

THE END OF SLAVERY AND THE DREAM OF A POST RACIAL SOCIETY

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In recent decades, a substantial literature has developed under the rubrics post-modern and post-colonial, which have involved major theoretical debates about the past and present. Implicit in the use of these terms is the notion that there was something called modernity and something called colonialism, and that understanding these phenomena is important to understand the world in which we live. Post-colonialism is relevant not only for the colonizer, but also for the colonized and, in some ways, for those of us who were neither, but have been shaped by the values and structures created by colonialism. The same thing is true of slavery. Slavery was a crucial part of early colonialism and, in a sense, provided the ideological foundation for late colonialism. Slavery can be understood as an institution, which then presumably ceases to exist when the slave is freed. I am using the term slavery not to refer simply to the institution, but to a global system of trade and production, which not only shaped the lives of tens of millions of people, but also the historical trajectories of those societies that provided the slaves or were the victims of the slave trade and systems of slave-based production¹.

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¹ On post-slavery see B. LECOCQ, E. HAHONOU, *Towards a post-slavery research agenda in Africa*, forthcoming as the introduction to a special issue of the "International Journal of African Historical Studies", vol. 48, 2015. See also F. COOPER, T. C. HOLT, R. J. SCOTT, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003; M. VAN DER LINDEN (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations: The Long Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, Leiden, Brill, 2011.

Slavery has long existed in almost all parts of the world. Furthermore, it was in some areas substantial enough to encourage war-like peoples to capture slaves and sell them to societies that had a need for labor. For example, the area around the Black Sea was a source of slaves for the ancient Greeks and for all subsequent societies in southwest Asia and the Mediterranean². Areas south and east of the Sahara also became a continuing source of slaves for the Mediterranean and the Middle East by early in the second millennium of the common era³. This was transformed into a massive global system with the expansion of Europe after the fifteenth century. Europeans found themselves with a great opportunity to make profit if they could find labor. In some areas, particularly in Asia, this was because potential sources of labor were tied down by existing forms of dependency. More important, the introduction of European diseases so decimated populations that even enslavement of indigenous peoples could not meet the hunger for labor⁴. Particularly important were plantations in the Americas developed to grow sugar, coffee and spices. This meant that for four centuries, there were massive movements of enslaved peoples over long distances. The largest and most studied movements were those from Africa to the Americas, but the same dynamic provided labor for plantations in the islands of the Indian Ocean, in Java and Sri Lanka⁵. Slaves also moved from Africa into Indian Ocean societies, from eastern Indonesia to the west and to Sri Lanka, and from Asian societies to South Africa⁶.

² D. BRAUND, *The Slave Supply in classical Greece*, in K. BRADLEY, P. CARTLEDGE (eds.), "The Cambridge History of Slavery", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, Vol. 1, pp. 112-133; W. SCHEIDELL, *The Roman Slave Supply*, in K. BRADLEY, P. CARTLEDGE (eds.), "The Cambridge History of Slavery", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, Vol. 1, pp. 287-310; Y. ROTMAN, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2009.

³ R. AUSTEN, *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁴ A. CROSBY, *The Columbian Exchange*, Westport, Greenwood, 1972.

⁵ On plantation systems and their hunger for labor see P. CURTIN, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990; S. SCHWARTZ, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, ch 1.

⁶ A. REID, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988-93; J. F. WARREN, *The Sulu Zone 1768-1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asia Maritime State*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1981. On the Indian Ocean world, the works of Gwyn Campbell are essential. See especially G. CAMPBELL (ed.), *The Structure of*

We thus had a massive integrated system that affected all parts of the world. The effect was by far greatest for Africa. By the 18th century Africa provided the overwhelming majority of slaves, and they moved in all directions, but the system was global. For areas that provided the slaves, it shaped not only the lives of those sold, but also the cultures and values of those who remained and who often became major slave users themselves. It also shaped the cultures of those areas that used the slaves, and their political and economic systems. Most important, it created systems of racial classification, in some cases a three-way system that involved the descendants of slaves, of native peoples, and of Europeans⁷. This modern slave-based economic system also contributed to the rapid economic growth in most of the nations that created it. This growth was most rapid in nations in northern Europe that did not recognize slavery at home, but exploited it massively in tropical colonies. The effects of this system have been long-lasting. Though in some populous Asian areas, the descendants of slaves seem to have slipped into the general population, leaving no lasting scars on their cultures, in most areas emancipation was no so much the end, but the beginning of a struggle for freedom and equality.

