to: Linda Ali's article

Dear Editor

Linda Ali's article gave the impression all slave traders were White. The tragic truth is that the overwhelming majority of Black African slaves were captured by other Black Africans before being sold to non-African slave traders.

The Imbangala of Angola, Ashanti of Ghana, Yoruba of Nigeria and Nyamwezi of Tanzania all captured and sold fellow Africans to foreign traders. Even today, some of the most powerful families in these countries are wealthy and influential precisely because their ancestors were slavers and slave traders.

I wonder whether the governments of Angola, Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania will be apologising for the parts their peoples played in the slave trade.

Miles Anderson

Subject: Black abolitionists
ACT Now issue: Spring 2007
Item responded to: Linda Ali's article

Dear Editor

I want to thank *ACT Now* for capitalising the words 'Black' and 'White' with reference to race. This convention has become standard good anti-racist practice, especially in academic circles in North America. I am delighted to see that it is now catching on in the UK as well.

Sharon Dawson

Dear Editor

I am writing in response to Linda Ali's fine 'Black abolitionists ...' article featured in the Spring 2007 edition of *ACT Now*. As a Black African Christian working in a secondary school, I was thrilled to see that the Association of Christian Teachers had included an article which told the story of abolitionism with Black Africans and their descendants very much to the fore. Thank you.

I would like to invite all ACT members to get involved with Black History Month (BHM) in 2007. BHM is open to all people regardless of race or nationality. In the USA it is celebrated each February, coinciding with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass (17 February 1818 – 20 February 1895) and Abraham Lincoln (12 February 1809 – 15 April 1865). In the UK, however, Black History Month is celebrated every October.

It is my belief that, Christian classroom assistants, teachers and headteachers should actively engage with BHM, not just because of its intrinsic educational worth, but because it is, morally speaking, the right thing to do. After all, we serve a Lord who hears the cries of the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed (Psalm 34, Psalm 103:6) and calls His people to build a society which is just, peaceful, free and inclusive (Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 7:5-7, Amos 5:7-12, Micah 2:1-12, Luke 4:14-21). As Christian educators, we are called to help our students and colleagues to see, and then deal with, the social ills that offend God.

Today, in the West and around the world, a disproportionate number of Black people are poor and/or marginalised and/or oppressed. Black History Month presents us all, regardless of our subject specialism, with a wonderful opportunity to confront this iniquitous inequality by helping our students and colleagues to hear the oft-silenced voices of Black people and to tell their untold stories.

George Akinyede