From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea:
The Strange Odyssey of the "Sons of Ham"

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[Noah] became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him he said,
"Cursed be Canaan;
    a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."
He also said,
"Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.
God enlarge Japheth,
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave."[1]

THIS STRANGE STORY HAS TROUBLED THEOLOGIANS for perhaps two thousand years. Since it is first found in the Old Testament, a common source of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, moralists have understandably expected to find in it some illustration of ethics or justice. Yet the story offends our moral sensibilities at almost every point. In the first place, even when the extreme sensitivity that the ancient Hebrews are supposed to have had about nudity is taken into account, Noah's curse dwarfs Ham's offense. By any ordinary standard, ancient or modern, Noah overreacted. Second, the curse fell not upon the offender at all, but upon Canaan, a son of Ham, who, in terms of the story, is

[1] Gen 9:21–27 (Revised Standard Version). All succeeding biblical references are enclosed in parentheses in the text; they are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

totally innocent. Over the centuries theologians have often held ideas about nu-
dity and respect for parents similar to those of the ancient Hebrews. Yet they
have consistently failed to find in Ham's behavior sufficient justification for
Noah's curse upon Canaan.[2]

The story of Ham presents far fewer difficulties, however, if it is considered
not as a moral tale but as a sacred myth. One of the characteristics of myths,
including sacred ones, is their amorality. In these accounts, divine or semidivine
beings often commit deeds that violate or transcend the moral restraints of the
ordinary people who believe in the myth.[3] An ethnographical study of northern
Ghana has shown that, among the Tallensi people, the most elaborate myths
are those that interpret situations of sharp social polarization, that interpret the
most tension-producing areas of their society.[4] If such a principle has wide appli-
cation, it would suggest that the Curse of Noah, which was molded and elabo-
rated for more than two thousand years, has functioned to interpret an area of
continuing social tension. This inquiry explores historically this area of tension
in an effort to determine why certain peoples have come to be regarded as heirs
to Noah's curse and others as heirs to his blessing, destined to have their needs
served by ethnic inferiors. By studying the shifting ethnic identifications of the
"sons of Ham," by following their journey in myth from the land of Canaan to
the land of Guinea, we can perhaps learn something about the historical pres-
sures that shaped modern white racial attitudes.

MOST SCHOLARS BELIEVE that the story of Noah's curse, in its biblical form, is a
product of the kingdom of David and Solomon and thus reflects the circum-
stances of the Hebrews in the tenth century B.C. The Hebrews believed them-
selves and several neighboring peoples to be "Semites"—that is, descendants of
one of the heroes of the tale, "Shem" (Gen. 10:22 ff.), who, in the various linguis-
tic forms of his name, is also called "Sem" and "Sam." About 1200 B.C., their
nomadic ancestors from the eastern desert had invaded the "land of Canaan,"
an invasion that coincided with one from the west by the Sea People, or Philis-
tines. By the tenth century the Canaanites, the presumed descendants of the in-
dividual upon whom the curse had fallen, had been conquered, and many of
them had been annihilated or enslaved. Yet it had become apparent that the
victorious Hebrews would have to share the land and the Canaanites with those

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[2] For efforts of critical scholars to solve some of the riddles posed by the story, see *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*,
introduction, translation, and notes by E. A. Speiser (Garden City, N.Y., 1964), s.v. "Noah and His Sons," 60–
63; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Ham," by A. Vajda; "Nuh [Noah]," by Bernard Heller. For the possible sexual
implications of the Hebrew word *'erwat* (nakedness) see F. W. Basset, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of
Canaan: A Case of Incest?" *Vetus Testamentum*, 21 (1971): 232–39. Interpretations of this kind go back at least
to the rabbinical literature of the fourth to the sixth centuries. See *b. Sanhedrin*, 70a (Isidore Epstein, ed., *The
Babylonian Talmud*, 35 vols. [London, 1935–52], 28: 477); English-language editions are cited in parentheses fol-
lowing the standard rabbinical reference. For historical interpretations, see note 5, below.
[3] *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, s.v. "Myth and Symbol," by Victor W. Turner, 577.
[4] Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (New York, 1945), 26. For the relationship be-
tween myth and social tension, also see B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (New York, 1926), 58–59;
and E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954),
277–78.

other conquerors, the Philistines, who thus become in myth the sons of Japheth, dwelling "in the tents of Shem."[5] If the story, despite its incorporation in the Jewish and Christian canons, seems to lack what many later readers liked to think of as the essential elements of divine justice, it at least has the merit of explaining events of history, which often seem to lack the essential elements of divine justice. The tradition provided a militarily successful people with religious sanction. It also provides an example of how myth translates the complex events of history into simple personal terms.

The story seems to say that all mankind is descended from the household of Noah, the single family that survived the Flood, and that one branch of the family of man is fated to perpetual slavery. In its original form, however, Noah's curse seems to justify the enslavement of a people, but a people who were racially indistinguishable from their conquerors. Indeed, according to the biblical account, the enslavers and the enslaved were descended from brothers. As yet the tradition showed no color bias.[6] The Hebrews of the first millennium B.C., like other ancient peoples, did not associate slavery with any particular race. But, if ancient slavery was racially nonspecific, it was by no means ethnically so. There were always some peoples considered more appropriate for enslavement than others.[7] For the purpose of understanding the rise of modern Western racial prejudices, it is important to consider the historical process whereby a people acquires or loses a slavish reputation, whereby slavery acquires or loses an ethnic identification.

The history of ancient Israel brings some light to this process, because the slavish reputation of the conquered Canaanites was the result of the position they occupied within the newly created Hebrew kingdom. David, Solomon, and their successors ruled an ethnically stratified society in which the ethnic distribution of power was celebrated by the Hamitic myth. The practice of slavery was by no means new to the Israelites during the period of the monarchy, nor had their modest conquests created vast armies of slaves such as those that flowed into the late Roman Republic. Yet the increase in slaveholding was sufficient to influence their lives and their thinking in a number of ways. "Canaanite slavery," for example, became the most debased form of exploitation that they knew, transmitting to each successive generation the meaning of the conquest and underscoring a difference in status between persons descended from the conqueror and those descended from the vanquished.

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[5] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John Marks (rev. ed., London, 1972), 134–35. For a summary of scholarly opinions on the dating of the story, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1: *Genesis, 1–11* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany, 1974), 656–57.

[6] See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 18; and Ephraim Isaac, "Biblical and Rabbinic Understanding of the Curse of Noah," *Sidic: Journal of the Service international de documentation judéo-chrétienne*, 11 (1978): 25. For racial perceptions in the biblical and Greco-Roman worlds, see R. A. Bennett, Jr., "Africa and the Biblical Period," *Harvard Theological Review*, 64 (1971): 489–90; and Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

[7] Eduard Meyer, *Die Sklaverei im Altertum* (Dresden, 1898), 10–11; Henri Levy-Bruhl, "Esquisse d'une théorie sociologique de l'esclavage à Rome," in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies*, ed. M. I. Finley (Cambridge, 1960), 152–55; and M. I. Finley, "Was Greek Civilisation Based on Slave Labour?" in *ibid.*, 60–61.

Furthermore, Canaanite slavery changed power relationships within the Israelite community, increasing the hierarchical character of society. Previously, the Israelites had had neither true kings nor state slavery, which involved the harshest use of captives. Ironically, state slavery not only further degraded the reputation of the vanquished but also enabled the kings to function with a certain despotic independence that would not have been possible for the earlier leaders, whose authority had been derived from ties of religion and kinship with their followers. Royal captives worked in state enterprises such as the copper mines and refineries of 'Arabah, which gave the king an income for which he did not have to answer to his subjects. This enabled him to hire foreign mercenary troops, making him less dependent upon the popular levy (1 Chron. 18:11; 2 Sam. 20:23).[8] There were also the *netinim*, the temple slaves, descendants of war captives, "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation" (Josh. 9:21–27; also see Num. 31:26–47). The *netinim* functioned to enhance the power and prestige of the state religion.

Had the reputation of the Canaanites depended upon state and temple slavery, it probably would not have survived the downfall of the monarchy and the destruction of the first Temple. But many more Canaanites served in Hebrew homes, and household slavery continued to be a feature of Jewish communities for more than two thousand years. Household slaves probably received considerably better treatment than could be expected in the royal slave gangs. Their treatment, furthermore, unlike that of either state or temple slaves, was governed by biblical injunctions. These regulations reflected the ethnic distribution of power established by the conquest of Canaan. A type of servitude existed even for Hebrews. Because of poverty, or because he had been convicted of certain crimes, a Hebrew might lose his freedom. But this did not make him an *eved Kanaani*, a Canaanite slave. The laws and customs of the conquerors protected even their least successful or most delinquent members. Legally, he could not be sold against his will to a non-Hebrew. He could not be required to do certain types of work that were considered degrading (Deut. 25:39–40). He had legal recourse if mistreated. He had the right to be freed at the end of a six-year term (Deut. 15:12–18). Though these servants were *eved Ivri*, sometimes translated as "Hebrew slaves," their actual status more closely resembled that of the indentured servants of the seventeenth-century English colonies. The real slaves held by Hebrew masters were the "Canaanite slaves," whose legal enslavement was compounded by ethnic debasement (Lev. 25:29–46).[9]

[8] Nelson Gluck, "The Boundaries of Edom," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 11 (1936): 148–49; Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine from the Middle of the Third Millennium to the End of the First Millennium* (New York, 1949), 96; and Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh, (New York, 1961), 89, 95, 123, 129.

[9] E. E. Urbach, "The Laws regarding Slavery as a Source for Social History of the Period of the Second Temple, the Mishnah, and Talmud," in Institute of Jewish Studies, University of London, *Papers of the Institute*, 1, ed. J. G. Weiss (Jerusalem, 1964): 26–27; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 80–83; David Farbstein, *Das Recht der unfreien und der freien Arbeiter nach jüdisch-talmudischem Recht* (Bern, 1896), 9–11; Zadoc Kahn, *L'esclavage selon la Bible et le Talmud* (Paris, 1867), 198–99; Simon Rubin, "Ein Kapitel aus der Sklaverei im talmudischen und römischen Rechte," in S. Krauss, ed., *Festschrift für Adolf Schwartz zum siebzigsten Geburtstag, 15 Juli 1916* (Berlin, 1917), 212; and Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, 105–06, 152.

In most societies it is unnecessary to explain the use of a double standard in the treatment of people of one's own kind and members of some out-group. Outsiders are treated differently because everything about them seems different. Furthermore, they are often perceived as inferior because, since most societies are ethnocentric, outsiders are judged by the only standards that one knows, that is, by the appearance, the speech, the customs of one's own group; and one's eyes and ears tell how badly an outsider falls short of the mark. As long as captives are ethnically distinct from their captors, their discriminatory treatment calls for no further apology.

