

She's a Child Not a "Choice"



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Edition



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Persons Not Property

African American slaves were once considered property and their status as property was enforced by violence and public policy. The killing of a slave was almost never regarded as murder, and the rape of slave women was

treated as a form of trespassing.

As an African American, I have asked myself these questions: How could this be justified? Was it not obvious that African Americans were persons—living, breathing human beings? Where was the outrage from the American public?

Haig Bosmajian, UW professor of speech communication says, “While names, words, and language can be, and are, used to inspire us, to motivate us to humane acts, to liberate us, they can also be used to dehumanize human beings and to ‘justify’ their suppression and even their extermination.”¹

In order to justify the inhumane treatment of African American slaves and soothe the consciences of the

Americans, dehumanizing terminology or the “language of oppression” was established and propagated by way of both “academic” and “legal” opinion at the very highest levels of our educational and legal communities.

From 1815 to 1830, the American Colonization Society: “Free black in our country are... a contagion.” In 1857 the U.S.

Supreme Court decided: “A negro of the African race was regarded... as an article of property... a subordinate and inferior class of being.” In 1858, the Virginia Supreme Court decision declared: “In the eyes of the law... the slave is not a person.” In 1867, Buckner Payne, publisher: “The Negro is not a human being.” In 1900, Professor Charles Carroll: “The negro is... one of the lower animals.” In 1903 Dr. William English: “The negro race is... a heritage of organic and psychic debris.” In 1909, Dr. E. T. Brady: “They [Negroes] are parasites.”²

Today, even while modern medical science clearly and overwhelmingly supports the humanity and personhood of the preborn child, the same financial motives and oppressive language strategies used to oppress African American slaves are being used to justify killing preborn children.

For example, in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided: “The Fetus, at most, represents only the potentiality of life.” Again, in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court declared: “The word ‘person,’ as used in the 14th Amendment does not include the unborn.” In 1979, Professor Joseph Fletcher: “Pregnancy when not wanted is a disease... in fact, a venereal disease.” In 1980, Dr. Mariti Kekomaki: “An aborted baby is just garbage... just refuse.” In 1984, Professor Rosalind Pollack Petchesky:

“The fetus is a parasite.” Again, in 1984, Rabbi Wolfe: “A fetus is not a human being.” In 1985, Dr. Hart Peterson on fetal movement: “Like... a primitive animal that’s poked with a stick.” In 1986, Attorney Lori Andrews: “People’s body parts [embryos] are their personal property.”³

In the July 12, 2009, edition of the *New York Times Magazine*, the power of the language of oppression to corrupt our conscience was revealed in the words of sitting U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She commented in an interview that she was surprised at a 1980 court ruling that prevented the restoration of Medicaid funding for abortions, because, in her opinion, when *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973, “there was concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don’t want to have too many of.”

History teaches us that the use of oppressive language to demonize and dehumanize certain segments of the human race is incontestably evil. In Germany, the persistent portrayal of the Jews as “vermin,” “bacilli,” “parasites,” and “disease” contributed to Adolf Hitler’s “Final Solution.”

In the antebellum South, the deliberate and system-

atic labeling of African Americans as “chattel,” “property,” “beasts,” “feeble-minded,” and “useless eaters,” eased the conscience of many and paved the way for the subjugation and suppression of African Americans.

Early in our nation’s history, the defining of the Native American as “non-persons,” “savages,” and “Satan’s partisans” led to the extermination of

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a significant portion of their population.

Yet, today, it appears we have not learned our lesson. The deliberate dismemberment and destruction of the bodies of those most vulnerable among us, preborn children, is entirely indefensible.

Human beings are persons, and persons are not property. As a civil society we must move beyond the loathsome language of oppression and recognize the inherent, inalienable and self-evident humanity of all human beings. Regardless of the circumstances by which we were procreated, method of reproduction, age, race, sex, gender, physical well-being, function, or condition of physical or mental dependency and/or disability, all human beings need to be, and deserve to be, protected by love and by law.

Rev. Walter Hoyer is the Founder and President of the Issues4Life Foundation and the California Civil Rights Foundation, which is the proponent of the California Human Rights Amendment. As author of the book, Leadership from the INSIDE Out, he is in demand as a speaker and consultant. To contact him visit www.issues4life.org or www.civilrightsfoundation.org.

¹ Bosmajian, H.A. *The Language of Oppression*. University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1983. | ² Brennan, William. “The Semantics of Oppression.” *Dehumanizing the Vulnerable*. | ³ *Ibid.* *For full citations visit www.humanlife.org/shesachild.php



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