

Racism –a residual legacy of Slavery?

By Chinweizu

[In December 2006, the London-based magazine, Index-on-Censorship, invited a number of persons to respond to the question:

“To what extent is racism and discrimination against black people in the US and particularly in this country, a residual legacy of slavery?”

The answer below was sent in by Chinweizu]

Racism is not at all a legacy of slavery but a constitutive and sustaining element of the White Supremacy system established by European power during the centuries of trans-Atlantic enslavement of Black Africans. Hence its extreme resistance to eradication.

Racism is, certainly, not a “residual legacy” in the passive sense of the dead hand of the past. It is not like a motion imparted to an object by an impulse withdrawn long ago; a motion sustained entirely by inertia. Because it is a constitutive element, it has been necessary to systematically apply force and fraud to maintain, in mutant forms, this vital pillar of white supremacy. Accordingly, new forms of “slave trade” and slavery as well as new structures of racism are still being elaborated and justified, even today, as they have been, whenever needed, since the 16th century.

For example, on Nov. 11, 2006, in Philadelphia, at a Wharton Business School conference on business in Africa, World Trade Organization representative Hanniford Schmidt announced the creation of a WTO initiative for "full private stewardry of labor" for the parts of Africa that have been hardest hit by the 500 years of Africa's free trade with the West. "Full, untrammelled stewardry is the best available solution to African poverty, and the inevitable result of free-market theory," Schmidt told more than 150 attendees. Schmidt acknowledged that the stewardry program—which will require Western companies doing business in some parts of Africa to own their workers outright-- was similar in many ways to slavery, but explained that just as "compassionate conservatism" has polished the rough edges on labor relations in industrialized countries, full stewardry, or "compassionate slavery," could be a similar boon to developing ones.

In short, racism is not a crime committed and completed long ago by moral Neanderthals, in the bad old days of chattel slavery; a crime whose “unfortunate consequences” are still, inexplicably, lingering on. Rather, the crime is still re-enacted, day by day and unrepentantly, by the heirs and agents of a system driven by the same enduring mania for cheap labor and profits that created chattel slavery.

To make this evident, several things need to be noted. First some clarification of terms. Contrary to prevailing confusions,

RACISM is a system of domination, of one race by another, which combines the superstition of racial hierarchy with a racialized structure of socio-economic domination and exploitation, and which is instituted and maintained by the violent practices of conquest and suppression, including torture, terrorism and mass murder.

The **colorarchy** or color-hierarchy, is a sorting principle by which, even if all else could be made equal, a person's position, expectations, opportunities, rewards and punishments are determined by skin color, with white skin privileged at the top, black skin disprivileged at the bottom, and the other colors—brown, yellow—in between.

Discrimination is merely the act of applying or enforcing the Colorarchy.

Furthermore, it needs to be understood that

1. The so-called Slave Trade and its so-called abolition were not what they are purported to be. "Abolition" did not, in any way, abolish or dismantle the racially stratified socio-economic system established by European power during the centuries of trans-Atlantic chattel enslavement of Black Africans.

The so-called Slave trade was not trade but **race war!** It was merely an aspect of the chattelization war which White European power waged upon Black Africans. It was a system for trafficking to the Americas the captives of the wars which European power instigated in Africa among the Blacks. Its abolition was no act of moral enlightenment or humanitarianism: it was a measure calculated to halt the inflow into the American plantations of Blacks who were born free in Africa—such Blacks tended to be less tolerant of enslavement than those born in captivity in the Americas. The Africa-born had been a large part of the slave population in Haiti which, during its successful liberation war, defeated the armies of France, Britain and Spain—the superpowers of that era. Stopping the "slave trade" was a clever ruse to prevent a rash of similar slave revolts which threatened to destroy the entire racialized slave labor system for the enrichment of Europe.

Furthermore, the celebrated British abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807 was promptly followed by the inauguration, by the same British, of what, had it endured, might have come to be called the "coolie trade", from India and China. The first shipment of 'indentured labour' from India to replace slave labour on plantations in the Americas and elsewhere, followed almost immediately on the formal abolition of slavery in British territories in 1834. [see, for example

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/coolies.shtml>; also

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/india/forced.htm>]

And following the Opium War (1840-42), the British began trafficking in indentured labor from the treaty ports of China. This trafficking was a replica of the early days of the 'trade' in African captives. British and other white gangsters used deception and intimidation to seize or kidnap Chinese laboring people, a.k.a coolies, and shipped them to the Americas, South Africa etc to do heavy labor. The ships in which the coolies were transported were reminiscent of the slave ships of the trans-Atlantic Middle Passage and were described by the Chinese as "floating hells". In light of that fact, British moral self-preening for ending the trans-Atlantic "slave trade" is dishonest and pharisaic. It is like a man who boasts: "Look I am a paragon of virtue. I've stopped beating my black wife", and who, even as he preens himself about that, proceeds to beat his new yellow wife, using the same club!

2. The abolition of slavery-- and all subsequent reforms-- have never altered, let alone abolished, the essential sorting principle of the Eurocentric socio-economic system, namely the Colorarchy. Moreover, after the abolition of slavery, the 'freed' slaves

were craftily ushered into a peonage system that, by design, preserved the essentials of the slavery system.