Yet, as has been characteristic of other slave systems, Hebrew slavery functioned in conflict with its own justifying ideology. On the one hand, because the Canaanites were different, they could be required to do demeaning work, and they could be held to lifelong and hereditary servitude. But, on the other, the daily operation of the slavery system, with intimate contact between slaves and owners, inevitably made the Canaanites less different, as they assimilated the religion, the customs, and speech habits of the dominant group. Inevitably, ties of religion, friendship, and kinship arose between bond and free. Slaveholders occasionally wrote wills freeing their slaves who were sometimes their kinsmen or fellow believers, thereby denying heritable servants to their legitimate children.[10] By one means or another, a number of slaves in each generation ceased to be slaves.

Yet slavery did not disappear, nor did the marginal status of the conquered population disappear. Legalists continued to distinguish between "Canaanite" and "Hebrew" slaves, though these two groups shared the same religion and culture. Throughout the centuries of the monarchs, the descendants of the vanquished remained *gerim*, "sojourners" in the land of their birth. After the Babylonian Captivity they became "proselytes." Their name had changed but their marginal status had not.[11] For a conservative process was functioning within Hebrew and, later, Jewish society that inhibited the total assimilation of converts to Jewish religion and culture, a process that maintained ancient distinctions established by distant wars of conquest. To understand how this process functioned we must look beyond the experience of the Jews and take a broader view of slave-holding societies.

THE PROCESS WHEREBY SLAVERY, especially household slavery, becomes ameliorated finds expression on the plane of ideas as paternalism. As the name implies, "paternalism" is associated with the patriarch, the head of a large, hierarchical household. The introduction of slaves into such a household enormously increases the authority of the patriarch in a way that is analogous to the manner

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[10] J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, trans. Aslang Møller, 1 (London, 1926): 40–41; Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans L'Empire romain, leur condition juridique, économique, et sociale*, 2 (New York, 1914): 81; Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 16 vols. (1937; 2d ed., rev. and enl., New York, 1952-), 1: 267–70; Urbach, "The Laws regarding Slavery as a Source for Social History," 48, *passim*; and David Farbstein, *Die Stellung der Juden zur Rassen- und Fremdenfrage* (Zurich, 1939), 21–22, 24, 27–28, 33.

[11] Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 40–41; and de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 74–76.

in which the acquisition of state slaves by a king enhances his despotic independence. Because slaves lighten household chores, the "real" members of the family are likely to welcome the addition of these fictitious members up until that critical moment when the patriarch awards to a slave something that a free person wants for himself: a particularly competent slave is given a responsibility that a son covets; an adored bastard stands closer to the power of the patriarch than a legitimate child; or a young slave sleeps in a bed that a legal wife thinks is her rightful domain. In brief, the patriarch has created what Marc Henri Piault has called the "scandalous paradox": a person who possesses neither legal rights nor social status has been given preference over one who possesses both.[12] In creating such tensions, a patriarch may merely be indulging his preferences. But, if he chooses, he can always favor a servile over a free member of the household, and this option serves to bring legitimate members of his family under tighter control.

Invariably, the free but dependent members of the patriarchial family, who may be called "legitimists," react to the scandalous paradox. Sometimes the legitimist backlash comes with fearful violence, and the recipients of paternalistic favoritism discover the fragility of such benevolence. In Hebrew tradition the slave woman, Hagar, having become pregnant by Abraham, suffered harsh treatment at the hands of the patriarch's legitimate wife and fled into the wilderness. Abraham did not lift a finger to help her (Gen. 16:1–6). In a more modern slave society there are reports of young concubines having their eyes gouged out by the jealous wives of plantation owners.[13] Status anxieties, unleashed by the scandalous paradox, may trigger pogroms, lynchings, and race riots. But there is a less dramatic, yet highly important, way that legitimists defend their privileges: it is primarily they who perpetuate tradition, who educate children, who shape status-sustaining ideology. As individuals they may not be as powerful as the patriarch, particularly during his years of greatest vigor. But they outnumber him. The household does not function well without their cooperation. Their ideas tend to be regarded as the more respectable ones of slave-holding societies, while those of the paternalist, if the ideas go beyond empty words, are looked on as eccentric if not subversive.[14] So to any status confusion that the patriarch in his senility may be generating, they reply with the clear-cut claims of the legitimate family. The pretensions of all others are the consequence of sin and abomination. In brief, slave-holding societies are character-

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[12] Piault, "Captifs du pouvoir et pouvoir des captifs," in Claude Meillassoux, *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 333, *passim*.

[13] Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, trans. Samuel Putnam (2d Eng. ed., New York, 1956), 351. Also see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 333. In slave and former slave societies, furthermore, the traditionally free population, especially highly insecure groups such as immigrants, finding themselves in a position analogous to free but dependent persons in a servile household, have often embraced the myths and cruelties of legitimacy with all the passion of neophytes.

[14] Thus in 1776, when Henry Laurens of South Carolina considered freeing some of his slaves, he anticipated that he would encounter the opposition of his children and that their views would be sustained by the community. Robert Carter of Virginia did, indeed, arouse the opposition of his sons and neighbors in 1791 by freeing five hundred slaves. See Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South: The Emergence of a Reluctant Nation* (New York, 1975), 368, 370.

ized by a tension between two *elite*-class, ideological tendencies: paternalism, associated with the patriarch, which functions toward the elimination of slaves as a distinct status group within the hierarchy of the patriarchial family; and legitimacy, associated with the free, dependent members of the household, which incubates traditions, myths, and sexual taboos serving to protect old distinctions of status and privilege.

THIS TENSION BETWEEN PATERNALISM AND LEGITIMACY may explain why Jewish society, despite its strong paternalistic impulse, for centuries held at a distance the *gerim* and proselytes: marginal status groups that shared its faith and culture. In order for free-born but dependent legitimists to maintain a sharp distinction between themselves and such socially marginal groups as slaves, they either had to cultivate some new defensive ideology, as the original ethnocentric justification was reduced to fiction, as Canaanites became assimilated to the "chosen people," or find new sources of slaves to replace those assimilated and emancipated. Both of these circumstances were present in the Hebrew kingdoms of the first millenium B.C. and in the later Jewish communities of the ancient and medieval Near East.

As to the first of these circumstances, the Hebrew legitimists, if they were to defend the line of social stratification defining their influence and privileges, had to cultivate some distance-creating idea that denied the legitimacy of the social ties that inevitably arose between bond and free. In the ancient and medieval Near East the necessary distance was created by the Hamitic myth, which always made possible a shift in the interpretation of the lowly status of the Canaanites from grounds of ethnic distance to grounds of birth. As Canaanites increasingly adopted Hebrew religion and customs and as their degradation became more difficult to explain by the inferiority of their culture, it could still be explained by Noah's curse on Canaan—that is, by the inferiority of their birth. Differences in ancestry, however, are not always as obvious to the eye and ear as those of language and custom. People making castelike distinctions, therefore, often appeal to a justifying myth. American scholars have sometimes thought that there is no way as effective in marking a status frontier as a cluster of ideas associated with skin color. Yet a myth also serves fairly well: two thousand years after the conquest of Canaan, the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, in compiling a slave code, was still observing a distinction between "Canaanite" and "Hebrew" slaves.[15]

Undoubtedly, the general acceptance of this Curse of Noah slowed down the process of assimilation and emancipation. Nevertheless, even as early as the beginning of the Christian era, there were no longer enough bona fide Sons of Ham available to meet the demand for slaves. Since it proved to be easier to stretch the definition of "Canaanite" than it was to find new sources of slaves

[15] Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, Book Twelve: Acquisitions, Treatise V: Laws Concerning Slaves (Isaac Klein, trans., *The Code of Maimonides*, Yale Judaica Series, ed. Julian Obermann, 20 vols. [New Haven, 1951], 5: 245–81).

locally, the custom arose of importing "Canaanites" into the ancient land of Ca-
naan. During the first Christian centuries most "Canaanites" were in fact either
Syrians or *Kushim* from black Africa.[16] In the early Middle Ages the concept was
stretched even further. In the ninth and tenth centuries, for example, as a result
of intertribal wars in the area of modern Yugoslavia, thousands of captives from
that region flooded the medieval slave markets. Some of these were sold as "Ca-
naanites" in the Jewish communities of the Near East.[17] The subtlety of the the-
ologian and the craft of the lawyer could transform blue-eyed Slavs and black-
skinned *Kushim* alike into fellow descendants of Canaan, both laboring under
the same devastating curse, the validity of which had grown no weaker over the
centuries than had the demand for slaves.

The "sons of Ham" had thus begun their journey that would lead them along
the tedious and twisted paths of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian theology and ju-
risprudence and would bring them one day to the shores of Guinea and beyond.
But, before considering the historical pressures that darkened their faces and
changed the way their hair grew, the problem of the justification of slavery in
Europe needs to be examined. After all, slavery played a less prominent part in
the life of the early Jews than it did in the Greco-Roman lands to the west.

MORE WIDELY ACCEPTED than the Hamitic myth during antiquity was a
"sambo" perception of slaves. Roman, Greek, and Hebrew masters all referred
to the fully adult men and women they owned by the linguistical equivalents of
"boy" and "girl." European slaveholders, moreover, would have found little to
disagree with in the views of ancient Talmudists, who believed that slaves had a
predilection for lying, laziness, theft, drunkenness, and lewdness.[18] Furthermore,
the Europeans, like the peoples of the Near East, engaged in the stereotyping of
slaves. But beyond the "sambo" perception, which all shared, the stereotypes
that emerged in the two regions were different. In Europe for a time, Scythians
were regarded as a slavish people. Then Thrace became an important source of
supply for the slave trade and Thracian characteristics, such as red hair, came to
be regarded as slave characteristics. An actor on the Roman stage wore a red
wig as a signal to the audience that he was playing the role of a slave. The Thra-

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[16] J. Klausner, "The Economy of Judea in the Period of the Second Temple," in Michael Avi-yonah *et al.*,
eds., *The Herodian Period*, vol. 7 of *The World History of the Jewish People*, ed. Cecil Roth (New Brunswick, N.J.,
1975), 194; and Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2: 259-60.

[17] Cecil Roth, "Economic Life and Population Movements," in Cecil Roth, ed., *The Dark Ages: The Jews in
Christian Europe, 711-1096*, vol. 11 of *World History of the Jewish People*, 27-28; Ivan Hrbek, "Die Sklaven im
Dienste der Fatimiden," *Archiv Orientáli*, 21 (1953): 549-50; and Johannes Hoffmann, "Die östliche Adriaküste
als Hauptnachschubbasis für den venezianischen Sklavenhandel bis zum Ausgang des elften Jahrhunderts,"
Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, 55 (1968): 172, 180.

