

PRESS RELEASE

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**OBAMA ADMINISTRATION PAYS \$492 MILLION TO SETTLE WITH INDIAN TRIBES;
IGNORES CLAIMS OF BLACK INDIAN FAMILIES**



On September 26, 2016, two days after inaugurating the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Obama administration announced it has settled lawsuits with 17 Indian Tribes and will pay them \$492 million dollars to end their long standing legal disputes about mismanagement of Treaty assets. The case brought by families of Black Indian Freedmen – slaves formerly owned and held in bondage by the tribes – also about mismanagement of Treaty assets, was not included. They have been in litigation with the U.S. Department of Interior since 2006 over failure of the government to enforce the provisions of the 1866 Indian Treaties and gross mismanagement of their real estate, leases and royalties and other assets. The lawsuit of the black Indian families, Leatrice Tanner-Brown and The Harvest Institute Freedmen Federation (HIFF), LLC v. Sally Jewell, Secretary of Interior, United States Circuit Court for the District of Columbia Case No.16-5040, is sponsored by the Harvest Institute Freedman Federation, a non-profit collaboration of The Harvest Institute, a black think tank based in Washington, DC and the Black Indian United Legal Defense and Education Fund based in Enid, Oklahoma. The Administration has provided redress to the Five Civilized Tribes who were slaveholders and allied with the Confederacy during the Civil War but continues the 150 year pattern of opposing and ignoring the Indian Freedmen permitting the travesty to their descendant families to continue.

Dr. Claud Anderson, president of The Harvest Institute based in Washington, D.C and the HIFF. said: "In the 1866 treaties, the federal government forced slave-holding Indian Tribes to release their slaves after the Civil War and mandated that the Freedmen and their descendants, receive monetary, land, other economic benefits and equal tribal membership. Later laws required the assets of the Freedmen to be managed and protected by the Secretary of the Interior. That did not happen and the government allowed predators to acquire those assets." The recent settlements acknowledge that the Department of Interior grossly mismanaged the accounts of Indian Tribes but the Administration has totally ignored the exploitation that the Department permitted upon the far more vulnerable former slaves of those same Indian Tribes.

The facts that Indian Tribes owned slaves, that there were Treaties and laws intended to protect the Black Indian Freedmen, are most often omitted from history books. The HIFF has taken deliberate actions to brief and inform the Obama administration and the public about these facts, the plight of the Indian Freedmen families and the reasons for their non-stop legal battle against the federal government. Indian Freedmen were entitled to meaningful oversight of their assets by the Department of Interior just as the Tribes with which this Administration has settled. The government has recognized the mismanagement of Indian Tribe assets but has refused to even acknowledge that it has also mismanaged the assets that belonged to the Indian Freedman, instead opposing the families at every legal step they have taken.

In response to Court encouragement that both the Department of Interior and HIFF mediate, the Department approached the HIFF about settlement meetings, but later rescinded the invitation. The Freedmen families are black citizens. They have been opposed, ignored and excluded because of their race and treated in an unconstitutional discriminatory manner by their government.

The Obama Administration continues the 150 year racial pattern in this matter. At the White House conference, Obama said to the Indian Tribes gathered: "I've heard you, I have seen you. And I hope I've done right by you... I hope I have set a direction that others will follow." Has the first Black President heard or seen the plight of the descendants of Black Indian Freedmen for legal redress?

For more information about the HIFF, and the lawsuit, go to www.harvestinstitute.org

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