In Jamaica, after a slave revolt in 1834, the abolition of slavery was conducted in such a way that, as Chomsky says, “the plantation system would be maintained without essential change.”

In the USA, following ‘Emancipation’, methods were devised to channel the Blacks into the same jobs and status they had previously been forced into. Along with terrorism, such as that carried out by the Ku Klux Klan, education became a principal tool for achieving this. As William H. Baldwin, the first president of the General Education Board and a trustee of the Tuskegee Institute put it:

The potential economic value of the Negro population properly educated is infinite and incalculable. In the Negro is the opportunity of the South. Time has proven that he is best fitted to perform the heavy labor of the South. He will willingly fill the more menial positions, and so the heavy work, at less wages than the American white man . . . This will permit the Southern white laborer to perform the more expert labor, and to leave the fields, the mines and the simpler trades for the Negro.”

In other words, the post-emancipation “industrial schools”—Hampton, Tuskegee etc--were designed to train Blacks to willingly fill the roles that Blacks had previously been forced into by slave drivers. The suitably “educated” Blacks, properly indoctrinated to believe in their own inferiority, would gladly take their decreed place at the bottom of the racially stratified socio-economic system. *Plus ça change . . .*

Nowadays, schooling largely suffices to do the same channeling, as public schools miseducate and massively flunk blacks into the least-skilled and least-paid jobs, or worse, into the labor reserve of the unemployed. Thus, Blacks are still being actively schooled into the bottom socio-economic stratum decreed for them by the Colorarchy. No passive “residual legacy” in that!

3. The doctrinal system has always worked overtime to inculcate in the population a belief in the Colorarchy. The dogma of black inferiority and white superiority--the alleged justification for the colorarchy--has constantly been taught by the organs of indoctrination. The grounds of justification have, of course, been changed over the centuries. They started with Biblical fables about Ham’s curse and shifted, during the European Enlightenment, to doctrines like Montesquieu’s claim that “it is natural to look upon [white] color as the criterion of human nature”, and that blacks, therefore, could not be human; and then to Kant’s metaphysical mumbo-jumbo about the color of reason: that white skin is the badge of truly human rational talent. Hence his assertion that “This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid.” The grounds later shifted, for much of the early 20th century, to differences in craniometry. Nowadays, the grounds are alleged to be the color of intelligence, as enunciated in the 1960s by IQ experts like Arthur Jensen and Hans Eysenk, and as late as 1994 by the proponents of the Bell Curve. The unrelenting dissemination of these superstitions inculcates in the population, including the Black victims, a belief in the colorarchy. No passive “residual legacy” here!

4. Developments that could upset the Colorarchy have consistently been destroyed by force and fraud. For example,

4a) post-Civil War Reconstruction, which threatened the colorarchy by electing blacks into public offices, was destroyed following the Hayes Compromise of 1877; and segregation --Jim Crow-- was instituted by law; and for a century thereafter the Colorarchy was enforced through indoctrination in the schools and terrorism in the streets by the KKK and white mob riots.

4b) When, after a century, segregation began to prove counterproductive for white supremacy, it was attacked and dismantled and the autonomous infrastructures that segregation had spawned in black communities were broken down by the crusade for integration. It should be recalled that Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, as well as the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s were products of segregated black communities. All the emergent organizations and the potential leadership stratum of the black communities were eliminated by an Integration movement that creamed off, and scattered them into white neighborhoods. As for the Black separatists, such as the Panthers, they were bloodily crushed by the violence of the US Government's COINTELPRO. [the FBI covert counterintelligence programmes directed against radical political organisations, including the Civil Rights movement.]. Thus, Integration was a crafty device to shore up white supremacy by preventing Black power from germinating in the segregated communities.

4c) To further divide the black communities of the USA, following their beheading by Integration, the "one-drop rule" is being discarded because it promotes a residual solidarity among the blacks. Under "multiculturalism", the old classification system is being replaced, on the Brazilian model, with a proliferation of racial categories. Designations like "biracial", "mixed race", "colored" are being encouraged among those African-American mixed breeds who would hitherto have been unequivocally classified as Blacks.

In the Brazilian model, a 1974 census presented people with a dizzying array of 134 racial categories. These ranged from "bem-branca" (real white) to "bailano" (ebony). In between were skin tones like "pardo" (brown), "criolo," "moreno," "mulatto," "prieto". Most of these, by the old "one-drop rule" of the USA, would be classified as Black. These divide and rule classifications have one invariant feature: white skin at the top, black skin at the bottom, i.e. they preserve the colorarchy. Again, this is no passive "residual legacy"!

This history of constant and active maintenance of the colorarchy means that apologies for slavery and racism, even if elicited from Tony Blair, George W Bush, the Pope and other leaders of the Eurochauvinist white power system, are beside the point unless the promise, implicit in any apology – to cease and desist from the behaviour apologised for – can be enforced. But that will never happen as long as this socio-economic system is not destroyed. The cat may apologise every day for its past kills, but will that cure it of its habit of hunting mice?

Finally, for the British Government to celebrate the bicentenary, and with moral self-preening, of an "Abolition" that deliberately amended and helped preserve a criminal system is a hocus-pocus quite worthy of the rulers of Perfidious Albion.

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18Dec06

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