[18] Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 1: 269-70; and Henri Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans
l'antiquité*, 2 (Paris, 1847): 8. For the same tradition among the Arabs, see Adam Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*,
trans. S. H. Bakhsh (Patna, India, 1967), 162. "Sambo," the Hausa word for "second son," in American usage
has come to designate a stereotype of the American black, who has been depicted as "docile but irresponsible,
loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness
and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration"; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional
Life* (3d ed., Chicago, 1976), 82. This work is a much-disputed interpretation of the "sambo" stereotype.

cian name, "Rufus," came to be regarded as a typical slave name regardless of the slave's nationality.[19]

In response to patterns of political disorder or military conquest, however, the principal source of European slaves kept shifting, and early ethnic stereotypes lost all credibility. Various Western European nationalities at times became important sources of slaves, although not for a long enough period for any of them to acquire a slavish reputation. Gaul, for example, was an important source immediately after the Roman conquest in the first century B.C. And the political and ethnic fragmentation of Britain, following the collapse of Roman power, briefly created a surplus of slaves for export in that country.[20] In the later Middle Ages, as stable governments emerged in the West, the source of European slaves became confined increasingly to the lands around the Black Sea, areas that continued to feed the Mediterranean slave trade from remote antiquity down to the beginning of modern times. Because every major ethnic stereotype of European slaves has been drawn from this region, a glance at its history may shed some light on how certain peoples acquire a slavish reputation.

Since prehistoric times the rich black soil country north and west of the Black Sea has attracted settlers. But this territory has been the scene of a repetitive disaster. Periodically, nomadic invaders from Central Asia have overrun the western steppes, annihilating the inhabitants or selling them into slavery. Ironically, those escaping the invaders and taking refuge in the Caucasus Mountains to the east of the Black Sea helped create still another source for the slave trade. The remnants of many peoples have intruded into the territory of earlier refugees where they competed for the resources of a region in which much land is nonproductive or marginal. Modern Caucasia is one of the most ethnically complex regions of the world. More than fifty languages are spoken in an area slightly larger than California.[21] In ancient times the ethnic fragmentation may have been even greater. Strabo reported that seventy languages were used in a trading town located near modern Sukhumi, and Pliny the Elder says the Romans in the same area used one hundred and thirty interpreters "for the purpose of transacting business."[22] From antiquity until modern times the poverty and the ethnic conflict of the region delivered a continuing stream of Caucasians to the

[19] M. L. Gordon, "The Nationality of Slaves under the Early Roman Empire," in Finley, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*, 174.

[20] But a measure of reunification took place within a hundred years, although some young Englishmen were still being shipped out of Bristol as late as the eleventh century. See Marc Bloch, "Comment et pourquoi finit l'esclavage antique," in Finley, *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*, 224–26; and Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, vol. 1: *Péninsule Ibérique-France* (Brugge, 1955), vol. 2: *Italie, colonies italiennes du Levant, Levant latin, Empire byzantin* (Ghent, 1977), 1: 701.

[21] Moses I. Finley, "The Black Sea and the Danubian Regions and the Slave Trade in Antiquity," *Klio: Beiträge zur alten Geschichte*, 40 (1962): 51–55; *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, translation of the 1973 edition, s.v. [Caucasus] "Historical Survey" by S. A. Zalesskii; Bernard Geiger *et al.*, *Peoples and Languages of the Caucasus: A Synopsis* (The Hague, 1959); and William H. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier, 1500–1800* (Chicago, 1964).

[22] Strabo, *Geography*, 11: 2, 16; and Pliny, *Natural History*, 6: 5. Some relationship appears to exist between this ethnic diversity and the political fragmentation that has characterized Caucasia and other slave-exporting regions. During the eleventh century, for example, in the one-hundred-and-ninety-mile stretch between Lake Van and the Black Sea coast, there are reported to have been some dozen rival "kingdoms." W. E. D. Allen, *A History of the Georgian People from the Beginning down to the Russian Conquest in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1932), 85.

slave traders. During the later Middle Ages certain Caucasian peoples such as the Circassians, the Abkhaz, and the Mingrelians were scarcely known outside of their native region except as slaves. Ibn Botlan, an eleventh-century Arabic-speaking Christian physician of Baghdad, described another Caucasian people in distinctly slavish terms:

> The Armenian is the worst of the white, as the negro is of the black. . . . Chastity is unknown and theft is rampant among them. But they know not avarice. Coarse is their nature and coarse is their speech. Let an Armenian slave be an hour without work and he will get into mischief. He only works under the threat of the cane or the stress of fear. When you find him lazy—it is simply because he delights in laziness and not because he does not feel equal to work. You must then take to the cane, chastise him and make him do what you want.[23]

Long debased by powerlessness, poverty, and slavery, Caucasian peoples have also been burdened with a "sambo"-like reputation that persisted a long time indeed. Even in the late nineteenth century an influential encyclopedia could write of a group of nationalities who lived in what is now the Soviet Republic of Georgia that "the one trait of these generally very poor populations is their carefree attitude. Living from day to day, these peoples think only of adorning themselves in brightly colored clothes that bring out their physical good looks. Singing and dancing are their favorite pleasures. Despite their mediocre intelligence these Caucasians know how to capture the sympathy of foreigners by their grand hospitality and gay friendly manner."[24]

During the late Middle Ages, however, the most prominent stereotypes of European slaves were not derived from the steady trickle of humanity flowing from Caucasian lands but from the larger disasters and more numerous peoples to the north and west of the Caucasians. In the late fourteenth century, for example, when Tamerlane's armies overran the Golden Horde, the slave markets of Italy were flooded with Tartars—a situation that created for a time a Tartar stereotype for slaves in that country.[25] The Slavic peoples of the area suffered a similar fate. Indeed, far more important than the brief Tartar stereotype was the Slavic one, which predominated during the latter half of the Middle Ages in many countries. The Slavs inhabitated, in addition to the western steppes, other areas that made them vulnerable. Many lived on the Balkan peninsula, which, like Caucasia, was an ethnically and politically fragmented mountain refuge for defeated peoples of the steppes. For centuries Balkan Slavs were victims of the Venetian slave traders. Also victims were the Central European Slavs, who lived in the path of the German medieval eastward expansion, the *Drang nach Osten.* In

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[23] Ibn Botlan, "Introduction to the Art of Making Good Purchases of Slaves," as quoted in Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, 162. In certain contexts, especially when comparing themselves to more northerly peoples, Arabs of this period thought of themselves as "black"; see Karl Vollers, "Über Rassenfarben in der arabischen Literatur," in G. Pitrè *et al.*, eds., *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari* (Palermo, 1910), 87; and Wolfdietrich Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen in der Sprache der altarabischen Dichtung* (Wiesbaden, 1965), 338.

[24] *La Grande Encyclopédie* [1885–92 ed.], s.v. "Caucase," by P. Lemosof.

[25] Domenico Gioffrè, *Il mercato degli schiavi a Genova nel secolo XV* (Genoa, 1971), 13–14; and *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Golden Horde," by V. I. Buganov.

virtually every language in Western Europe, the word for slave derives from this politically fragmented and perpetually vulnerable people.[26]

WHILE SHIFTING ETHNIC STEREOTYPES FOR SLAVES emerged in ancient and medieval Europe, a relatively stable, *racial* stereotype for slaves emerged at the same time in the Near East. Just as most European slaves, and all of the major stereotypes of them, were drawn from the perpetually vulnerable peoples around the Black Sea, so the peoples of black Africa played a corresponding role in the slave trade of the Near East. As Near Eastern slaves more and more came from below the Sahara, the people of the Near East increasingly equated "slaves" with "Negroes." Crucial though this development is for understanding the evolution of the Hamitic myth and the origins of modern racial prejudice in general, the various stages of the process cannot be dated with absolute certainty. Its broad outlines, however, are known. The New Testament contains no hint of any identification of "slave" with "Negro." To be sure, these books from the later first and early second centuries are in Hellenistic Greek and leave the imprint of Hellenism on certain traditions of the Semitic-speaking peoples. In the Babylonian Talmud and certain Jewish midrashim there is a suggestion, albeit tenuous, of such identification. These works, which scholars have ascribed to the fourth through the sixth centuries A.D. (or C.E.), seem to betray little European influence. The equation of "slave" with "Negro" is missing, however, from the Quran (Koran), a highly indigenous Arabian work of the early seventh century. Only from the eighth century on, in several types of Muslim literature, does the fusion of the notions of "black" and "debasement" appear unmistakably and continually.

The differences between European and Near Eastern stereotypes for slaves resulted from the differing nature of the slave trade in the two regions. In Europe, until very late in the Middle Ages, not only the African slave trade but also all direct trade with sub-Saharan Africa was of minor importance. The world's greatest desert posed a formidable barrier between the two regions. Not until the second half of the fifteenth century was the Sahara bypassed on the west and relatively easy maritime contact established between Europe and black Africa. But some three thousand years earlier the Sahara was bypassed on the east. Even as early as the Middle Kingdom in the second millennium B.C., the Egyptians constructed a Nile–Red Sea canal and established Red Sea ports serving

[26] Meyer, *Die Sklaverei im Altertum*, 11; Hrbek, "Sklaven im Dienste der Fatimiden," 547, 552; Hoffmann, "Die östliche Adriaküste als Hauptnachschubbasis für den venezianischen Sklavenhandel," 170, 172, 179, *passim*; and Antonio Teja, "Aspetti della vita economica di Zara dal 1289 al 1409," pt. 2: "La schiavitù domestica ed il traffico degli schiavi," *La Rivista Dalmatica*, 22 (1941): 29–30. For the derivation of the word slave in various languages, see Verlinden, *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, 2: 999–1010. Another study yields still further evidence for the slavish reputation of medieval Slavs. The Arabic term for "eunuch" is derived from the ethnic root *Sakhab* (Slav), while the Catalonian term *esclavó* (castrated goat) and the Spanish *eslabón* (link of chain) are likewise taken from the name of East European captives who were sometimes castrated or chained. See Henry Kahane and Renée Kahane, "Notes on the Linguistic History of Sclavus," in *Studi in onore di Ettore Lo Gatto e Giovanni Maver* (Florence, 1962), 346, 350–51, 357.

their trade with black Africa. Early in the first millennium B.C., the first He-
brew kingdom also had such a port (1 Kings 9:26–28). Furthermore, the Nile
valley, fertile and densely settled, led like a road from the Mediterranean to
black Africa.[27]

From remote antiquity the Near East imported slaves from black Africa.
Egyptian paintings depict Negro captives. For a very long time this trade was
relatively small though growing. Probably as late as the seventh century A.D.
more local natives than blacks were sold as slaves in the Near East. Before the
establishment of Islam, this ancient battleground of nations, itself, supplied con-
siderable numbers of captives to the slave trade. It may have been as late as A.D.
1000 before the institution of slavery in the Near East and Muslim lands be-
came predominantly Negro slavery.[28] But long before a majority of slaves were
black, perhaps several centuries before, enough Africans were sold in the Near
East to form the basis for a racial stereotype for the region comparable to the
Thracian or the later Slavic stereotypes farther west. While still a minority of
the servile population, blacks could be recognized as members of the lowest
status group, foreign slaves, those sold beyond reach of kin and hope of ransom.
This bottom stratum of the society, which included only a small minority of the
white population, accounted for the overwhelming majority of the blacks. It was
they who became the instantly visible "Canaanites," the archetypal "sons of
Ham."[29]