A question of Race

One of the most important legacies of this integrated slave system is a system of racial classification. In the rest of the paper, I will not deal with the problems slaves faced in created new communities and free work situation. I will focus on race. The problem here is that race does not exist, or at least physical anthropologists say it does not exist⁸. What does it mean to say that race does not exist? There are

Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia, London, Frank Cass, 2003; G. CAMPBELL (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, London, Routledge, 2004.

⁷ There are numerous studies of the history of racism. The best introduction is G. FREDERICKSON, *Racism. A Short History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002.

⁸ R. C. LEWONTIN, S. ROSE, L. J. KAMIN, *Not in Our Genes*, New York, Pantheon, 1984. For a description of human evolution, see L. L. CAVALLI-SFORZA, P. MENOZZI, A. PIAZZA, *The History and Geography of human Genes*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994. See also AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS, *Statement on Biological Aspects of Race*, in "American Journal of Physical Anthropology", vol. 101, 1996.

certainly people with dark skins who look different from most of the rest of us⁹.

First, skin color is only one of many inherited characteristics. We could divide people by height or hair color or body type – or the type of ear wax – all genetically inherited characteristics. There are two kinds of ear wax. Can we then divide peoples of the world by type of ear wax? What about height? Africans include the tallest and shortest people in the world. Africa is the most genetically diverse continent. People for tropical areas tend to be darker than those from temperate climates, but there is no link between skin color, hair type, the shape of noses, or intellectual abilities.

Second, people have interacted with each other for time immemorial. Early man moved in search of more fruitful environments. More recently, people have travelled for trade or to seek out a better life. And they marry or cohabit. Racial science saw mongrelization, the mixture of racial groups as likely to produce degenerate beings. This was contrary to what they could have seen if they looked around themselves. Thomas Jefferson believed that sexual relations between supposed racial groups produced inferior beings and yet, he spent most of his life with such a being, produced four supposedly mixed race children and used others to run his plantation¹⁰. Racial science has always been unscientific, whether it was the American notion that a bit of African DNA somehow created uncivilized instincts, or the Australian notion that sexual relations with an aboriginal woman was somehow improving the race¹¹. Racist ideas, however, have persisted because they are rooted in our historical experience, particularly in the history of slavery.

⁹ The absurdity of racial classification systems is underlined by the fact that in Africa and the Americas there were people with light skins, who were considered black while in and near the Sahara there were people with very dark skins who considered themselves white. See below discussion of B. HALL, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011. See also on race in Mauritania Z. OULD AHMED SALEM, *Prêcher dans le desert. Islam politique et changement social en Mauritanie*, Paris, Karthala, 2013.

¹⁰ A. GORDON-READ, *The Hemingses of Monticello. An American Family*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2008. The book deals with Jefferson's relationships with one family of mixed ancestry. Jefferson chose his cook, his butler, and most of his key personnel from the Hemingses. Gordon-Read also makes clear that such links were common in the Virginia elite.

¹¹ On Australian racial mythology see H. REYNOLDS, *Why Weren't We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth about our History*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1999.

What about slavery?

The modern African slave trade began only in the 15th century. That is not to say that slave trading was new. Slavery existed in all parts of the world, and where slavery existed, slaves were generally traded¹². Though most slave trades were local or regional, slaves had to be moved away from their homes to reduce the potential of escape. Two inter-related characteristics characterize slavery. First, slaves were *property*. The essence of the property relationship is that they could be bought and sold, and this increased their value. Second, slaves were *kinless*. The absence of family ties made them more exploitable and therefore, more valuable. Slaves fought everywhere to change the nature of their servitude, but it was the form of that servitude that made it profitable.

There were many slave trades in the world. The ancient Sumerians raided and traded in nearby hilly areas, and in fact the word for slave meant literally “hill people”¹³. Fernando Santos–Granero has written about people in pre-Columbian America, for whom slave-raiding was a proof of manhood¹⁴. The largest slave trade in the pre-modern world was between Mediterranean societies and those of the Balkans and the Black sea. The Greeks got most of their slaves there, as did the Byzantine empire and the Muslim societies of the Mediterranean. There were also slave trade routes that took slaves from Prague across Europe to Mediterranean areas¹⁵. The word for slave in most European languages is not *servus*, the ancient Latin word for slave, but a word based on the word *Slav*: *ésclave* in French, *sklave* in German, *schiavo* in Italian, *escravo* in Portuguese. This suggests that, in the medieval imagination, slavery was associated with Slavic peoples rather than Africans. That changed.

