



## **Mauritians Flee Slavery, Ethnic Cleansing and Government Repression**

The Mauritanian government has long persecuted its Black population forcing many to flee the country and seek safety in the United States. States like Ohio have emerged as a welcoming safe haven for Mauritians who have been in the U.S. for decades as well as newer asylum seekers.

As Mauritians in these communities and their allies continue to support one another in Ohio and other parts of the US, there is a growing sense of urgency within the community as the deportation and detention of Mauritians increases. Mauritians in the U.S. are now facing two-fold discrimination and anti-Black racism at the hands of the U.S. immigration system after fleeing anti-Blackness in Mauritania.

“There is no justice for Blacks in Mauritania,” Mohamed said to CUSP via Zoom. He did not share his real name because his mother remains in Mauritania and he fears she could face reprisals for his critiques of the government.

The Biden administration has resumed deporting Mauritians to a country that even the US State Department has [found](#) to commit widespread human rights abuses including the continued existence of slavery and slavery related practices, arrests of Black Mauritians and widespread sexual exploitation. We urge the Biden administration to designate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Mauritania to protect Mauritians in the US from deportation to a country that still practices slavery.

Mohamed and his brothers were living in the countryside of Mauritania where they were enslaved and forced to work as shepherds for an Arab or Moor family.

“We were working for these people for free. We took care of their camels, raised them, sold them,” Mohamed said, “We could not keep living like this.” Their enslaver provided them with food and nothing else. According to Mohamed, if he or any of his brothers refused to work, they would be taken to the police station and beaten.

“No one listens to Black Mauritians when you go to the police,” Mohamed said.

Despite these appalling conditions, the Department of Homeland Security does not even provide Mauritians with a meaningful opportunity to exercise their right to seek asylum. With arbitrary detention, high bond amounts, lack of language access and no legal counsel, Mauritanian asylum seekers are at a grave disadvantage from the moment they interact with the U.S. immigration system. The discrimination faced by Mauritanian asylum seekers upholds a long legacy of anti-Blackness within the United States immigration system. Black immigrants face far greater [risks](#) of deportation and they are more likely to be placed in solitary confinement when they are detained by immigration authorities.

Black Mauritians choosing to migrate to the United States are making a decision rooted in desperation, courage and the need for a better life, not a facile social media trend. They face dangerous conditions along the way, particularly within Mexico where multiple Mauritians have described to CUSP how widespread anti-Blackness resulted in robberies and threats to their lives.

Black Mauritanian migrants are escaping enslavement in their home country and then confronting the anti-Blackness within the United States immigration system. Historically, we have seen several examples of how mainstream media vilifies vulnerable populations or exploits their suffering to produce videos that line their pockets with profits or prestige at the expense of these migrants' safety. We see this playing out with Mauritians as we read news coverage that share the names of individuals who are in the midst of immigration proceedings. This is extremely dangerous because speaking publicly can negatively impact their ability to attain asylum.

Media coverage that highlights the names of individuals who have opened their homes to migrants in Ohio places those individuals at risk.

Black asylum seekers are forced to confront anti-Black racism at the hands of the government and members of the far-right. In Ohio, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has [detained](#) 47 Mauritians from 2009 to 2020 after they had some form of run-in with the law because local police in Ohio have agreed to turn over individuals in police custody to ICE regardless of how minor the infraction or the outcome of the police interaction. We know Black communities are vastly [over-policed](#), increasing the dangers facing undocumented Black immigrants especially in states like Ohio.

“Anti-Blackness exists at every level of society in the US, including media coverage,” said Haddy Gassama, the Policy and Advocacy Director at the UndocuBlack Network, “Careless reporting can be just as harmful to vulnerable communities as immigration enforcement policies that disproportionately harm Black migrants.”

Anti-migrant and white supremacist groups are powerful forces within this country and it is the responsibility of news agencies not to endanger the vulnerable populations who provide them

with the information necessary for their headlines. The Department of Homeland Security [deemed](#) white supremacists the greatest domestic terror threat facing this country.

“As a multi-racial coalition, we recognize that it is the communities who most intimately understand the violence of white supremacy and its long legacy in this country who will lead the fight against it,” said Carolyn Tran, Co-Director of Communities United for Status and Protection (CUSP), “We will continue to stand by the most vulnerable in our communities and speak out against dangerous media coverage.”

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