More than ten centuries separate the appearance of the story of Ham in the
book of Genesis from the elaboration and explanation of the tale that occurs in
rabbinic literature. During these centuries the face of servitude had darkened in
the Near East. In retelling the story, one rabbi correspondingly darkened the
face of Ham and made the curse of Noah read, "Your seed will be ugly and
dark-skinned." If this writer magnified the curse, another likewise increased the
offense for which it was a punishment: "Ham and the dog copulated in the Ark,
therefore Ham came forth black-skinned, while the dog publicly exposes its cop-
ulation."[30] Still another commentator further vilified the delinquent ancestor of
slaves by suggesting that Ham had not only looked upon his father's nakedness

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[27] José Antonio Saco, *Historia de la esclavitud desde los tiempos mas remotos hasta nuestros días*, 1 (2d ed., Havana,
1936): 23–25; and Levi Herzfeld, *Handelsgeschichte der Juden des Altertums* (Braunschweig, 1879), 128, 221–22,
233. For a discussion of caravan trade and the Sahara as a barrier, see E. W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the
Moors* (New York, 1958). For the navigational problems that delayed the development of a sea route around
the western Sahara, see Raymond Mauny, *Les navigations médiévales sur les côtes sahariennes antérieures à la découverte
portugaise* (Lisbon, 1960). For evidence of a black slave trade in Pharaonic times, see Wallon, *Histoire de
l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, 1: 27; for the trade in the first century A.D., Raymond Mauny, trans., *Périple de la mer
Erythrée* (Paris, 1968), 25–26; and, for the early Islamic period, Y. F. Husan, *The Arabs and the Sudan from the
Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1967), 42–50.

[28] That slaves were predominantly black in Egypt during the period ca. 950–1250 is evident from the Gen-
iza documents. See S. D. Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1: *Economic Foundations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles,
1967), 130–47. Also see Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, 157–58; and Gernot Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in
der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft bis XVI Jahrhundert" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wil-
helms-Universität, Bonn, 1967), 52. Rotter's fine doctoral dissertation has been my chief authority on Muslim
race relations and racial attitudes.

[29] Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam* (New York, 1971), 27–28.

[30] *Bereshith Rabbah*, 36. 7 (H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans. and eds. *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. [Lon-
don, 1959], 1: 293). Also see *b. Sanhedrin*, 108b (Epstein, *Babylonian Talmud*, 20: 745).

but had castrated him as well.[31] Clearly, a person who believed these words and accepted the biblical tradition of hereditary sin had to conclude that the treatment slaves were getting was about what they deserved. And, indeed, such conclusions, along with fragments of the rabbinic commentary, have been echoed down over the centuries, from Babylon to New Orleans, often by men who have been generally innocent of any other bits of Hebrew learning.

The racial stereotyping of slaves by Jews does not appear to have been elaborated beyond the rabbinic expressions of the period from the fourth to the sixth century. During the Middle Ages the Jews became to a larger extent a European as well as a Near Eastern people, and they came to share the stereotypes of both regions. Blacks continued to be "Canaanites"; but at the same time, by some logic best understood by theologians and lawyers, the Slavonic language, ancestor of the modern Slavic languages, became the "language of Canaan."[32] After the sixth century, it was those less Europeanized sons of Shem, the Arabs, who further developed the tradition of Ham.

SIXTH-CENTURY, PRE-ISLAMIC ARABS may have already begun to equate blacks with slavery and debasement, although the evidence is questionable.[33] Such an equation is not to be found in the Quran or in the early Islamic movement of the next century. All races were welcomed into the faith, and the Quran lashes out against pride in family lineage, adding that the "most honoured . . . in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous." And the Quran views the linguistic and racial differences of man without any Arab ethnocentrism but sees them as a manifestation of a divine miracle.[34] Furthermore, in Muslim society, as in Jewish society, slavery never became the predominant labor system. The Quran possibly reaffirms the Semitic tradition concerning the descendants of Ham. It is free, however, of the color prejudice that seems to have influenced slightly earlier rabbinic versions of the tradition; and there is no condemnation to slavery. Rather than a curse, it contains a vaguely directed threat coming not from Noah but from God himself: when the waters of the Great Flood had subsided, God commanded Noah to "come down from the Ark with peace from us, and blessings on thee and on *some* of the peoples who will spring from those with thee: but there will be other peoples to whom we shall grant their pleasures for a

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[31] *Wayyikra Rabbah*, 17.5 (Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4: 219).

[32] A twelfth-century Jewish scholar, arriving in Prague from Germany, wrote, "Here begins Sclavonia, called by the Jews who inhabit it *Kh'na'an*, because the inhabitants sell their children to all nations, which is also applicable to Russia"; *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. A. Asher (New York, n.d.), 164. For Slavonic as the "language of Canaan," see Jacob Winter, *Die Stellung der Sklaven bei den Juden in rechtlicher und gesellschaftlicher Beziehung* (Halle, 1886), 5–6, n. 5.

[33] One Islamic scholar has given some weight to this evidence; see Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 25, 75–78. Another has held that antiblack statements attributed to sixth-century poets "almost certainly belong to later periods and reflect later problems . . ."; see Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam*, 9.

[34] Quran, 49: 13, 30: 22 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans. [Mecca, 1956]). But, since Arabic is the sacred language of Islam, an element of ethnocentrism was inescapable.

time, but in the end will a grievous penalty reach them from us."[35] In years to
come Muslim slaveholders would make considerable use of the Hamitic myth,
but the Quranic version would not prove to be their most effective weapon.

In view of the broad-minded ethnic and social attitudes of the Prophet as well
as the noblest of his followers, it is ironic that the lands of Islam became the
cradle of modern racial stratification and of many of the ideas that are still used
to justify special privileges defined by skin color and other racial characteristics.
Muslims aspired to a universal brotherhood of believers. But prominent among
their actual achievements was the forging of new links between blackness and
debasement. It was under the Muslims that slavery became largely a racial insti-
tution.

An important reason why Muslim slavery became Negro slavery was because
the rise of Islam eliminated from the Mediterranean slave trade an important
source of light-skinned slaves. Previously, the military and political disorder of
the Near East had filled the slave markets with captives; as long as these condi-
tions persisted, most slaves remained racially indistinguishable from their mas-
ters.[36] But the Muslim ideal of brotherhood united the Bedouins, redirected
their fierce fighting qualities outward, and assimilated their energies into a dra-
matic campaign of conquest. When the frontiers of Islam became comparatively
stabilized, one hundred years after the death of the Prophet, the movement had
established Muslim hegemony over a vast area extending from the Iberian pen-
insula to the borders of China. The political reality of unity found an idealized
expression in the Sunna, or Islamic law, which held that no freeborn Muslim
could be sold into slavery. Nor could a "dhimmi"—that is, a person who re-
mained a Jew or a Christian but who lived under the protection of a Muslim
government—be legally enslaved.[37] If the highly assimilationist Muslim system
of slavery was to endure, new sources of captives had to be found outside of the
Dar al-Islam, the countries living under the peace of Islam.

Lawful captives had to be taken either north of the Mediterranean or south of
the Sahara; and, indeed, until well into the modern period, Muslims acquired
slaves from each of these regions, though in highly unequal numbers. During
the later Middle Ages a number of European states developed, with sophisti-
cated military organizations that could answer the challenge of Islam blow for
blow. European rulers, furthermore, could often recover their captured subjects
by prisoner exchange or ransom.[38] But, basically, few European slaves were
available for purchase during the later Middle Ages because of the more orderly
political conditions in France, England, the German Empire, and other coun-
tries. As these states ceased producing a surplus of slaves for export, the supply

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[35] Quran, 11: 48; italics added. But, since slaves did not have "their pleasures for a time," the threat may
not be directed against the sons of Ham, as is sometimes supposed.

[36] Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, 1: 228.

[37] Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates," in P. M. Holt *et al.*, eds., *The Cam-
bridge History of Islam*, 1: 57–103; and *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., s.v. "Dhimma," by Claude Cahen.

[38] Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, 1: 541–43; and Iris Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The East-
ern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum*, 30 (1955): 328. Also see Hans
Müller, "Sklaven," in B. Spuler, ed., *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, pt. 1: *Der Nahe und der Mittlere Osten*, 6, sec. 6
(Leiden, 1977): 68–72.

from Europe was reduced to a minimum, and those came mainly from the Slavic lands.[39] Both in Europe and in black Africa the slave trade was governed by similar considerations. But, after about the eleventh century, political conditions south of the Sahara were more favorable to slave traders. To be sure, there were strong states in black Africa, such as those of the western Sudan, that protected their inhabitants from slave raids; but most black Africans lived in ethnically fragmented, often mutually antagonistic, societies that could offer little resistance to raids from the Sudanese or other Muslim states. It is no accident, therefore, that in late medieval Arabic poetry and popular literature *Banu Ham*, the "sons of Ham," is a synonym for *sudan*, the Negroes.[40]

Not only did slavery become largely a racial institution in a broad belt of countries extending from Andalusia to the Indian Ocean, but a related development also took place in these countries that forged even tighter links between blackness and debasement, links that have endured into the modern era. As early as the ninth century, racial stratification began to appear in *both* the servile *and* the free populations.

A line of racial stratification dividing the servile population can be seen in the evolution of two Arabic words. *'Abd* (plural *'abīd*), the classical term for slave, continued to be used in its original sense in legal and other formal literature. But in popular literature the term was no longer applied to a white, regardless of legal status. A European slave was now most often referred to as a *mamluk* (owned). *Mamluks* were rarer—and, hence, more expensive—than the *'abīd*.[41] European slaves, furthermore, had special uses that also enhanced their value— in prisoner exchanges, for example, to recover family members captured by Christians in the religious wars or to obtain substantial ransoms from wealthy families for Christian knights. Even those of a lower class origin were a potential source of ransom; for Europe, unlike black Africa, had well-organized institutions, such as *El Orden de la Merced*, that specialized in raising money to ransom Christian captives.[42] To be a white slave was to be a valuable slave, and in the history of servitude relative value, more than any other factor, influenced the treatment that an individual could expect.

[39] Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, 158. The Mediterranean slave trade was actually more complex than the above description suggests. Some slaves came from more distant lands such as Central Asia and even India. Also the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought about a vigorous revival of white slavery. But until 1453 the Christians controlled the Straits and, hence, access to the Black Sea source of slaves. See Albert Howe Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge, Mass., 1913), 45–61.

[40] Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 22, 141. *Sudan* as a geographical term is derived from *Bilad al-Sudan*, "the land of the blacks." For the relationship between state power and the slave trade in this region, see Marian Malowist, "Le Commerce d'or et d'esclaves au Soudan occidental," *Africana Bulletin*, 4 (1966): 61, *passim*.