¹² The only important study of slavery in global perspective is O. PATTERSON, *Slavery and Social Death. A Comparative Study*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1985.

¹³ I. MENDELSON, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1949.

¹⁴ F. SANTOS-GRANERO, *Vital Enemies: Slavery, Predation, and the Amerindian Political Economy of Life*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2009.

¹⁵ K. FISCHER DREW, *Slavery and Serfdom in Medieval Europe*, in P.L FINKELMAN, J. C. MILLER (eds.), “Macmillan Encyclopedia of World Slavery”, New York, Simon and Shuster Macmillan, 1998, pp. 570-576; W. D. PHILLIPS JR., *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

There were some African slaves sold into the ancient and medieval Mediterranean, but most slaves imported by both Christians and Muslims were light-skinned and blonde. The change was largely the result of sugar¹⁶. Europeans learned about sugar from Arabs during the crusades and began growing it on Cyprus and other islands of the eastern Mediterranean. The history of the subsequent centuries was one of constant innovation, lower prices and increased demand, particularly as the drinking of coffee, chocolate and tea increased that demand. Sugar spread to the western Mediterranean and then, as Iberian ships explored the Atlantic, Genoan capital and Italian technology introduced sugar to the Atlantic islands. No matter how much sugar was produced, the market absorbed it. By the early 16th century, Madeira was the world's largest producer.

Sugar was most efficiently grown on plantations, partly because the equipment used demanded capital investment, and partly because it was important to get sugar into the presses as soon as possible¹⁷. The early plantations involved both slave and peasant labor, but as the Portuguese moved from sub-tropical to equatorial regions, they found Portuguese peasants no longer interested to the new island colonies. The heat was unbearable and the climate unhealthy. By the end of the 16th century, São Thomé had replaced Madeira as the largest producer of sugar in the world, but using only slave labor, almost all of it from the Kongo kingdom. Soon, however, because of security problems on São Thomé, sugar production shifted to Brazil, where it was easier to control slaves.

Columbus, Brazil and the Americas

The problem in the Americas was not simply that the first Iberian settlers were often brutal though they were; Columbus not only forced native people to work under abusive conditions, but even shipped native slaves to Spain¹⁸. The real problem was the invisible passengers

¹⁶ S. MINTZ, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, London, Penguin, 1985; E. ABBOTT, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*, London, Duckworth, 2008.

¹⁷ S. SCHWARTZ, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835*, cit., esp. ch. 5; P. CURTIN, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, cit., ch. 1 and 2.

¹⁸ R. WRIGHT, *Stolen Continents: 500 Years of Conquest and Resistance in the Americas*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.

on the ships that carried Europeans to the Americas. Amerindian peoples had no resistance to the diseases Europeans brought with them¹⁹. These diseases decimated populations all over the Americas. Two American scholars estimated that in the Valley of Mexico, population dropped over a century and a half from 25 million to a million and a half²⁰. Africans had a greater resistance to European diseases, many of which had long traversed the Sahara. Efforts were made to enslave and use Amerindian labor, but there were not enough of them and African labor was preferred. Efforts were also made to use indentured white labor, but mortality was higher than among Africans and Africans and their descendants were increasingly permanent and hereditary slavery, though always with a significant rate of manumission. Increasingly it became impossible to recruit European labor. From the end of the 16th century, African slaves increasingly filled the demographic void created by European diseases. Furthermore, slavery was for the first time identified with a single group, black Africans.

It is relevant here that European Christians did not enslave other European Christians²¹.

There had been much enslavement by Vikings and along the frontier of Western European expansion into the East. The Vikings developed trade routes down the Russian rivers into the Blacks, which brought slaves, furs and war to Byzantine and Arab trading partners²². With the conversion of both Slavic and Scandinavian peoples to Christianity, the various slave trades across Western Europe ended, though Russian and East European slaves continued to move to Byzantium and the Muslim states, mostly from slave raiding polities like the Tatar Khanate of Crimea.

Muslim parallels

There are certain parallels between the Christian and Muslim slave trades. In both cases, most slaves came from Slavic areas. In both

¹⁹ A. CROSBY, *The Columbian Exchange*, cit..

²⁰ W. BORAH, S. COOK, *The Indian Population of Central Mexico 1531-1610*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1960.

²¹ D. ELTIS, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, ch. 1 and 3.

