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### Impacts of Racialized Ignorance in the New World

Racial ignorance is the backbone of the culturally afflicted disease better known as slavery. It has been misused for centuries, and most importantly, the color of one's skin was the weapon used against African Americans to bring justification for the actions of European men. It effectively brought slavery to the New World, and then allowed for white men to abuse the rights to historical significance amongst African-American people.

To begin, the official meeting between European and African people was the jumping point for Racialized Slavery. The first encounters that Europeans had with Africans were very confusing. Europeans had never seen men with such dark skin, and not only was their skin dark, but they were stark naked and lived like 'savages' – a term frequently used from this point forward. Europeans needed to find justifications for the dark skin of these new people, especially since they believed Africans were an 'ugly rejection' of the 'purity' of European men.

The obsession to label everyone and everything was also somewhat birthed during this happenstance. The Europeans needed to have an answer to this mysterious issues, regardless of how they came upon it. It is normal for humans, when presented with something unknown, to challenge that curiosity based on what is their norm, but Europeans took it upon themselves to build personal narratives to cover up an underlying selfish desire; in this case, the need for slaves in the New World.

In the book, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, white and black skin was described to be in complete contrast with one another; "White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil" (Jordan 17). The differences in skin recognition were also associated based on the European standard of beauty; the Queen Elizabeth. Elizabeth was the focal point for beauty and grace because of her pale skin, rosy cheeks, and her perfectly shaped body, whereas Africans had disproportionate lips and noses, and unruly, messy hair.

Perhaps putting oneself into Europeans' shoes would help to better understand their stance. If modern humans met an entirely new race, let's say for arguments sake people with purple skin, they too would be completely perplexed as to what the background of these people are. But that doesn't excuse turning confusion into domination. Europeans had gone their entire life modeling the standards set by Elizabeth and other rulers, so these 'savage' curly haired and dark skinned people was certainly a culture shock upon their arrival. At the same time, their 'coping mechanisms' were a bit more irrational than others who had met Africans before them.

An interesting thing to note is that Europeans were not the first to interact with dark-skinned Africans. King Ptolemy of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt at one point suggested that, "Negro's blackness and woolly hair were caused by exposure to the hot sun and had pointed out that people in northern climates were white and those in temperate areas an intermediate color" (Jordan 20-21). Ptolemy's suggestion puts a practical twist to the European misconceptions of African skin. Instead of flashing a religion card, Ptolemy used his knowledge of environment to promote a theory of sun exposure. Was it a flawless concept, no of course not, but was it a much more inviting and non-racially biased argument, yes it was. It also proved that other human beings were capable of understanding cultural differences without violence.

Fueled by Christianity, the ultimate weapon of mass destruction in many cases, a huge way that Europeans attempted to convince themselves that African's should be slaves was through the 'cursed son of ham' mythology. The basics behind the tale are, "Ham had looked upon his father's 'nakedness' as Noah lay drunk in his tent... when Noah awoke he cursed Canaan, son of Ham, saying that he would be a 'servant of servants' unto his brothers" (Jordan 25). The use of this story, (which supposedly is in Genesis, but there is little to no evidence) was to somehow relate the impure black skin to the curse. Christian leaders used this in sermons so that they had some leverage in their case against Africans. Their assumptions were that by making Africans slaves, Europeans were inadvertently saving them from their own religious demise, and carrying out the acts the bible had spoke of.

In the article, *Liberation Historiography: African-American Historians before the Civil War*, the author John Ernest pulls examples from more Europeans about how they perceived their overstayed welcome in African land. George Bancroft, a European historian, wrote a proclamation in 1837 that stated, "the slave-trade united the races by an indissoluble bond... ships from the New World would carry the equal blessings of Christianity to the burning plains of Nigritia, that descendants of Africans would toil for the benefits of European civilization" (Ernest 8). This is a perfect example of what the mindset was like for the average European Christian; the impure needed to be rectified and shone the ways of God, and it was easy to tell which people were considered to be the impure based on the color of their skin.

This is also where Africa became nothing but a breeding ground for slaves. Africans born to their homeland were shipped off the New World, and their home became nothing but a whisper in the wind. They were stripped of their identity, literally and figuratively, and dispersed like cattle amongst European men. Though, the racial ignorance, and now racial bias, did not

stop there. Fast forwarding to the year 1855, an excerpt in *Liberation Historiography* brings up one of many events that came along post African's being exposed to the New World.

Peter Salem was an African-American who participated in the Battle of Bunker Hill. He was responsible for shooting a British Major named Pitcairn, but there was a huge historical issue with the event; he isn't rightfully depicted for it at all. In many instances, "this colored soldier occupies a prominent position; but in more recent editions, his figure is non est inventus..." (Ernest 5). The bias presented by Europeans/Whites that depicted this event in place for their 'uneducated, primitive slaves' is absolutely extraordinary. Africans were so unjustly dismissed that people like Peter Salem weren't even respected enough to be praised for his huge accomplishments. It seems impossible to erase someone from history, but Europeans were having no problem whatsoever doing so.

The European take over was not focused solely on the African body, but of the heritage as well. When an African was sold as a slave, they handed over their rights of freedom, and of culture and dignity. A huge issue that stemmed from the acts of racial slavery was the stripping of identity. Africans had no way of recounting their own history, whether it be from white suppression, or simply because they had been born and raised as slaves and had no clue where they came from. The idea of 'savagery' somehow meant that Africans had no basic human rights to explore or identify with their own culture.

Ernest explains the status of Africans of the New World in a very straightforward way: "they belong to no people, race, or nation; subjects of no government—citizens of no country—scattered surplus remnants of races, and of different nations—severed into individuality—rendered a mass of broken fragments, thrown to and fro, by the passions of this and other ungodly nations" (Ernest 19). His own arguments are not to promote the idea of revenge for the

wrongful doing of slavery, but to help African's enlighten and liberate themselves and their culture. He wants Africans to take back their control and rewrite history from the point of view of those who suffered through this, not of the men who perpetuated it.

Africans are a people who have been raped and pillaged of their rights further beyond those of the moral standpoint. Even in the New World, White slave owners degraded and abused their slaves to make sure they know just how unworthy they really were. The racial ignorance shifted from one based on religion to more of just unadulterated disrespect because of skin differences. The points that are made to erase Africans from all events possible further validate how little they are seen as actual human beings, and furthermore, how unwilling Whites and other races were, and sometimes are, to accept and learn more about cultures they do not understand.

In conclusion, it's quite interesting to explore how much disdain Europeans/Whites truly have for darker skin colors, and a lot of it is based solely on not understanding that cultural beliefs do not dictate what makes a human being. Racial ignorance to this very day is prominent in many societies, and the hope that people will wake up and realize we are all the same underneath the color differences is a hope many hold strong. The oppressive veil of Eurocentricity needs to be lifted, and the eyes of people being shrouded by it deserve to be opened so that a culture so regretfully forgotten can not only be embraced, but finally embrace themselves.

Works Cited

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