

Islam and American Values: Slavery

The beliefs and values of the United States were expressed in our founding documents. Are the doctrines of Islam compatible with these beliefs and values? Let's take a look at one of the core American beliefs expressed in the thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Amendment XIII

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

The Koran and Slavery

Despite claims to the contrary, during the time of Muhammad the Muslims possessed, bought, and sold slaves. In the Koran there are numerous verses acknowledging and accepting the Muslim possession of slaves, for example:

Chapter 2, Verse 221

And do not marry Al-Mushrikat (idolatresses) till they believe (worship Allah Alone). And indeed a slave woman who believes is better than a (free) Mushrikah (idolatress), even though she pleases you.

And

Chapter 24, Verse 58

O you who believe! Let your slaves and slave-girls, and those among you who have not come to the age of puberty ask your permission (before they come to your presence)...

And the Koran talks about freeing slaves, but only in atonement for one's misdeeds (not because slavery was wrong), and only a slave who is already a Muslim:

Chapter 4, Verse 92

It is not for a believer to kill a believer except (that it be) by mistake; and whosoever kills a believer by mistake, (it is ordained that) he must set free a believing slave...

Muhammad and Slavery

Muhammad bought, sold, and gave away, slaves:

After the defeat of the Jewish Bani Qurayzah tribe, Muhammad divided up that tribe's "property, wives, and children" among the Muslims; but some of the women he sent to Najd to be sold for horses and weapons.

The Life of Muhammad, p. 466

Muhammad bought Safiyyah, one of his wives, in exchange for seven slaves.

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2272

It was narrated that 'Abdul-Majid bin Wahb said: 'Adda' bin Khalid bin Hawdhah said to me: 'Shall I not read to you a letter that the Messenger of Allah wrote to me?' I said: 'Yes.' So he took out a letter. In it was: 'This is what 'Adda' bin Khalid bin Hawdhah bought [from] Muhammad the Messenger of Allah. He bought from him a slave' - or - 'a female slave, having no ailments, nor being a runaway, nor having any malicious behavior. Sold by a Muslim to a Muslim.'"

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2251

They [the Muslims] took several captives from the people of Mina' which is on the shore, a mixed lot among them. They were sold as slaves and families were separated. The apostle arrived as they were weeping and inquired the reason. When he was told he said, 'Sell them only in lots', meaning the mothers with the children.

The Life of Muhammad, p. 791, n. 914

The Prophet sent Ibn Abi Hadrad in this party with Abu Qatadah. The party consisted of sixteen men, and they were away fifteen nights. Their shares [of booty] were twelve camels [for each man]...When the people fled in various directions, they took four women, including one young woman who was very beautiful. She fell to Abu Qatadah. Then Mahmiyah b. al-Jaz' spoke of her to the Messenger of God, and the Messenger of God asked Abu Qatadah about her. Abu Qatadah said, "I purchased her from the spoils." The Messenger of God said, "Give her to me." So he gave her to him, and the Messenger of God gave her to Mahmiyah b. Jaz' al-Zubaydi.

The History of al-Tabari: The Victory of Islam, pp. 150-151

It was narrated that Jabir said: "A slave came and gave his pledge to the Prophet, pledging to emigrate, and the Prophet did not realize that he was a slave. Then his master came looking for him, and the Prophet said: 'Sell him to me,' and he bought him in exchange for two black slaves. Then after that he did not accept the pledge from anyone until he had asked whether he was a slave.

Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2869

Then they brought Umm Qirfah's daughter... to the Messenger of God...The Messenger of God asked Salamah [who had captured the daughter originally] for her, and Salamah gave her to him. He then gave her to his maternal uncle, Hazn b. Abi Wahb, and she bore him 'Abd al Rahman b. Hazn.

The History of al-Tabari: The Victory of Islam, pp. 96-97

After the defeat of the Jews at Khaybar, Muhammad had the women of Khaybar "distributed among the Muslims."

The Life of Muhammad, p. 511

After the Hawazin tribe was defeated, Muhammad gave Ali, 'Umar, and 'Uthman (all later caliphs) each a woman from among those captured. 'Umar then gave his to his son.

The Life of Muhammad, p. 593

Muhammad even had a slave guarding him:

Narrated 'Umar: I went to (the house of the Prophet) and behold, Allah's Messenger was staying in a Mashruba (attic room) and a black slave of Allah's

Messenger was at the top of its stairs. I said to him, "Tell (the Prophet) that here is 'Umar bin Al-Khattab (asking for permission to enter)." Then he admitted me.

Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 7263

Muhammad tried to get the Bani Salamah tribe to join him in attacking the Byzantines at Tabuk. He told their leader,

O Abu Wahb, would you not like to have scores of Byzantine women and men as concubines and servants?

Al-Wahidi's Asbab al-Nuzul, p. 122

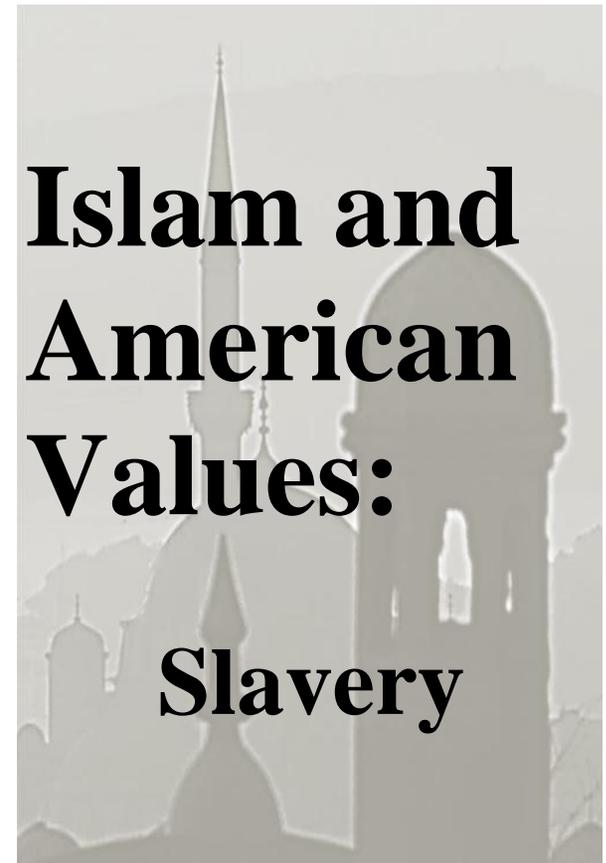
For information about the Koran and Muhammad authorizing non-Muslim women captured in battle to become the sex slaves of their Muslim captors, see the brochure *Islam and Women: Whom Your Right Hands Possess*.

So we can see that both the Koran and the teachings and example of Muhammad authorize slavery. And remember, Muhammad spoke for Allah (4:80) and is the timeless standard of good conduct for Muslims (33:21).

To sum it up: slavery is outlawed in the United States, but authorized under Islam.

For an in-depth look at the conflict between Islamic Doctrine and the 13th Amendment, see my book: *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*.

Dr. Kirby is the author of six books on Islam. His books are available on Amazon.com.



Part of a series on Islam

By Dr. Stephen M. Kirby

IslamSeries@gmail.com

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