²² R. MAZO KARRAS, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988.

cases, there was a theological justification. For Christians, it was the doctrine that enslavement was justified only in just war²³. This was a question that much concerned some Christian missionaries in the Americas. They accepted slavery, but were not convinced that the slaves they were ministering had been justly enslaved. The question was more important in the Mediterranean. Debra Blumenthal writes that in Valencia a slave imported from outside that lands of Aragon had to be interrogated by the bailiff general to determine whether he or she was justly enslaved. The slave had the opportunity to present his or her case²⁴.

The Muslim equivalent of just war was jihad. The Koran lists only two ways a person can become a slave, by birth or as a result of capture in a jihad²⁵. A jihad was a war made in the name of religion. Islamic law constrains the conditions under which a man could engage in jihad. It was important that he purify himself to be sure he was not making jihad for selfish reasons. This was the greater jihad. Then he had to engage in the jihad of the word, that is to say, he had to try and convert the enemy. Only then was he justified in making war.

Neither Muslims or Christians were much limited by the principles of the religion they claimed to believe. Just as European Christians did not enslave other European Christians, so with few exceptions Muslims did not enslave other Muslims, at least not within the Arab and Turkish heartland. Middle Eastern *élites* did however want slaves – slave women for their harems, soldiers, and servants, particularly eunuchs – to administer and guard the harems. Castration was illegal under Islamic law. This meant that castration, like enslavement, took place outside of Arab and Turkish domains. Whatever the intentions of the founders of Islam, slavery was important to the operation of the Arab and Ottoman states²⁶.

Like Muslims, Christians could twist their principles when it was in their interest to do so. The raiding and the military campaigns that

²³ P. RAMSAY, *The Just War*, New York, Scribners, 1969.

²⁴ D. BLUMENTHAL, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2009, pp. 20-28.

²⁵ J. R. WILLIS, *Jihad fi sabil Allah- its doctrinal basis in Islam and some aspects of its evolution in nineteenth-century West Africa*, in “*Journal of African History*”, n.3, 1967, pp. 395-416; J. R. WILLIS, *Jihad and the Ideology of Enslavement*, in J. R. WILLIS (ed.), “*Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*”, London, Frank Cass, 1985, pp. 1-15.

²⁶ M. ENNAJI, *Slavery, the State and Islam* (tr. by T. Lavender Fagan), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

marked Islam's African frontier did not meet the strict definition of jihad. Much of the enslavement in the Mediterranean involved corsairs seizing enemy ships or raiding enemy shores. When asked at the defense of her thesis whether any slave had won his or case and been liberated by the bailiff, Debra Blumenthal claimed to know of only one case. A Muslim was seen as by definition as an enemy of Christendom. In the Middle Ages, it was religion that determined enslaveability for both Muslims and Christians.

Distortion of Religious Principle

For both Christians and Muslims, religious principles did not stand in the way of the increasingly profitable exploitation of others. In both cases, religion was used in ways that contrasted with the principles articulated by religious teachers. For the Arab world, the process was slower. The Fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 slowed the flow of Slavic slaves to Mediterranean Christians, but Turks continued to import slaves from the Balkans, the Russian steppes and the Caucasus into the 19th century. Gradually, however, the expansion of the Habsburgs in the Balkans and Romanovs in Russia closed off many sources of slaves. As a result, there was an increase in the importance of Africans. One of the results of the 7th century Arab conquest of North Africa was the penetration of both trade and Islam south of the Sahara. This fueled over a number of centuries the development of complex states extending from Ghana, Mali and Songhai in the West to Sennar and Ethiopia in the East. Some of these empires had commodities Arab merchants wanted. Ghana and Mali were major sources of gold, but slaves were also important there. In the central and eastern Sudan, slaves were the most important African export. Enslavement was rationalized by the fact that those being enslaved were pagan²⁷.

A major concern of the desert-side empires was always control of the warlike propensities of their nomadic neighbors, control of

²⁷ J. SPAULDING, *Slaves of the King' Rhetoric and Reality in the Nubian State Tradition*, in J. SPAULDING, S. BESWICK (eds.), "African Systems of Slavery", Trenton, African World Press, 2010, pp. 247-266; M. A. KLEIN, *Slavery in the Western Soudan*, in J. SPAULDING, S. BESWICK (eds.), "African Systems of Slavery", Trenton, African World Press, 2010, pp. 11-44; J. O. HUNWICK, *Notes on Slavery in the Songhay Empire*, in J. R. WILLIS (ed.), "Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa", London, Frank Cass, 1985, Vol. 1, pp. 16-32.

sources of wealth in the desert and protection of trade across the desert. By and large, they were successful in doing this. Then in 1591, an invading army from Morocco defeated and destroyed Songhai, but was not able to construct a new hegemony. This left nomadic and sedentary people face-to-face without the mediating presence of an imperial state.