[41] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., s.v. " 'Abd" by R. Brunschvig; and Eliyahu Ashtor, *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'orient médiéval* (Paris, 1969), 58–59, 361–63, 437–38. In Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries a "good-looking, but untrained white slave-girl fetched 1,000 dinars or more," while in Oman, near the mouth of the Persian Gulf, blacks were selling for the equivalent of 25–30 dinars; Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, 157–58. For the racial connotation that the word *'abd* assumed, see Leon Carl Brown, "Color in North Africa," in John Hope Franklin, ed., *Color and Race* (Boston, 1968), 193.

[42] Other such institutions included the Order of the Trinitaries, Santa Maria della Mercede, and Riscatto Schiavi. See Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, 1: 541–43; Origo, "Domestic Enemy," 328, 330; and Gioffrè, *Mercato degli schiavi a Genova*, 51–52 n. 115.

The favored treatment of *mamluks* is especially important because of the direction that the institution of slavery took in Islamic countries beginning roughly in the eighth century. The legitimist impulse all but collapsed.[43] Muslim patriarchs were, therefore, inhibited by few legal restrictions or social taboos in their paternalistic management of slaves, a development that resulted in hundreds of thousands of people, made captives by the wars of conquest, passing completely through the institution in about three generations to become fully integrated into Islamic society. Thus, Muslim slavery had few parallels in the degree of its paternalism. The "scandalous paradox" was everywhere in evidence as sons of slave mothers became sultans who governed through slave administrators, whose courts were protected by elite guards, entertained by highly trained musicians and dancers, all of whom were slaves. Though their servile status was more than a legal fiction, these slave elites sometimes exercised considerable power and enjoyed a splendid life style.[44] Under the Fatimid caliphate of the tenth and eleventh centuries, for example, *mamluks* of mostly Turkic or Slavic origin administered Egypt and other countries of the Near East and North Africa.

Black slaves, or *'abīd*, however, were less expensive and consequently more expendable. Tens of thousands of black Africans, for example, labored on land reclamation projects in Iraq. Blacks were also used in the copper and salt mines of the Sahara. Wherever the work was demanding and the conditions harsh, black slaves were likely to be found.[45] Furthermore, when slaves were emancipated, the old line of racial stratification that divided the servile population into *mamluks* and *'abīd* continued to affect their status as freedmen. Because of the almost unparalleled paternalism of Muslim slavery, patriarchs showed a marked tendency to assimilate fresh captives to Islamic culture, convert them, and later emancipate them.[46] Although creating a demand for freshly captured pagans, this process also produced a continuous growth of the freedman population. But

[43] Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 76–77, 131–35. Nevertheless, the legitimist tendency did not disappear, especially in the area of law. Muslim law, and, indeed, the legal systems of all slave-holding societies, have functioned conservatively—that is, toward maintaining as much of the original servile character of the society as possible. Thus, despite the towering legal authority of Quran 24: 30 ("And to those of your slaves who desire a deed of manumission, execute it for them, if ye know good in them, and give them a portion of the wealth of God which He hath given you"), the courts responded more sympathetically to the self-interests of heirs who were in their prime than they did to the piety of patriarchs who were aged or deceased. Later Muslim courts ruled that an owner could not by will alienate more than one-third of his estate. Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, 169.

[44] For a study of highly trained servile entertainers, see Albert Wesselski, "Die gelehrten Sklavinnen des Islams und ihr byzantinischen Vorbilder," *Archiv Orientální*, 9 (1937): 353–78. For revolts of free subjects against servile bureaucrats, see A. N. Poliak, "Les révoltes populaires en Egypte à l'époque des Mamelouks et leurs causes économiques," *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 8 (1934): 251–73. For examples of the conspicuously privileged slave in other cultural settings, see Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, 1: 189; and Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, 71. In slave and former slave societies with strong legitimist traditions, however, a much less dramatic advancement of a low-status person is required to create the scandalous paradox. To produce such a reaction in the United States, for example, it has often been sufficient for a Negro to appear driving a new Cadillac.

[45] For the use of black slaves in Saharan salt and copper mines, see Ibn Battuta, *Voyages d'ibn Battuta*, trans. and ed. Defremery C. Sanguinetti, 4 (Paris, 1879): 377, 440; and, in gold mines, see Hasan, *Arabs and the Sudan*, 50–63. For a revolt involving thousands of black slaves used in land reclamation projects in southern Iraq, see Alexandre Popovic, *La Révolte des esclaves en Iraq au IIIᵉ/IXᵉ siècles* (Paris, 1976).

[46] Samuel Sheridan Haas, "The Contributions of Slaves to and Their Influence upon the Culture of Early Islam" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1942), 10–11, 39–52, *passim*; and Michael Brett, ed., *Northern Africa: Islam and Modernization* (London, 1973), 2–3.

blacks fared more poorly than whites as freedmen just as they had as slaves. Even the term *'abīd* still clung to them in freedom, linking them to the lowest stratum of the servile population. Behind this lingustic tie lay the reality that they had moved from the lowest stratum of the servile population to a corresponding position in free society. And *'abīd* no longer denoted their legal status; instead it identified their race. By the ninth century, therefore, the process of enslaving, assimilating, converting, and freeing Negroes had, in a series of Muslim cities from Andalusia to Persia, created a class of blacks who, though legally free, still worked as butchers, bath attendants, and the like, who still toiled in lowly occupations similar to those they had pursued as slaves.[47] Emancipation did not dramatically change what one saw blacks doing; in popular usage they were still *'abīd,* "slaves."

Despite the general polarization of Muslim society into low-status blacks and high-status whites, no clearly defined color bar emerged. Muslim countries have, therefore, produced some notable examples of the overlapping of racial status groups. Tenth-century Egypt, for instance, had a *de facto* black ruler. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an elite guard of blacks held the balance of power in Morocco; two centuries later it was ruled by Sultan Mulay Hasan, whose mother was black.[48] One of the most spectacular examples of black upward mobility is that of Kīzlar Agasī Beshir (1650–1746), an Abyssinian eunuch purchased for thirty piasters, the price of a first-rate donkey, but who prospered unbelievably during his long tenure as Ottoman secretary of the treasury. By the time of his death, he had amassed a vast fortune and had founded the Mosque of Aga in Istanbul as well as a number of schools and a public library.[49]

Muslim racial attitudes reflect the ambivalence of the system of color stratification in Islamic society, with its inconsistency, at times its seeming lack of color prejudice. Significantly in this respect, a body of Muslim literature emerged that treated blacks sympathetically or defended them against their detractors.[50] Nevertheless, Muslims lived in a racially stratified society. If they, unlike people in later English-speaking stratified societies, had no clearly defined color bar, if they were correspondingly less disturbed by the occasional appearance of a high-status black, such violations of the prevailing pigmentocracy, or light-skinned dominance, did not happen often enough to discredit the assumptions most people made about skin color and status: light meant superiority, dark meant debasement.[51]

Muslim attitudes toward blacks were mixed, but amid their ambivalence one

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[47] Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 114.

[48] Brown, A'Color in North Africa," 191–92.

[49] Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches,* 10 vols. (Pest, Austria-Hungary, 1827–35), 8: 70–71.

[50] For a review of this literature, see Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 10–20. Unfortunately, most of these writers do not defend blacks in general but limit their defense to certain nationalities, especially Abyssinians.

[51] Levy, *Social Structure of Islam,* 61–64; and Gustave E. von Grünebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (2d ed., Chicago, 1954), 199, 109–10. For the development of the idea of "pigmentocracy" as a theory of Latin American race relations, see Alejandro Lipschütz, *El Indioamericanismo y el problema racial en las Américas* (Santiago, 1944).

can detect here and there most of those notions making up that cluster of ideas we recognize as modern Western racial prejudice. As Negroes came to occupy the bottom strata of both free and servile society and as the term 'abĭd came in popular usage to identify a race rather than a legal class, Muslims came to attach to blacks those ideas that Old World peoples had traditionally attached to slaves regardless of their origin. Negroes were thus stereotyped as lazy, lecherous, and prone to lie and steal. And, when humans are treated as domesticated animals, they are sometimes regarded as animallike. Thus, just as the ancients occasionally denied the humanity of slaves, so could Ibn Khaldun, a historian of western Islam, write that "the only people who accept slavery are the Negroes, owing to their low degree of humanity and their proximity to the animal stage."[52] But not very intelligent animals, a Persian writer thought: "Many have seen that the ape is more capable of being trained than the Negro, and more intelligent." A thirteenth-century Moroccan asserted that the blacks had another quality that seemed to make them especially suited to the debased status that his society generally accorded them. They were "the most stinking of mankind in the armpits and sweat."[53] And, according to a popular work on slave buying, blacks were "fickle and careless. Dancing and beating time are engrained in their nature. They say: were the negro to fall from heaven to the earth he would beat time falling."[54] Thus the most important ideas justifying white dominance had been current in the racially stratified lands of the Mediterranean for several centuries before the northwest Europeans bought their first Negro slaves.

Though Muslims held many disconnected ideas and value judgments that lent stability to a previously evolved pattern of pigmentocracy, the closest they had to a theory of race relations remained the ancient Hamitic myth. During the first century of Islam, the "sons of Ham" had begun their migration to *Bilad al-Sudan*, the land of the blacks; but within their ranks were still a number of light-skinned peoples. Thus, the myth justified slavery more than white superiority, as it had done since early in the first millenium B.C.

The evolution of this tradition is reflected in the genealogies that often follow an account of the curse of Noah. These genealogies purport to show how various nationalities descended from the single family that survived the Flood. They therefore reveal beliefs about which nations have been condemned to perpetual slavery.[55] At the time of the Muslim conquest of North Africa, most genealogies

[52] Meyer, *Die Sklaverei im Altertum*, 47–48; and Ibn Khaldun, *An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332–1406)*, trans. Charles Issawi (London, 1955), 98.

[53] Nasir al-Dīn Tūsī, *Tasavvurāt* (Leiden, 1950), as quoted in A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (London, 1958), 255; and as-Suhaylī, "Er-Roud el-Unif [*sic*]," as quoted in Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2 (London, 1872): 1462, s.v. "Sudan."

[54] Ibn Botlan, "Introduction to the Art of Making Good Purchases of Slaves," as quoted in Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, 161.

