

Airline security program has 'slave' overtones

By Hazel Trice Edney
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WASHINGTON — The proposed computerized federal airline security system that would require passengers to present identification, undergo a background check and be color-coded, based on their perceived risk, harkens back to slave laws that prevented blacks from traveling, says a Harvard University researcher who specializes in privacy issues. "What this is really reminiscent of is what happened on plantations during slavery when black people or persons of color had to have passes in order to travel," says Richard Sobel, a privacy policy researcher at the Harvard Medical School. "Essentially, the 13th Amendment ended involuntary servitude, but when you have to ask the government's permission to do certain things such as to travel or to work, you are no longer your own person."

Despite strong opposition from civil libertarians and civil rights activists, the Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration is pushing ahead with the so-called CAPPS 2 program with hopes it will be in full operation within a month. It is a heightened version of the Computer Assisted Passenger PreScreening program (CAPPS 1), instituted to heighten security following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The TSA argues that current security measures, which centers on the scrutiny of packages and people in search of potential weapons — is not enough. CAPPS II would collect the names, home addresses and phone numbers, dates of birth and travel itineraries of travelers. The information would then be fed into huge databases, such as Lexis-Nexis and Acxiom, that are connected to public records. It would draw on credit bureau reports, Social Security

numbers and other personal data before assigning a threat level to potential passengers.

A red rating would prohibit the traveler from boarding a flight. A yellow rating would mean a passenger will be scrutinized and questioned further before allowed to board a plane. A green rating allows a person a standard flight experience.

While there have been increased advocacy — even from liberals — to sacrifice some conveniences since Sept. 11, CAPPS 2 is the level of scrutiny that simply goes too far, according to some activists.

"Requests for I.D.s happen to blacks and minorities much more often than whites," Sobel says. "Travel is a civil right. The black migration that occurred in this country brought a wave of migration from the South...Imagine what it would be like now if people had to get government's permission to go to Chicago."

As early as 1690, laws were established to criminalize transported Africans who moved about or even visited friends on other plantations without passes. Slave patrols, mostly White males with guns, were set up to enforce the laws.

"The real danger to civil liberties is that the government assumes that it has the right to tell people whether they can travel or not. And that's not a stretch. That's exactly what the system is about," Sobel says. "It's also saying it's okay for the government to go into your private records, even if you haven't done anything wrong, to potentially restrict what you're able to do."

Sobel says he hopes activists will oppose CAPPS 2. And many are.

Bill Scannell, the activist who led the successful boycott against Delta Airlines last spring, after the airline worked with the TSA to implement CAPPS II on an experimental basis, has established a new site,

www.dontspyonus.com.

"To think that my own country that I served in the Army and all of that stuff, wants to put up internal border controls that I'm supposed to get permission granted to me to determine whether I can travel from one part of my country to another part of my country. It's appalling," Scannell says.

The TSA projects that at least 5 percent of flyers might be coded yellow or red under CAPPS II. Under current security measures 15 percent of customers are flagged for further checks.

Even some conservative groups are raising questions about CAPPS 2.

"There are procedural and operational questions that need to be worked out," says Charles Peña, a defense policy analyst for the CATO Institute, a Libertarian, non-profit research foundation in Washington, D.C.

"I'm all for catching criminals, but is this a counter-terrorism measure or is this a crime-fighting measure? The more you blur the two, the more you're on a slippery slope," says Peña. "And racial profiling is a concern that we cannot dismiss."

Profiling of Muslims after Sept. 11 will also add to the profiling of blacks, says LaShawn Warren, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union.

"The Muslim faith is the fastest growing religion

among African Americans," Warren says. "And so, our concern is that this is going to unfairly impact African Americans and it's going to target them."

The expansion of CAPPS 2 can be stopped in several ways, all requiring a coalition of people taking stands, say activists:

- Citizens contacting members of Congress and even local and state legislators could put pressure on the TSA to reconsider the plan;

- Congress could decide to make a law to defund the program and simply say no money can be spent on it;

- Airlines could rebel, saying they fear losing customers to other forms of transportation and.

- Boycott and divest in companies and reservation systems that are used in con-

junction CAPPS 2.

"I'm not saying there's not a problem. I'm saying that

this is not a solution," says Sobel. "There's really no way to implement this. This system needs to be stopped."

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Ebony magazine editor honored at Livingstone

By Mai Li Munoz Adams
SPECIAL TO THE POST

SALISBURY — The editor of Ebony magazine will be honored at Livingstone College's Founders' Day ceremonies Feb. 5 in Varick Auditorium.

Lerone Bennett Jr., an historian and the publication's executive editor, will be given an honorary degree, along with Abdul Sm Rasheed, president and chief executive officer of the North Carolina Community Development Initiative and former Charlotte City Council member Ron Leeper.

The event is free.

The keynote address will be given by Bishop Cecil Bishop, chair of the Livingstone College Board of Trustees, senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and bishop of the Piedmont Episcopal District.

Bennett, a Mississippi native, is an alumnus of Morehouse College in Atlanta. Early in his career, Bennett worked as a reporter and then city editor at the Atlanta Daily World. He assumed the post of associate editor at Jet magazine in 1953 and in 1954 became associate editor at Ebony, which was established in 1945 by John H. Johnson. In 1958 he became Ebony's senior editor and in 1987 was named executive editor. Bennett was also a visiting professor at Northwestern University from 1968-1969 and a senior fellow at the Institute of Black World in 1969.

For more than 40 years, Bennett has been writing the history of blacks in America. Out of a series of articles written for Ebony emerged Bennett's first book, "Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America: 1619-1962," published by Johnson Publishing Company. Other history books by Bennett are "The Negro Mood," "What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King Jr.," and "Confrontation: Black and White."

To recognize those who helped the college with its \$20 million capital campaign, Livingstone President Algeania Freeman Ph.D. will also present meritorious commendations to trustees Bishop George Battle Jr., chair of Livingstone's capital campaign; Dorothy Colson, president of the Livingstone College National Alumni Association and director of the UNCF/Annual Fund at Bennett College; and Bishop Cecil Bishop.

Immediately following the ceremonies, guests are invited to the renovated Old Hood Building for a rededication ceremony.

Rooms inside the building will be named for individuals for their donations and/or contributions to the college's \$20 million capital campaign. They include Bishop William and the late Mrs. Edra Hilliard, the late Bishop Charles Foggie, Dr. and Mrs. Winsel Black, Bishop Cecil Bishop and Battle.

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