From 1600 to 1900, the interface between desert and savanna was a violent one, though there was also commercial interaction. Tuareg and Arab tribes raided into the savanna, while also protecting a slave trade from further south. Many of those slaves were used within the desert itself, though others were directed to the Mediterranean. Bruce Hall has revised our understanding of this dynamic with a brilliant book²⁸. It deals primarily with the area of the Niger bend, but is suggestive for a larger area. Central to Hall's work is the development of a justification for enslavement. Previous writers have assumed that racism was something the Tuareg and the Saharan Arabs learned from the French. It is more accurate to say that the French and Tuareg found each other's ideas congenial and were able to build a relationship on them.

Hall's argument is that though most of the desert peoples were originally Berber speakers, groups all along the desert-edge developed genealogies that claimed Arabian and sometimes even Sherifian origins. A corollary to this was the notion that their sedentary neighbors were already slaves, either because of the curse of Ham or because it was believed that there was an earlier Arab conquest of these peoples²⁹. The supreme irony of this is that the ancestors of Songhai and Mande speakers who were targeted by nomadic slave raiders had also used religion to justify enslavement. Now religion was replaced by race and was being used to similar effect. The effect was to justify the increasing enslavement of African peoples, and also to picture them as a servile race, an inferior group of people. Racism in the Arab world is more complex than in North America, but racism was there, it created a belief in African inferiority, and it justified enslavement.

²⁸ B. HALL, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*, cit..

²⁹ On the use of the curse of Ham to justify enslavement in diverse historical contexts, see D. GOLDENBERG, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.

Portuguese Voyages

The Portuguese also used religion to justify their first slave raids. Azurara has a description of a slave raid on the Moroccan coast by a ship returning from its exploration of the coast in the early 15th century³⁰. The Portuguese attacked a peaceful village, shouting praises of God and St. George, taking 165 captives in the first raid and more in subsequent smaller raids, with others being killed or drowned while fleeing. Once they reached Portugal Prince Henry himself presided over the division of the spoils. Azurara is plaintive and not unsympathetic to the misery he describes as husbands were separated from wives and children from their mothers but, at the end, he is satisfied that “as soon as they gained a knowledge of our language, they turned Christian without much difficulty...Christians as good and true as though they were descended from the beginnings of Christ’s law”. Religion thus justified the Portuguese doing to these people what they would not do to other Europeans. Religion remained important to the Portuguese, who often arranged a dockside conversion of slaves about to board a ship to the Americas. But increasingly the discourse was one of race. By the end of the 16th century, someone importing a black slave into Valencia did not need to prove enslavement in a just war. Blackness was *prima facie* evidence of enslavability.

By the early 17th century, the Portuguese were displaced in much of Africa by the Dutch, English, French and Scandinavians. All of these were societies where slavery no longer existed. And yet, they quickly got involved in the most brutal slave trade ever. The only way people who did not want slavery in their homelands could justify doing what they did was the belief that black people were inferior, were suitable only for labor, and were perhaps better off in American slavery than in a homeland seen as barbaric.

³⁰ G. EANNES DE AZURARA, *Chronica de descobrimento e conquista de Guiné*, Paris, J.P. Aillaud, 1943. Excerpt translated in R. CONRAD (ed.), “Children of God’s Fire. A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil”, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 5-11.

Slave trade and racism

Earlier societies often marked slaves with distinctive tattoos or shaven heads, but in the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds blackness was a sign of enslavability. Slavery in the Americas was a prison. There were few opportunities for a slave to develop his intellect, though everywhere some did demonstrate their abilities: the Spanish poet, Juan Ladino; the German-Ghanaian philosopher, Wilhelm Amo; Simon Gray, who though a slave, managed a network of barges operating on the Mississippi between Natchez and New Orleans. And then, there were former slaves like Olaudah Equiano or Frederick Douglass. The fact that some people could rise above their servile origins could not dent the stereotypes that so-called white people had.