[55] Gerhard von Rad has warned against reading traditional Hebrew genealogies literally as expressions of actual kinship between peoples. Rather the language of kinship is used to express the social and political relationships of tenth- to ninth-century Palestine. See von Rad, *Genesis*, 140. In her study of the Tiv people of Nigeria, Laura Bohannan also found that traditional genealogies had little correspondence to actual kinship. Rather, they were constantly being revised to explain changes in then-existing power relationships. See Bohannan, "A Genealogical Charter," *Africa*, 22 (1952): 140, *passim*.

showed the Egyptians, the Berbers, and other conquered peoples as "sons of Ham." But history did not bear out the truth of the myth in this form. As the conquest swept into southwestern Europe, many of the earlier conquered peoples adopted Islam and distinguished themselves as soldiers and administrators. These nationalities did not look or behave like slaves. Actually they were the products of cultures more urbane and sophisticated than that of their conquerors. By the tenth century, however, the myth had been adjusted to the new reality: Egyptians and Berbers were exempted from the curse. Their reprieve was accomplished by one of two methods. Either the genealogy was revised so that North Africans, though still "sons of Ham," were descended through some son other than Canaan upon whom the curve had fallen; or the story itself was retold in such a way that these particular sons of Ham were forgiven for the sin committed by their ancestor.[56]

The blacks fared less well in the real world and thus in the world of myth. In sub-Saharan Africa most of them were protected neither by the peace of Islam nor by powerful indigenous states. Furthermore, most blacks passing through the institution of Muslim slavery did so after the frontiers of Islam had become stabilized and opportunities were more limited than they had been in the years of rapid expansion. Just as the blacks, free and slave, remained more or less permanently clustered at the bottom of the status ladder, so the status-defining myth assumed a relatively fixed and unmistakably racial form. A recounting of the story in the tenth century by the Persian historian, Tabari, is typical of the form it had assumed by the later Middle Ages: "Ham begot all blacks and people with crinkly hair. Yafit [Japheth] all who have broad faces and small eyes (that is, the Turkic peoples) and Sam [also called "Shem" or "Sem," the mythical ancestor of the "Semites"] all who have beautiful faces and beautiful hair (that is, the Arabs and Persians); Noah put a curse on Ham, according to which the hair of his descendants would not extend over their ears and they would be enslaved wherever they were encountered."[57]

Popular genealogies often reveal more about existing power relationships than they do about the actual origins and kinship of peoples.[58] Three centuries before Tabari, for example, the Persians, after their conquest by Muslim armies, had sometimes been sold into slavery and classified as "sons of Ham."[59] But then a political upheaval brought the Abbassid caliphs to power and elevated Persians to positions of authority and influence throughout the vast territories of the caliphate.[60] As a result, by the tenth century Ta-

[56] Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 147–49; and *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. "Ham," by G. Vajda. Also see Mohammed Tabari, *Chronique* . . . , trans. Louis Dubeux (Paris, 1836), 107–08.

[57] Abū-Ga'far Muhammed b. Garir a-Tabarī, *Ta'rih ar-rusal wa'l-muluk*, ed. J. DeGoeje, 1 (Leiden, 1879): 223, as quoted in Rotter, "Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft," 147. Though Persian, Tabarī wrote in Arabic and, indeed, is the author of what is regarded as the major Arabic historical work of the Middle Ages.

[58] Ignaz Goldzicher, *Mythology among the Hebrews and Its Historical Development*, trans. Russell Martineau (New York, 1967), 357–59. Also see note 53, above.

[59] Haas, "Contributions of Slaves to Early Islam," 62; and Abd al-Husain Zarrinkuls, "The Arab Conquest of Iran and Its Aftermath," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, 2 (Cambridge, 1968): 29, 42, *passim*.

[60] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., s.v. "Abbasids," by Bernard Lewis.

barī could perceive the Persians, though they were linguistically unrelated to either the Jews or the Arabs, as "Semites," a people basking in Noah's blessing and destined to be served by the now definitely sub-Saharan *Banu Ham.*

. UNTIL NEARLY THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES Christians showed no particular interest in Jewish and Muslim revisions of the Ham story. Their version, to the extent they related the story at all, was still the one that appears in Genesis, sometimes used to justify slavery, but one that remained innocent of racial overtones.[61] In Christian Europe "slave" still meant "Slav," not "Negro." But already a development was taking place in the Christian lands of the Mediterranean that would have an enormous impact on the habits of Europeans, on their economy, and on the way they perceived blacks. In the eastern Mediterranean during the First Crusade, Europeans had learned to make sugar, a product that one chronicler described as an "unsuspected and inestimable present from Heaven."[62] Sugar production was as labor intensive as it was profitable, creating a strong demand for unskilled, closely supervised, work gangs. Initially, growers were able to answer their needs by investing in the labor supplied by the religious wars, captives sold into slavery, or religious refugees who could be employed under conditions approaching slavery. After the Crusaders were expelled from the Near East, their sugar industry was transferred westward to new areas, especially Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, and parts of Spain. The industry was extended further westward, mostly by Italians, to the Madeira Islands about 1432 and to the Canaries about 1480. It was also Italian merchants who supplied sugar planters with much of their labor, selling them "Slavs" from the Black Sea region.[63] Political developments in the Near East greatly affected the sugar industry. On the one hand, the disorder created by a new round of wars in the area and by ruinous Turkish commerical policies, helped Christian planters by eliminating their Muslim rivals.[64] But, on the other, these same policies threatened trade between

[61] A late thirteenth-century English legal writer, for example, noted that "serfage, according to some, comes from the curse which Noah pronounced against Canaan, the son of his son Ham, and against his issue"; [Andrew Horn] *The Mirror of Justices,* ed. William Joseph Whittaker, Introduction by F. W. Maitland (London, 1895), 77. Also see Piero A. Milani, *La schiavitù nel pensiero politico dai Greci al basso Medio Evo* (Milan, 1972), 244, 292, 300, 309, 316, 355–57, 376–77, 377 n. 16.

[62] Charles Verlinden, *Les origines de la civilization atlantique de la Renaissance à l'Âge des Lumières* (Paris, 1966), 167.

[63] Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany," 361 n. 44; Charles Verlinden, "Aspects de l'esclavage dans les colonies médiévales italiennes," *Hommage à Lucien Febvre,* 2 (Paris, 1953): 103; and Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar,* 1 (London, 1949): chap. 8 *passim,* esp. 74, 76–80, 100, 115. Some sugar had been produced in Spain, mainly in the Costa del Sol region, since the Muslims had introduced it in the tenth century. It had flourished in conjunction with a secondary industry, the manufacture of various kinds of jams and concentrates for soft drinks made from local fruits. Although with the Reconquest and the re-establishment of Christianity many people favored wine over Muslim-type soft drinks, certain of these preparations such as grenadine and sasparilla continued to be popular. Knowledge of the techniques for making jams and soft-drink concentrates continued to be regarded as a desirable accomplishment for slave women. Edmund O. von Lippmann, *Geschichte des Zuckers seit den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Beginn der Rubenzucker-Fabrikation* (Berlin, 1929), 241; and Ruth Pike, *Aristocrats and Traders: Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972), 177–78.

[64] W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen âge,* 2 (Leipzig, 1923): 276 ff.; Poliak, "Révoltes populaires en Egypte," 253–254.

the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and, hence, the labor supply of Christian planters. The price of sugar climbed, but so did the price of slaves.[65]

In 1444 Diniz Dias, his caravel racing before the constant north wind, bypassed the fearful Saharan inferno and dropped anchor before the green land of Guinea. There the Portuguese found peoples of many languages and customs cultivating fields of rice, millet, and yams. Guinea, or more strictly Upper Guinea, is a relatively narrow strip of tropical rain forest extending along the southern and southwestern coast of the large western bulge of Africa. Even before the coming of the Europeans these peoples had suffered slave raids. For the great Sudanese savanna to the north, separating the rain forest from the desert and forming an east-west axis across the continent, may have played a role in the history of Guinea similar to that played by the Eurasian steppe in the history of Caucasia.

Higher and less humid than Guinea, Sudan sustained a healthier population that enjoyed a greater prosperity due to better conditions for agriculture and stock raising. Like the Eurasian steppe, medieval Sudan had been the scene of great empire building. These empires, however, had never extended into the relatively inaccessible areas of the rain forest with its comparatively poor and isolated village populations. Large-scale cavalry warfare, which built and overthrew the empires of the savanna, was ineffective in the forest lowlands. Furthermore, the lowlands were infested with the sleeping sickness–bearing tsetse fly, which is dangerous to man but deadly to horses.[66] Nevertheless, small-scale raids into the rain forests, especially slave raids, were feasible, since the raiders could usually be confident that they would face not armies but peasant communities that, because of the local nature of their political institutions, could not call on outside help.[67]

Moreover, the conversion of Sudanese governing elites to Islam had results similar to those produced by the emergence of Christian governments in medieval Europe. On the one hand, the support of a well-organized, literate religion strengthened the position of kings, enabling them to offer greater protection to their own subjects. But, on the other, religion provided a rationale for slave

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[65] Ashtor, *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'orient médiéval*, 460–61, 498–504; and Karl Schneider, "Der Sklavenhandel im mittelalterischen Italien," *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft*, 20 (1907): 238.

[66] Jack Goody, "Introduction," in Jack Goody and Kwame Arhin, eds., *Ashanti and the Northwest* (Legon, Ghana, 1955), 82–83.

[67] Bolanle Awe, "Empires of the Western Sudan: Ghana, Mali, Songhai," in J. F. A. Ajayi and Ian Espie, eds., *A Thousand Years of West African History* (Ibadan, Nigeria, 1965), 57–59; and Christopher Fyfe, "Peoples of the Windward Coast, A.D. 1000–1800," in *ibid.*, 149–50, 158–59. Several scholars have held that the inevitable human disasters connected with building the medieval Sudanese empires caused a southward drift of population into the less favorable environment of the rain forests and thus contributed substantially to the cultural diversity of Guinea. See Akin Mabogunje, "The Land and Peoples of West Africa," in J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, 1 (New York, 1972): 28; Jacques Richard-Molard, *Afrique occidentale française* (Paris, 1949), 108. Walter Rodney, who based his own work on that of Richard-Molard and Antonio Mendes Correia, the anthropologist, reached similar conclusions. See Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (Oxford, 1970), 5–6. Raymond Mauny, however, has had the "impression" that most of the peoples of Guinea had lived a very long time in those locations where they are first noted in Arabic and Portuguese sources. See Mauny, *Tableau géographique de l'ouest africain au moyen âge d'après les sources écrites, la tradition et l'archeologie* (Dakar, 1961), 448.
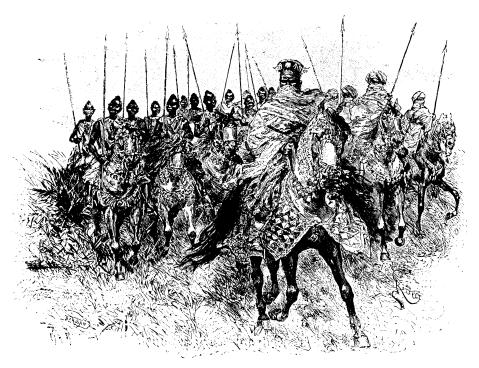
Figure 1: The Mossi prince, Boukary, later ruler of the kingdom, and his horsemen on a slave-raiding expedition. Photograph from a wood engraving, taken from Captain L. G. Binger's description of his two years in Africa; Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée par le pays de Kong et le Mossi*, 1 (Paris, 1892): 455.

raids. With the growing volume of the trans-Saharan slave trade and, especially, with the opening of the Atlantic trade, Sudanese rulers showed an increasing tendency to proclaim a *jihad*, or holy war, against *Kaffirs* (unbelievers) as well as against Muslim heretics. Like similar movements in Europe, such as the *Drang nach Osten*, the *Reconquista*, or the Crusades, these campaigns delivered thousands of victims to the slave traders.[68]

With the opening of South Atlantic navigation, the relative isolation of the peoples of Guinea ended. They found themselves between the hammer of Portuguese maritime power and the anvil of the Muslim states. Furthermore, Guinea, like the Caucasus region and the slave export areas of the Balkans, was a kaleidoscope of local cultures in which slave traders had no trouble finding ethnic antagonism from which they could profit.[69] Just as the Italian traders

[68] J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in West Africa* (Oxford, 1959), 28–30; Mauny, *Tableau géographique de l'ouest africain au moyen âge*, 541–42; and Rodney, *Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800*, 236. The Sudanese poet, Mohammed Bello, writing Hausa verse in Arabic script, voiced sentiments that would not have been unusual among the Crusaders, Junkers, or conquistadores of medieval Europe: "Brethren we thank God; / We perform acts of faith and prayer / Even holy war for Thee the Exalted One: / We slew the breed of dogs, . . . / We have slain the heathen." See J. H. Greenberg, "Hausa Verse Prosody," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 69 (1949): 127.

