

guage. “The truth is,” Mencken wrote to a friend, “that the academic idiots are all taking it very seriously, greatly to my joy.”

He thrice revised and expanded the work, in editions published in 1921, '23, and '36 (and also produced two massive supplements in 1945 and '48). *The American Language* in its 1936 edition was widely hailed as Mencken’s masterwork, and it was a great popular success.

The Sage of Baltimore’s influence on linguistics “has been primarily literary and inspirational,” Nelson observes. Mencken was essentially an artist, not a rigorous thinker.

Yet his masterwork has “the ambition as well as the messiness and inconsistency of many classic American books,” Nelson points out. And on *its* future, he believes, heavily rests Mencken’s own.

## OTHER NATIONS

### *Africa’s New Slave Trade*

“My Career Redeeming Slaves” by John Eibner, in *Middle East Quarterly* (Dec. 1999), 1500 Walnut St., Ste. 1050, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102–3523; and “The False Promise of Slave Redemption” by Richard Minitzer, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1999), 77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114.

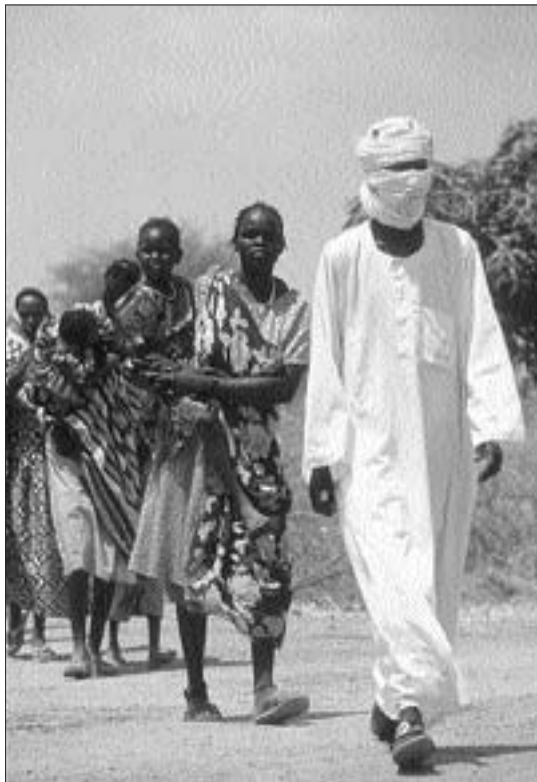
Slavery survives today in Mauritania (see *WQ*, Winter ’98, p. 140) and Sudan, Africa’s largest country. Indeed, chattel slavery, which had been suppressed in Sudan by the British, has been “experiencing a great revival” there, writes Eibner, an official with the Zurich-based Christian Solidarity International (CSI).

Islamic fundamentalists “gain[ed] the upper-hand in Khartoum” in the mid-1980s, he says, and set about subduing mostly Christian and animist southern Sudan. Slavery returned, as armed Baqqara Arab tribesmen raided the villages of black Dinkas, killing men and enslaving many women and children. After the radical National Islamic Front seized full power in Khartoum in 1989, Eibner says, slavery became “an instrument of a state-sponsored jihad.” Today, he estimates, there are about 100,000 chattel slaves in Sudan—while many other Sudanese are in “concentration camps . . . and in militant Qur’anic schools, where boys train to become *mujahidun* (warriors of jihad).”

What is to be done? In late 1995, Eibner’s organization began “redeeming” Sudanese slaves, that is, buying their freedom through Muslim Arab intermediaries who usually pose as slave owners. By last October, CSI, paying \$50 or more per slave, had freed 15,447

to return to their homes. But the slave raids in Sudan continue.

CSI has run into criticism, not only from Khartoum (which denies there is any slavery in Sudan and charges CSI with kidnapping), but from the United Nations Children’s



*Western Christians are rescuing enslaved Dinkas like these from bondage—but is the price too high?*

Fund (UNICEF), which has called buying slaves “absolutely intolerable.” Minitier, a Washington-based writer, argues that the practice, though well intended, is counter-productive: “Slave redeemers enrich every element of the trade: raiders, owners, and traders. . . . In effect the redeemers are keeping prices high and creating a powerful incentive for raids.”

Antislavery activist Michael Horowitz, director of the Hudson Institute’s Project for International Religious Liberty, told Minitier that slave redemption “may not be the answer to the problem, but it is the answer to

many mothers’ prayers.” Minitier, however, believes that “public policy requires a focus on the larger interest. With good reason, the U.S. government does not negotiate with terrorists or pay ransom to kidnappers. . . . Fighting slavery is not a task for sentimentalists.” One effective measure that could be taken, in his view, if outside governments had the will and Sudanese rebels the tools, would be to cut the rail link between Khartoum and the regime’s southern stronghold of Wau. Without the train, Minitier says, slave raiders could not move large numbers of slaves north.

## *Welfare-to-Work in Canada*

“When Financial Incentives Encourage Work: The Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project” by Charles Michalopoulos, Philip K. Robins, David E. Card, and Gordon Berlin, in *Focus* (Fall 1999), 1180  
Observatory Dr., 3412 Social Science Bldg., Univ. of Wisconsin at Madison, Madison, Wis. 53706.

Eight years ago, amid criticism that its generous welfare and unemployment insurance programs were encouraging people to avoid work, Canada launched an experiment called the Self-Sufficiency Project in two provinces to see if temporary earnings supplements would entice welfare recipients into finding jobs.

The early evidence from studies by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is very encouraging, according to Michalopoulos and Berlin, of the SRDC’s U.S. partner, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, and economists Robins, of the University of Miami, and Card, of the University of California, Berkeley.

Between 1992 and 1995, almost 2,900 single parents (mothers, for the most part, with little education) who had been Income Assistance (IA) recipients for at least a year were offered supplements if they left welfare and worked full-time. The supplement equaled half the difference between the person’s wages and \$31,080 (U.S.) in British Columbia or \$25,200 in New Brunswick—levels set to make full-time work pay better than welfare. The supplements would stop after three years.

Nearly two-thirds of the single mothers refused the offer. “I don’t have education or skills where I’m able to get a nice job,” one

said. Nevertheless, the authors report, full-time employment increased significantly—to an average of 29 percent in the fifth quarter after the trial began, compared with only 14 percent in a control group of comparable welfare recipients.

To test whether earnings supplements would have the unintended consequence of extending recipients’ stay on the welfare rolls, more than 1,600 British Columbia single parents new to welfare during 1994–95 were told they would be eligible for the supplements after one year on IA. These mothers were likely to be less disadvantaged than the long-term recipients, and it turned out that very few of them prolonged their stay to get the supplements. After a year, 60 percent were still on welfare—only four points higher than the percentage for a control group of comparable welfare recipients with no prospect of eligibility. Two and a half years later, moreover, it appeared that the supplements were working as intended: More than 40 percent of the eligible group were employed full-time, compared with less than 29 percent of the control group. “Most remarkably,” say the authors, “at the end of the period, the cost of supplement payments was more than offset by reduced IA payments and increased tax revenues.”

It’s too early to pass final judgment on the Self-Sufficiency Project; that will depend on