There is a stigma attached to slavery within all hierarchical societies. The stigma persists even after slavery is ended³¹. The stigma is often associated with stereotypes. The slave is lacking in honor. He is not a gentleman. In the Savannah societies of West Africa there are codes of honor which differentiate between people of noble and slave origin. Nobles are generous. They do not beg. They speak softly. They are not crude. They do not talk openly about sexual matters. Slaves and people of slave descent are allowed to beg. Muslim villages in West Africa often ban dancing or, more likely, limit it to artisans or people of slave descent. Paul Riesman described male nobles going to slave villages because they enjoyed the relaxed approach to sexuality. They enjoyed listening to people talk about sex³².

The image of the slave in Africa is similar to the image of the Black in the Americas. In *Black Like Me*, John Howard Griffin described the experience of dying his skin black and travelling as a black man³³. White men who picked him while he was hitch-hiking were interested in being entertained by tales of his sex life. The assumption was that he was a sexual athlete. The fascination with black male sexuality was also linked to a fear responsible for lynchings and crucial to American racism. Similarly, there was a fear of a smart black. Richard Wright in

³¹ The persistence of the stigma is discussed in many of the contributions to B. ROSSI (ed.), *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2009.

³² P. RIESMAN, *First Find Your Child a Good Mother: The Construction of Self in Two African Communities*, New Brunswick, Transaction, 1992.

³³ J. H. GRIFFIN, *Black Like Me*, New York, New American Library, 1961.

his autobiography, *Black Boy*, describes a situation of terror in Mississippi, in which he could not indicate an interest in books³⁴. One result is that “happy talk”, acting like Sambo, became both the way African slaves dealt with their owners and the way blacks in the United States dealt with white society³⁵.

We can ask a similar question about colonialism. By the late 19th century, almost every European nation was a parliamentary state. Every one of them accepted the right of people to have some say in how they were governed. The vast majority of colonies had absolutely no participation of the governed in government. Colonised people, particularly black ones, were seen as not qualified to rule themselves. From slavery to colonial rule was a short but direct leap.

Emancipation

Between 1833 and 1888, every single western nation abolished slavery. In the last years of the 19th and the early 20th century, European colonies distanced themselves from slavery. The colonial state ceased to enforce the rights of slave owners in most areas though, in some cases, actual abolition did not come until the 1930s and in some Saharan colonies like Mauritania and Niger abolition was not enforced³⁶. In most cases, in both Africa and the Americas, emancipation was not the end of slavery, but the beginning of a long slow struggle for real emancipation. The struggle was often over control of labor, but equally often, over dignity, social equality and control of their family lives³⁷. Within Africa, slaves could become invisible

³⁴ R. WRIGHT, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*, Cleveland, World Publishing, 1945.

³⁵ Elkins (S. ELKINS, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1963) treated Sambo as a result of the impact of centuries of slavery rather than as an example of role-playing. I first heard the term “happy talk” while serving in the U.S. Army between 1955 and 1957 and saw examples of it. One of my black friends spoke of it as a way African-Americans dealt with white society, but, in the process, it confirmed racist stereotypes.

³⁶ Z. OULD AHMED SALEM, *Prêcher dans le desert. Islam politique et changement social en Mauritanie*, cit.; B. ROSSI, *From Slavery to Aid: Power, Labour, and Mobility in the West African Sahel 1800-2000*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

³⁷ Foner (E. FONER, *Nothing but Freedom. Emancipation and its Legacy*, Baton Rouge, State University Press, 1983) argued that the major concern for freed slaves in the United States and the Caribbean was control over their work and family life. I extended

if they were willing to distance themselves from friend and family. Freed slaves in the Americas were marked by skin color as former slaves and were subject to a racism that continued their subjection in different forms.

Breakdown of the racial order

Much of the racial order that emerged from slavery began to break down only after World War II. In the United States the needs of industry brought millions of African-Americans to the North, where they had the vote. By this time, there was also a black *élite* capable of challenging the racist structures of American society. In Europe, colonialism was under challenge everywhere after World War II and no longer made economic sense to most Europeans. The withdrawal from colonialism came at time when European industry needed labor. Parallel to what happened earlier in the northern United States, Europe turned to Africa and the Middle East for labor. These workers followed a small African population of mostly sailors, students, and former students already in Europe. On both sides of the Atlantic, people of radically different origins were increasingly interacting in the classroom, on the pitch, in the workplace, in the bedroom and in politics. There is nothing like the American Black Caucus in Europe, but in France there are African mayors in small towns, city councilors, cabinet ministers and TV personalities. In Latin America there are slower, but important processes of change, particularly in Brazil. Almost everywhere that people of African descent live, they have established the right to both control their own lives and to participate in the government of the communities they inhabit.