[69] An official for the Royal Africa Company in 1726, noting the variety of languages along the Gambia such that the people on one side of the river could not understand those on the other, concluded that this situation was "no small Happiness to the Europeans who go thither to trade for slaves." Since Gambians, who were "naturally very lazy, abhore slavery," the business could be quite dangerous. But, by "having some of every sort on board," there was "no more likelyhood of their succeeding in a plot than finishing the Tower of Babel." William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London, 1744), 28. Another observer noted that there were seven or eight languages spoken along a sixty-mile stretch of the Gold Coast and that three or four of these were not mutually comprehensible. William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea . . .* (1704; 4th English ed., London, 1967), 130.
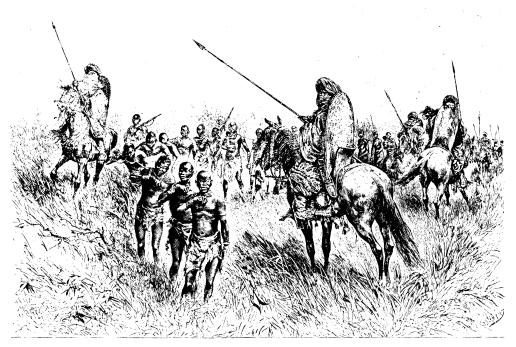
Figure 2: The Mossi horsemen returning with their captive slaves taken during a raid on noncentralized African peoples. During his exploration of Africa, Binger met Boukary in 1888 and described two such raiding parties conducted by the prince. Photograph from a wood engraving, taken from Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée*, 471.

were furnishing arms to the Crimean Tartars in exchange for the captives taken in the raids against the Slavic and Caucasian peoples, so the Portuguese established a similar relationship with the Bijagos (or Bissagos) of Guinea.[70] The Europeans had thus discovered a vast source of black "Slavs"—a source that lay, as it turned out, not far from the major trade-wind, sailing route between Europe and the Americas.

At the same time, the Black Sea trade, the principal source of white slaves, became increasingly constricted. Nine years after the Portuguese opened up the maritime route to Guinea, Constantinople fell to the Turks, eliminating the last relic of Christian control over the Straits. To be sure, the Black Sea trade continued for a time but only on terms laid down by the Turks.[71] Turkish restrictions on the buying and selling of Muslims not only sharply reduced one important source of light-skinned slaves but also, insofar as some Italian merchants were concerned, stood the religious justification for slavery on its head. Cautious about dealing in Muslims, Genoese and Venetian traders furnished the victorious Ottomans with ready cash for their surplus Christians, including Christian monks. These payments were not made for the pious medieval purpose of ransoming brothers in Christ. Inspired by a more modern spirit of enterprise, Ital-

[70] Rodney, *Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800,* 104. As early as 1460–62, according to a contemporary report, the Portuguese procured slaves through Muslim middlemen. See G. R. Crone, ed., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents,* Hakluyt Society Publications, 2d ser., no. 80 (London, 1937), 18. Also see G. I. Bratianu, *Recherches sur le commerce génois dans la Mer Noire* (Paris, 1929), 289; and Verlinden, "Aspects de l'esclavage dans les colonies médiévales italiennes," 94–95, *passim.*

[71] A. H. Lybyer, "The Ottoman Turks and the Routes of Oriental Trade," *English Historical Review,* 30 (1915): 580–84.

ian merchants snapped up these victims of Turkish expansion for use on the sugar plantations of their island colonies in the eastern Mediterranean or shipped them to the western Mediterranean where they were sold in competition with blacks whom the Portuguese had begun to bring up from Guinea.[72] In the long run, however, the commerce of the Italian cities did not prosper in the lands controlled by the Turks. In the second quarter of the fifteenth century 91 percent of the slaves in Genoa were of Black Sea origin; by the last quarter of the century this figure had fallen to 26 percent.[73]

Not only was the flow of slaves from the Black Sea area to the western Mediterranean becoming increasingly constricted, but also the largest single source of white slaves in the mid–fifteenth century, the Russians, virtually dried up. In 1462 Ivan the Great became grand duke of Moscow. His accession marked the end of a long period of political fragmentation as well as the emergence of a viable state, which, like the Ottoman state, could offer its subjects some protection against slave raids.[74] Of the Black Sea slaves being sold at Genoa, the proportion that was Russian fell from 41 percent in the second quarter of the fifteenth century to 18 percent in the last quarter. Furthermore, the rise in the median age of Russian slaves being sold in the last quarter suggests that many were resales who had been in Italy for some time and that among the freshly taken captives the proportion of Russians was even lower.[75]

With this turn of events the reputation of Slavs began to improve. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Tunisian historian, Ibn Khaldun, could still write that Negroes had character traits "close to those of dumb animals. It has even been reported that most of the Negroes of the first zone [the tropics] dwell in caves and thickets, eat herbs, live in savage isolation and do not congregate, and eat each other. The same applies to the Slavs."[76] But, before the century was over, as a victorious Slavic nation swept out onto the steppes and began the conquest of the Eurasian heartland, the image of Slavs began to change. Sugar production was expanding rapidly in the Atlantic islands, and the cane fields were being filled with "Slavs" who came from Guinea instead of the Crimea. The term "slave" was losing all of its psychological connection to Eastern Europe, just as centuries before the term "Canaanite" had lost all connection with Canaan.

As historical events redirected the slave trade, as European slavery entered what the leading authority on medieval slavery has called its "Negro" period,[77]

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[72] I. Sukasov, "Documents récemment découverts datant de la fin du XIVᵉ siècle et concernant les Bulgares de la Macédoine vendus comme esclaves," *Makedonski pregled*, 7 (1932): 236; Charles Verlinden, "La Crète, débouché et plaque tournante de la traite des esclaves aux XIVᵉ et XVᵉ siècles, in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, 3 (Milan, 1962): 630, *passim*; and communication from Charles Verlinden, June 15, 1979.

[73] For these estimates, see Gioffrè, *Il mercato degli schiavi a Genova nel secolo XV*, 61.

[74] George Vernadsky, *Russia at the Dawn of the Modern Age*, vol. 4 of George Vernadsky and Michael Karpovich, eds., *A History of Russia* (New Haven, 1959), 1–12, 96–101.

[75] Gioffrè, *Il mercato degli schiavi a Genova nel secolo XV*, 19.

[76] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 1 (New York, 1958): 168–69.

[77] Charles Verlinden, "Schiavitù ed economia nel Mezzogiorno agli inizi dell'età moderna," *Annali del Mezzogiorno*, 3 (1963): 37. Also see Charles Verlinden, "Esclavage noir en France méridionale et courants de traite en Afrique," *Annales du Midi*, 78 (1966): 335–443; and Vicenta Cortes, *La esclavitud en Valencia durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos, 1479–1516* (Valencia, 1964), 16.

Christians began to look at blacks in ways that had been characteristic of racially stratified Muslim countries for some seven centuries. Perhaps the bare beginnings of this change appear in a report that a mid-fifteenth-century Portuguese chronicler made to Prince Henry the Navigator. He wrote that a "noble Moor" captured on the Saharan coast had proposed through the Arabic interpreter that, if he were allowed to return home, his ransom would be paid in "black Moors." "Here you must note," the chronicler told the prince, "that these blacks were Moors like the others, though their slaves, in accordance with ancient custom, which I believe to have been because of the curse which, after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain [*sic*], cursing him in this way—that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world." But, when it turned out that the ten blacks that were actually delivered in payment of his ransom were not in fact Muslims, the writer piously added: "For though they were black, yet had they souls like the others, and all the more as these blacks were not of the lineage of the Moors but were Gentiles, and so the better to bring into the path of salvation."[78] Blacks were still "Gentiles." In time, Europeans would call them by other names, names less connected with religion.

IN THE TWO CENTURIES AFTER COLUMBUS, race relations in some of the recently discovered lands took a new turn. To the predominantly Negro, but racially mixed, slavery of the Christian and Muslim Old World was added the exclusively Negro slavery of the Americas. In their quest for an explanation for this development, a number of scholars have stressed the importance of the meaning that Old World peoples attributed to color. To these peoples angels were white, the devil was black. They associated white or lightness with such positive values as virtue, chastity, and purity and linked black or darkness with ignorance, filth, death, and sorrow. It has been suggested that such color values may have influenced early settlers of the American colonies so that, when confronted with a racially mixed labor force, colonists tended to favor whites over blacks, establishing a pattern of discrimination that resulted in the emergence of a system of slavery that was exclusively Negro.[79]

But this hypothesis fails to account for the stable relationship that had long existed in the Old World between racially mixed slavery on the one hand and color prejudice on the other. Furthermore, after the brief "Negro period" of slavery in Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century, white slavery revived there—in the face of essentially the same color prejudice.[80] While any

[78] Gomes Eannes de Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, Hakluyt Society Publications, 1st ser., no. 95 (London, 1895), 54–55.

[79] Philip Mason, *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race* (1962; 2d ed., Westport, Conn., 1975), 58, 77, *passim*; Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Significance of Skin Color in Human Relations," in Franklin, *Color and Race*, 114, 120; Talcott Parsons, "The Problem of Polarization on the Axis of Color," in *ibid.*, 358; Jordan, *White over Black*, ix–x, 9, 41, *passim*; Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, 1971), 208–12; and Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York, 1970), 232.

