

Christians use movie to spotlight modern-day human trafficking

March 3, 2007

Posted: 3/02/07

Christians use movie to spotlight modern-day human trafficking

By Robert Marus

ABP Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Nearly 200 years after [William Wilberforce](#) brought an end to England's slave trade, a wide audience has a chance to see his story told on film. But the producers of [Amazing Grace](#), and a wide coalition of Christian and other groups, hope the legendary reformer's inspiring tale will focus the West's attention on a more disturbing story—the modern-day slave trade.

The feature-length film uses the beloved hymn for its title and organizing theme in telling Wilberforce's story. After rediscovering his Christian faith in his 20s, the member of Parliament struggled for nearly three decades in the 18th and 19th centuries to abolish England's trade in African slaves.

Actor
Youssou
N'Dour
portrays
freed slave
Oloudah
Equiano in
*Amazing
Grace*, a
new film
about
British
abolitionist
William
Wilberforce.
Equiano
worked
with
Wilberforce
to ban
slavery in
the British
Empire.
(RNS photo
courtesy
Samuel
Goldwyn
Films)

The hymn's text was one of many written by Wilberforce's spiritual mentor and fellow abolitionist, Anglican priest John Newton. Newton had been converted to Christianity as a young man after a harrowing experience

piloting a slave ship during a storm.

According to one of the film's producers, the makers of *Amazing Grace* realized its potential to spotlight both the historic and the modern-day evil of slavery. Human trafficking is "probably the biggest human-rights problem in the world today," said Bob Beltz, a former pastor who now oversees film production for the Anschutz Film Group.

Early on, Beltz said, the film's producers and marketers decided it would be both financially and socially responsible to join the film with a social-justice campaign against modern-day slavery.

A wide variety of religious and human-rights groups—from the Congressional Human Rights Caucus and Focus on the Family to the National Council of Churches—have joined with the film's producers in supporting the Amazing Change campaign (www.theamazingchange.com). The campaign aims to use various grassroots groups to raise awareness of the historical and modern slave problems.

According to the U.S. State Department, somewhere between 600,000 and 800,000 people are trafficked—by force or coercion—across international borders every year. Between 14,500 and 17,500 of those people are sold into the United States.

"The thing about trafficking is that it can occur in the biggest city or in a rural environment—and it is a hidden phenomenon," said Martha Newton, director of the office of refugee resettlement at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Her agency deals with refugees from the slave trade.

Newton noted there are many different kinds of human trafficking—forced servitude, labor coercion and fraud, sexual slavery and child slavery.

Most captives are women and children, although adult men are forced or

coerced into labor as well.

Newton's agency coordinates with other governmental and private organizations to uncover the victims of human trafficking, remove them from bondage and help them rebuild their lives in the United States.

Wilberforce won his battle to abolish the slave trade in the British empire.

In 1807, Parliament finally outlawed the slave trade in England. The reformer—who had many health problems and dealt with a long-standing opium addiction—lived long enough to learn, in 1833, that Parliament would extend the ban to all of England's colonies.

But 200 years later, his struggle continues.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.