With the Civil Rights revolution in the United States and the migration of millions of African and Middle Eastern peoples to Europe, Black people became visible and an active part of all of our societies. Furthermore, the independence of former colonies meant interaction at a higher level. The Kennedy administration was not only sympathetic to the aspirations of Black people, but forced by Cold War concerns prepared to challenge the social order of the nation's capital city. Washington was a southern city, but from 1957 it was the home of

his argument to West Africa (M. A. KLEIN, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

thousands of black diplomats and international civil servants at institutions like the World Bank and the Organization of American States. Concerned to win the friendship of newly independent countries, the Kennedy administration was determined that none of their diplomats be denied hotel or restaurant service in Washington, or for that matter in the deep south. When Washington began offering tours of the United States to influential groups from Third World countries, African visitors usually wanted to see the South and were taken to Atlanta, the most progressive city in the South and sometimes to Texas. Of course, the increasingly black civil service in Washington also benefitted from the desegregation of the city.

There have also been slow patterns of change in Europe. Going through Charles DeGaulle airport in Paris or riding the London Underground, a high percentage of the people processing are black. What is important is that international political concerns forced nations to speed up a process of racial inclusion. There is, to be sure, resistance and points of tensions. Anti-immigration parties exercise increasing influence. Africans are likely to have their identities checked just as Black youth in North America are more likely to be “carded” than their white peers. Nevertheless, the face of European and American cities has changed and an increasing number of young people are living in a post-racial world³⁸.

Post-racial society

When Barack Obama astounded many of us by being elected President of the United States, it gave rise to a lot of American triumphalism. This was, many announced the beginning of a “post-racial” United States. Much of this was premature. Racism still persists, not only among those who voted against Obama, but in a polite form even among some of those who voted for him, but it is no longer fashionable. Still, change has been dramatic. The end of colonialism has

³⁸ A measure of change is Paul Saltzman’s documentary, *Prom Night in Mississippi* (2009), which deals with an effort to integrate the high school prom in a rural Mississippi high school. Two things are striking. One is that the students have been dealing with each other throughout their school years. The second is an interview with a white girl dating a black boy and with her father. Mere decades ago, the black male would have been lynched and she might have been driven out of town. Racism still exists in Mississippi, but the rules have changed as have values and the structures of authority.

opened up opportunities for able Africans. Colonial regimes carefully limited the career potential of those Africans it educated. Kofi Annan and Chinua Achebe would probably have been clerks or school-teachers if colonial rule had not ended. There were no economists in Africa in 1950. Today, African statesmen, bankers, and diplomats flit across our television screens. We read African novels and listen to African musicians. African-American scholars teach at our universities.

Immigration reform has made it possible for Africans to seek opportunity elsewhere. In Europe, millions of Africans came to meet needs fueled by economic expansion. In the United States, African immigrants move well into American life, in part because they are the best educated immigrants, better educated than even Chinese newcomers. There are almost three million blacks in the US from Africa and the West Indies. Change has been most dramatic in the United States. The movement from benign neglect and outright segregation to one of enforced integration has been dramatic, particularly in the South. The Johnson administration brought in legislation that required any company contracting with the federal government to hire members of minority groups at all levels: not only black, but also Asian, Native American, and Hispanic. This was called affirmative action. Universities with lily-white faculties suddenly found that there were able scholars in all minority groups. Student bodies became racially more complex. The number of black students at Berkeley went in three years from 140 to 800. Today, there are black surgeons at prestigious teaching hospitals, black partners in top law firms, black professors at top Ivy League universities, black company presidents, black cabinet ministers. Black professionals operate at all levels of American life. Black university grads have the same employment rates as whites or Hispanics³⁹. This has become the new normal.

Persistence of racism

Does this mean the end of racism? Not yet. It is stronger in the lower classes than in *élite* groups. In some parts of the United States, one can get away with murdering a Black male. The Tea Party, the right wing of the Republicans, often talks in coded terms, which have

³⁹ M. WAYNE, *Imagining Black America*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014.

a racist sub-text. Obama is not one of us, they say. They want to reclaim America, by which they mean take it back from people of color. There is still a large black underclass that is worse off than in the 1960's. They live in urban ghettos, attend the worst schools, drop out of school early and suffer because the economy has few jobs for unskilled young people.

