

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

2021

The American Virus: Racism

Trevor O'Reggio

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

The American virus: Racism

America is infected with a virus more deadly than Covid 19, the virus of racism. This deadly virus has infected and infiltrated every aspect of American life. It cannot be treated with a vaccine and while Covid 19 will eventually disappear, racism will remain with us. The sad tragedy is that we have grown so accustomed to it, especially for those who benefit from it, we have no desire to get rid of it. A short excursion in American history will remind us that the recent events have historical roots.

When the first group of Africans landed in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, they had no idea that their descendants would endure two hundred and forty four years of brutal slavery and that even after emancipation, they would continue to be treated as second class citizens. Initially, these early Africans worked along side Irish indentured laborers. When it became apparent to the ruling elites that the African laborers and Irish indentured workers could form an alliance that would benefit them both, they changed the laws to make a distinction between both groups. After the Nathaniel Bacon's rebellion, this distinction moved the colony away from indentured labor to Black slavery. Thus, began the genesis of racial slavery in the American colonies. From then on, Blackness was identified with slavery. This institution was now race based. Since many of the slave holding colonists were professed Christians, they now attempted to justify their brutal treatment of their fellow humans from their sacred text, the bible. These two-faced hypocrites mined the biblical text to find support for their horrendous practices. Twisting and misrepresenting the bible, they offer what they considered biblical support for slavery in an attempt to assuage their guilty consciences. It was not uncommon for these self-righteous hypocrites to rape, abuse, torture and even kill their slaves, then go on to their churches to worship their white god. In the minds of these so-called Christians, Blacks were not fully humans, which made it easier to denigrate and degrade them. Classified with the master's property, they were treated as such. Their value was only in the labor that they could render.

Slavery has been part of most human societies, but in America, it took on a particular virulent character. There was a deliberate and conscious effort to dehumanize and debase the slave. While the institution of slavery was bad enough, it was the philosophy that undergirded it that was even more demonic. Many taught that Blacks were created to be slaves or to do any servile work, so even if at some future time when slavery would be abolished, Blacks would never be considered on par with whites.

White colonists fought the American Revolutionary war ostensibly for freedom. But freedom for who? They complained about British oppression and their lack of representation. Once they acquired their freedom, they now used it to keep others in bondage. Some of them recognized the obvious contradiction, but the majority of them held fast to this peculiar institution, because it was not simply a labor system, but a way of life. In 1790, the Congress passed the first Naturalization Act to determine who could qualify to be an American citizen. Among the qualifications was skin color- WHITENESS. Yes, one had to be white in order to qualify for American citizenship. So, let's be clear about one thing, the Founders of the American Republic set about establishing a white nation. Almost every subsequent laws concerning immigration were meant to favor white immigrants from Europe. This is how our nation began, it was organized primarily to benefit whites. Some argue that the system is broken because it is not benefiting the non-white population. No, it's not broken, It is working exactly as it was designed.

With the Civil war ended, over four million black slaves were now "free" after rendering over two hundred and forty four years of unfree labor, (I wonder how much that is in dollars, trillions, billions maybe), the newly freed slaves received little help and after around twelve years of mealy support

from the Federal government, they were abandoned to the ire and cruelty of the recently defeated Confederates, who now went about stripping Blacks of virtually all of their civil rights, even though laws were on the books to secure those rights. Not only were their rights taken away, but they were now subjected to widespread terrorism from individual and government actors. Laws were passed restricting their movement, they were re-enslaved through the prison work system, they were forced into debt peonage on the former slave plantations, they were denied access to capital, they were incarcerated for the mildest offenses, their votes were taken away, they could not testify in court against a white person, they were lynched in large numbers, many times on the flimsiest of evidence, and the white perpetrators invariably escaped justice. Blacks were denied jobs, education, decent housing. Subjected to innumerable humiliations, they were segregated and discriminated against. The evils perpetrated against them are too numerous to list. But there is a record in heaven and one day Justice will triumph. There was visceral hatred especially in the South against Blacks, they were told they were called Apes and were told that they had no history, culture or past to be proud of. The Civil war ended but the underlying philosophy about Blacks would actually flourish and would shape the thinking, culture, customs and practices of America. White supremacy which was part of the colonies from their inception, was a virus that was now part of the American body politic. It could no longer be distinguished from the American DNA. It affected every aspect of American life. Policing which began in America as slave patrols hunting down runaway slaves was a vital part of reinforcing white supremacy. The police enforced the laws even if they were blatantly racist and the police force became the public face of an inherently racist order. How then can you account for the huge disparity of blacks in the prison system? The police were also supported by a judicial system, judges and prosecutors all working together in a system that was and remains inherently racist and biased against Blacks. This brings us to the recent events of police brutality especially against Blacks. The record is replete with numerous cases. The invention of the cell phone with cameras is only now bringing to light what has been going on for decades. Without the cell phone videos of that police officer putting his knee in the neck of George Floyd, nothing would have come of that case. George Floyd's death would have been written up as just another black criminal resisting arrest. The knee of the police officer on George Floyd's neck is emblematic of America's knee on the neck of Blacks throughout American history. It is a graphic illustration of the sufferings of Blacks living under a racist socio-economic order set up to disenfranchise and marginalize them

Is there hope for a cure for this virus of racism? I am pessimistic. It will not go away. What Blacks have to do is strengthen their immune system against it, learn how to live with it. Work hard, study diligently, learn, succeed, pray, vote, fight injustice wherever one encounters it, march against, write against it, preach against it, call it out wherever you see it, change the laws, become police officers, go to congress, form alliances with like minded people, love each other, support each other, be a father to the fatherless, a mother to the motherless, mentor the young, learn your history, build businesses, invest in your communities, become judges, lawyers, governors, teachers, doctors,. Determine in your mind that you will leave the world a better than when you arrived. Live a life worthy of emulation. Do these and a million other things that will make America a place where in spite of the presence of the virus of racism, Blacks will not only survive but thrive.