[80] Lybyer, *Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*, 45–61, *passim*; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 (New York, 1973): 754–55, 841–42; Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, "La esclavitud en Castilla durante la edad moderna," *Estudios de historia social de España*, 2 (1962): 380–81, 381 n. 24; von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 3: 167, 5: 321, 6: 154; and Paul W. Bamford, "Slaves for the Galleys of France, 1665–1700," in James Ford Bell, ed., *Mer

simple explanation for a complex development is risky, a more promising ex-
planation of the rise of exclusively black slavery in the New World appears to be
the differences in mortality rates of the various racial populations of the early
modern world. According to Philip D. Curtin, "statistics now available suggest"
that the death rate of blacks in the New World was "about one-third as high as
that for European newcomers."[81] Investment in a black slave was, therefore, far
safer and more profitable in the Americas than investment in a white one. Thus,
in the New World, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, black slavery
replaced the various forms of white servitude. In the Mediterranean world, how-
ever, where conditions were healthier for whites, slave dealers could continue to
buy and sell blacks and whites with egalitarian evenhandedness, seemingly ob-
livious to the fact that their world of religious ideas had been populated by
white angels and a black devil for thousands of years.

During these same two centuries when slavery in the New World was becom-
ing exclusively black, several patterns of race relations emerged. On the one
hand, there was a discernible legitimist impulse. The Iberian nations, beginning
in the Portuguese colonies in India (and perhaps influenced by the caste system
of that country), established a system of racial "castas," in which pure-blooded
whites were the most privileged group. But this system failed throughout the
Portuguese and Spanish empires, where the European settlers were over-
whelmingly males. Even when white women finally began arriving in the colo-
nies in greater numbers, they found themselves confronted by a strongly estab-
lished paternalistic culture, one of the characteristics of which is a marked
sexual division of labor: women strive to become specialists in virtue, men in sin.
The Portuguese crown and benevolent societies, for example, strove mightily to
establish the legitimate white family, even to the extent of subsidizing the dow-
ries of chaste white girls. But, while male colonists showed considerable appre-
ciation for the ideal that these young ladies reflected, as evidenced by the popu-
larity of the Marian cult, they also showed a definite reluctance to give up their
black and brown concubines. As a result, many splendid young white women,
unable to find husbands, entered convents or returned to Portugal, taking their
virtue with them.[82]

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chants and Scholars: Essays in the History of Exploration and Trade (Minneapolis, 1965), 171–91. Furthermore, the
racially mixed slavery of the Mediterranean continued for at least a generation after the disappearance of
black slavery from the Americas. According to Reuben Levy, Circassians and blacks were still being sold on
the slave block in Istanbul in 1908; Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1957), 88. And, in 1948,
the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights noted the persistence of this institution in the Near
East; see Müller, "Sklaven," 77.

[81] Curtin, "The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1800," in Ajayi and Crowder, *History of West Africa*, 253. How
little color values contributed to the shaping of American labor systems is further suggested by the simultane-
ous decline in Indian slavery in the same lands where there was a rise of exclusively black slavery and a decline
of white servitude. See Almon Wheeler Lauber, *Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the
United States* (New York, 1913). Also see Bamford, "Slaves for the Galleys of France," 185, 190.

[82] A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *Hidalgos and Philanthropists: The Santa Casa da Misericordia of Bahia, 1550–1755*
(Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), 32–33, 179–83. Brazil's paternalistic culture, moreover, may have inhibited
the bourgeois process of capital accumulation. Because aging patriarchs could count more sins than legitimate
heirs, they sometimes willed property—property that in other societies would have perpetuated or increased
the economic power of a family—to trust funds for financing masses for the dead. João de Mattos de Aguiar,
who died in 1700, furnishes an extreme example of this tendency. His will provided for eleven thousand

The legitimate white family was numerically weak in the Iberian colonies, and its advocates suffered setbacks, as bastards—the brown-skinned sons of concubines and slaves—filled the ranks of the militia and sometimes served as officers and bureaucrats as well. What has replaced "castas" in the Iberian empires is a *café con leche* society, consisting of a racial continuum in which whites are clustered toward the top both socially and economically while blacks are clustered toward the bottom, but a society without clearly defined racial frontiers.[83] This pattern has long existed in many Muslim countries and, prior to the great discoveries, apparently had already been established in those parts of Portugal and Castile that had long remained under Islamic influence.[84] The Muslim-Iberian system involves a subtle interplay between the resources of each individual and the white racial prejudices of society that rewards the light-skinned and penalizes the dark. Its flexibility enables an occasional Negro to rise high and allows more than an occasional white to remain poor.

In the seventeenth century, as the system of "castas" began to disintegrate in the Iberian colonies, it was picked up by the northern European powers and applied more successfully in their colonies, where the sex ratio among white settlers was more balanced:[85] a white, colored, black, three-status system in the West Indies, and a biracial, two-status system in North America. The status systems established by the north European empires incorporated several features similar to the caste system of India, including status group endogamy or in-group marriage, the association of each status group with a particular kind of economic activity, and a corresponding degree of access to political power.[86] Yet the racial status hierarchies of these societies have never become as firmly established as has the caste system of India. Despite the most valiant efforts of that great school of status-sustaining mythology and taboo, the legitimate white family, the quasi–caste systems of the New World and South Africa have never been upheld by such an elaborate ideology as that which lends a certain stability to the caste system of India. Thus, low-status people of these societies do not to the same degree internalize caste values. Nor have the quasi–caste systems ever become self-policing. The perpetuation of patterns of caste behavior in these coun-

masses annually, at a cost of two hundred réis each, to be said for his soul and those of his parents and grandparents. *Ibid.*, 167–68. For the failure of legitimacy in other parts of the empire, see Charles Ralph Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Empire* (Oxford, 1963), 49–53, 116–17.

[83] Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Empire*, 50, 57, 73–76, 83–84. For the breakdown of the system of "castas" but the persistence of color prejudice, see Florestan Fernandes, *The Negro in Brazilian Society*, trans. Jacqueline D. Skiles *et al.* (New York, 1969), 12, 135, 168, 451 n. 20; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México* (Mexico City, 1972), 85, 93, 154, 198, 224–33, 267–80; and Franklin W. Knight, "Cuba," in David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore, 1972), 280. For an interpretation that stresses the differences between the American racial status groups and the East Indian caste system, see Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, 1967), 53–56.

[84] E. Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, 3 (Paris, 1953): 186, 208; Domínguez Ortiz, "La esclavitud en Castilla durante la edad moderna," 372.

[85] Herbert Moller, "Sex Composition and Correlated Cultural Patterns of Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2 (1945): 131–37.

[86] H. Hoetink, *Caribbean Race Relations: A Study of Two Variants*, trans. Eva M. Hooykaas (New York, 1967); and Degler, *Neither Black nor White*. These studies provide an excellent comparison of the two basic patterns of New World race relations, though I disagree with some of the conclusions reached by each author.

tries, unlike in India, has continued to depend upon the heavy-handed inter-
vention of a strong state, ultimately upon the pistols and sabers of militia
companies manned by the white-skinned sons of the "uptight" legitimate fam-
ily.

Despite the New World's history of exclusive black slavery, patterns of race
relations have arisen there that share an underlying common feature with those
of the Muslim world of the Near East and North Africa: each of these societies is
a pigmentocracy, ruled by people with light skin. This racial distribution of
power, established centuries ago by the clash of arms, is maintained by a system
of color values that permits a governing elite to define eligibility to power and
privilege in its own image. Such color values are expressed in a cluster of dis-
tance-creating ideas, ideas that attach characteristics to the Negro that were
once attached to slaves of any origin and that make a caricature of the physical
and cultural traits of sub-Saharan Africans. Such caricatures inevitably imply
that the debasement of blacks is the result of their race and culture rather than
their history of captivity and exploitation. These perceptions, which emerged in
the racially stratified countries of the Muslim Mediterranean during the cen-
turies immediately prior to the great discoveries, created neither racial strati-
fication in the Old World nor exclusively black slavery in the New. Historically,
they arose as an attempt to explain and justify already existing social relations,
social relations that were the result of the physical processes of history. Their
function is thus conservative rather than creative. That is, they function to con-
serve old social relationships rather than to create new ones.

But, while the distance-creating perceptions of blacks were by no means new,
most of them going back at least to the eleventh century, these old ideas were
now operating within a new social environment, within the ethos of emerging
capitalism. This new environment made an important difference. Some of the
world's greatest fortunes were being won from the extraction of precious metals
and from the production of plantation commodities, particularly sugar. Al-
though these industries were not confined to the New World, the Americas pre-
sented entrepreneurs not only with their greatest opportunities but also with
their most acute problem: how to persuade people to work for bare subsistence
in mines and on plantations located in a country of "open resources,"[87] where
there was an abundance of land often free for the taking? How could entrepre-
neurs control other people's impulse to "get ahead" in a land of boundless op-
portunity? Slavery helped. But so have the various "color bars" and patterns of
color prejudice that restrict upward mobility and, hence, function to maintain
an adequate supply of cheap labor, making possible higher profits.

To be sure, in those parts of the Americas where the white man continued to
deal with the black man as his, or somebody's, household servant, the more typ-
ical pattern of Old World racial prejudice still persisted—with all of its inconsis-
tencies and its admixture of paternalism. But, wherever color prejudice has been

[87] For the theory that, "leaving militarism and other secondary causes out of consideration," slavery flour-
ishes only in situations of "open resources" or frontier conditions, see H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System*
(The Hague, 1900), 306, 347, *passim.* The "Nieboer thesis" is further developed by W. Kloosterboer; see her
Involuntary Labour since the Abolition of Slavery (Leiden, 1960).

reinforced by the profit motive, wherever relations with the blacks have been conditioned not only by face to face contact but also by the pressure of distant and impersonal markets, white prejudices have taken on such an immediacy, a consistency, a neurotic intensity that a number of scholars have understandably mistaken this attitude for an "irrational" psychological phenomenon rather than a discrete historical one.[88] In certain advanced capitalist countries, furthermore, these ideas about blacks have been transmitted to each successive generation by means of a legitimate white family, which, by uniting an appeal to immediate self-interest with moral zeal, has elevated an ancient cluster of perceptions and myths to the level of an impassioned ideology.

This investigation, thus, does not bear out the belief that patterns of race relations were shaped by pre-existing prejudices of whites. Rather, it supports the proposition that patterns of both race relations and prejudice are determined by power relationships. Inevitably, power relationships change, often for reasons that have little to do with what people think about status; and, as they change, old patterns of thought give way to new ones. Myths become transformed. Sometimes they are even discarded.

[88] Especially see H. Hoetink, *Slavery and Race Relations in the Americas: Comparative Notes on Their Nature and Nexus* (New York, 1973), 51, *passim.* Also see Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, 95, *passim*; Degler, *Neither Black nor White*, 211, *passim*; Jordan, *White over Black*, vii, x, 9, *passim.*