There are conscious efforts to deny the vote to significant parts of this population. Not only are convicts denied the vote, but so is anyone on parole or probation. The latest tactic is to require voters to show a piece of picture ID, which is hard to attain for poorly educated blacks: 13% of Black males have been denied the right to vote because of convictions and four states deny them the vote for life, even for one minor crime.

In Europe, racism can also be crude and violent. Neo-Nazi and skinhead groups have murdered black people. In Hungary the worst racism is directed at an indigenous European group, the Roma, but it shows how violent racists can be. In Italy, racism can be extremely crude. Cecile Kyenge, a Congo-born ophthalmologist, was appointed to the cabinet of Enrico Letta in early 2013. The response of politicians from right-wing parties was virulently racist. She has been bombarded with bananas and compared to an orangutan or a gorilla. One parliamentarian called on her to be raped.

Browning of the World

The next stage in the transformation is the browning of society. Throughout those centuries when people believed that races really existed, many also believed that sexual relations between the races were immoral. They were also illegal in many American states. That did not prevent it from happening, though it was usually limited to white men and black women. Sometimes it was casual, sometimes it was brutal, sometimes it produced loving long-term relationships. But it happened. It also happened in the colonies, particularly in those colonies where European men came without European women.

Today the rate of mixing is increasing. In the United Kingdom, around 40% of men of West Indian origin born in the UK have married white women. About a fifth of women of West Indian origin marry white men. In the United States 16% of black marriages are with members of another race. Almost 90% of young whites see

nothing wrong with members of different racial groups marrying. Even among older people, the percentage of those accepting intermarriage is increasing. The children born from these relationships usually have loving relationships with both parents and often with both extended families. Many of them identify with neither racial community, defining themselves either as biracial or as an entirely new race. As families become more diverse, this cannot help but influence attitudes.

Others in the *élite* no longer identify themselves by race, but rather by social class or peer group. Children grow up with different values. My daughter, who was raised in a multi-racial neighborhood and with many of our black friends coming in and out of the house, once commented that she never thought of herself as white person until she went to university in the States. Conversely, the dark-skinned adopted brother of her best friend was stunned when he went to music school in the US to discover that he was black. It has been projected that the United States will be largely brown by 2050. I am not sure of the mathematics behind that prediction, when it will happen, or whether such projections include Asians but it is clearly in the works.

When we speak of the browning of Western nations, or use the term fashionable in Canada, visible minorities, we are not just speaking of people of African descent. I live in what was once a lily-white city, which has become one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. My classes, like the city at large, involve people of many different complexions. Some like the South Asians are dark skinned products of another process of evolution. Others like most people from Latin America and the Middle East are products of mixing. The boundaries between groups overlap and are often very fuzzy. The questions of difference are more cultural than racial, but even here people cross lines. At Toronto's annual Caribana festival, a celebration of African *diaspora* culture, there are a significant number of people of European descent in the bands and in full costume.

The move toward a post-racial society does not necessarily mean an end to difference, just a recognition that differences based on skin color or minor facial differences are not important. In the United States the black underclass may long persist given the difficulties they have in getting resources necessary if they are to transcend a heritage of poverty and discrimination. They will probably face discrimination not only by people of European and Asian descent, but by the more

privileged sectors of African-American society⁴⁰. Many differences will persist. The troubling inequality of our time means that we may develop new forms of class conflict. And freed from the burden of racial stereotyping, we may be freer to develop the richness of our different religious and cultural traditions.

Conclusion

The linked triad of slavery, colonialism, and racism has been with us for a long time and were global phenomena. Racism was important in justifying both slavery and colonialism. Slavery was an institution of great brutality, which was based on acts of violence and harmed several hundred million people over many centuries. There was thus a need to justify this in societies which enslaved people, traded them or profited from their labor. This need felt was based on a series of fictions. It operated to restrict human freedom and to limit the possibilities of human development among both the oppressed and the oppressors. The seeds of its destruction lay in the nature of slavery. Colonial regimes had to end slave-raiding and slave trading because they restricted economic growth and in the long run all forms of slavery had to go. The end of colonialism came in part because it limited growth and became too expensive. Just as it was inevitable that colonized people would demand control over their own lives, so too it was inevitable that people of slave descent would demand full rights everywhere. Racism has been more difficult to eradicate, but it is clearly waning. Increasingly, a post-racial order seems possible.

⁴⁰ For a masterful reflection on change within the African-American community, see M. WAYNE, *Imagining Black America*, cit..