

## **Slavery Must Be Faced, Not Ignored, Blacks Say**

Slavery in Waco, Part 2 of a series

By: Karla Price

The effects of slavery—some silent, some more pronounced—linger on for many blacks in Central Texas.

"In my opinion, the effects of slavery have been devastating. It has resulted in a loss of culture, loss self-identity, and cultural pride related to our true heritage," said Myrtle Thompson, president of the McLennan County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

"The system of slavery set the stage for racism and racism of course, has had a devastating effect upon us as a race of people. Racism began in that period of time and has continued into 1990," Thompson said.

"Those who think it is best to forget that slavery existed are mistaken," said Thompson.

"People ask a lot of times, 'Well, shouldn't we just overlook that period of time? That was something that happened long ago. Slavery is something of the past.' That's not true. How can we understand our future, how can our young people understand their futures, if we don't stop long enough to analyze the past and what happened to us as a race of people?"

Waco resident Frances Todd, whose great-grandmother was a slave in Central Texas, agreed.

"We're a proud people. But many of us feel degraded, and the race as a whole has a poor self-image," she said.

Thompson said the history of slavery as taught in schools is often distorted or incomplete, leaving young people feeling confused.

"Even though it was a very oppressive time for many African-Americans, we can also look back on it with a lot of pride in that we were able to overcome that oppression with strength. In 1990, I see a lot of young people who really don't understand that time because it has not been properly taught in the schools. ["

"Until they are taught their history in the proper perspective, we will continue to have a problem with a lot of our young people, because this is a matter of them regaining their pride -- pride in their culture and pride in their heritage."

Todd, a retired teacher, said classes studying slavery would benefit from people whose ancestors were slaves.

"I think they should get some people who remember what their ancestors told them and who study our literature and teach it like it was," she said. "They say slaves were happy. They were not happy. They were always plotting their freedom."

Events such as the annual Cotton Palace Pageant, which celebrates the years when slavery was a legal and accepted practice are insensitive, said Thompson. "I do believe that the Cotton Palace Pageant is insulting to many African-Americans, it's very insensitive to African-Americans. I think that any time there's a situation or event that excludes any race of people it needs to be evaluated by the sponsors and the participants.["]

"I have never seen an African-American Cotton Palace King or Queen," Thompson added. "I doubt if I ever will if this event continues. It symbolizes a period of history when cotton was king and this is not something we take pride in."

Todd shared Thompson's sentiments.

"I think very little of the Cotton Palace Pageant. I just think it's something that they celebrate that happened long ago and is best forgotten. The Confederate War is over and the South lost," she said.

Lester Gibson, a candidate for McLennan County commissioner and second vice president of the NAACP, said the assumption of a master-slave relationship is still present in parts of society.

"In Waco we are living in a culture based upon the old plantation concept, which no longer exists. They're holding on to the idea, the attitudes, even the physical remnants of the slave plantation. They promote it and they're proud of it. The expected behavior of a slave prior to 1865 are the same expectations that people walk around here with now, in terms of how they deal with African-American people. We ourselves, as a people, submit to that. We submit to that inferior thinking, not even knowing why."

Coming to terms with the existence of racism is the only hope for a solution, said Thompson.

"We're often asked is racism totally to blame for the problem. And of course we cannot overlook parental responsibility, or the role of the churches and the community, but it's impossible to overlook racism as a major factor that has contributed to the establishment of almost a permanent underclass in this society, said Thompson. "Until America wakes up and realizes how racism is really making an impact and what it has done to an entire race of people, we will continue to have the problems that we are faced with today."