

A slave to slavery comparisons

Written by Julianne Malveaux, NNPA Columnist
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The brilliant surgeon Dr. Benjamin Carson is out of order and out of control when he compares the Affordable Care Act to slavery. As a physician, he must know how many people lack health care, and how much work this administration had done to right that wrong. As a health advocate, he must have seen those men and women who decide to forego pain medication in favor of something to eat for their children. As a distinguished medical leader, he must have read the Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports that talk about the differential ways in which health care is delivered in emergency rooms, with Black and Brown men less likely than others to receive medication for their pain, even when it involves a broken bone.

So when Carson says that the Affordable Care Act is "worse than slavery," I truly wonder what he knows about slavery. Does he know about being dragged from one country and placed on an auction block in another? Does he know about enduring backbreaking work, day after day, hour after hour, where the most human desires like love and companionship are snuffed out by the needs of greedy masters? Has he had a limb – a leg, an arm, a tongue – severed to make serve as an example for others? Has he felt a shackle on his neck, across his Adam's apple, so tight that he could not breathe? Has he tried to run, and been captured and beaten? Or beaten even if he did not run? Does his back show the signs of White rage? Has he seen his own child sold at auction? Has he slid besides his woman, his love, knowing that she had no say if the master decided to have sex with her?

Has he been literally emasculated, his body a victim to a master's rage? Has he learned to read? According to an old North Carolina law, "to teach a slave to read is to excite dissatisfaction in the general population." Whites who taught slaves to read were fined as much as a year's wages. Slaves who taught each other to read risked 39 lashes. I don't know what the amazing Dr. Ben Carson is thinking when he compares anything in our current space to slavery. He has not known a slave's life, and, blessedly, neither have most of us. But we know that affordable health care is not the same thing as slavery.

I am tired of people making false slave comparison, effectively reducing it to a political volleyball. The minimum wage was called "worse than slavery," yet slaves were never paid. Health care, however flawed, is worse than slavery, but slaves had no health care, especially after they failed to produce for massa. A hardship here, a problem there, is worse than slavery. Memo to those who lack historical consciousness – no it isn't!

Slavery means having no control over your destiny. Slavery is about conforming or risking life and limb. Slavery is about the evisceration of families, about the lives and loves shattered for the profit of those who failed to value Black people as equal, as human. Slavery is not about a

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law you don't like, not about a wage you don't like. Anyone who lives and breathes air in these United States today will never know the brutality of a century and a half ago.

I will acknowledge Dr. Ben Carson as an amazing surgeon. That is, after all, is reputation. Somebody put a mike up to his mouth though, so he decided to step off medicine and into politics. If he is into slavery, he needs to go back to his own plantation. You have choices, Dr. Carson, and slaves did not. We may agree or disagree about the Affordable Health Care Act, but we will never agree that the Affordable Care Act is worse than slavery. If you don't know anything about slavery, pick up a book. In 1831, picking up a book in more than 15 states was illegal. And so was a Black person voting. Only after you feel the lash of slavery, directly or indirectly, can you speak to this. You are generating headlines but not good sense with your misplaced slavery comparisons.

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