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Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race

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Spanish and Portuguese Influences on Racial Slavery in British North America, 1492-1619

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Several years ago, I considered medieval and early-modern Iberian racial ideology as the subject of an article for *William and Mary Quarterly*, but almost immediately I left the topic behind in order to conduct research on the cultures of Africans in the early Portuguese colonial world. As I pondered how I could make a new contribution to the subject of racial degradation, I realized that I was well situated to write a “sequel” to my earlier work, one that would link Columbian-era racial discourse with English and North American ideas about race and slavery. In my earlier work, I suggested ways that Islamic ideas were passed on to the Spanish and Portuguese, concluding that many of the ideas that informed fifteenth-century Iberian society were already well formulated in the Islamic world. Here, I hope to show how Iberians completed the cycle, exchanging similar ideas about race and slavery with their English counterparts in the Atlantic world, ultimately creating broadly conceived “European” or

even “white” identities. By highlighting some of the Atlantic connections that forged racial slavery and degradation, I will try to steer the discussion away from English/North American exceptionalism toward what I feel is more accurately a European problem, writ large.¹

Having said that, I should be clear from the outset that my paper is largely a response to the scholarship on slavery and race in British North America. More specifically, I am interested in the so-called “origins debate” that has animated colonial American historiography. At stake in these debates is the question of whether racism was the “unthinking” result of economic and political systems imposed by elites, or whether racism was a function of more deeply entrenched ideas that were at the core of Western society and culture. Though rarely stated overtly, the contemporary implications are clear enough: If racism is essentially a tool of the ruling elites, it can be assailed through class struggle. If, however, racism is somehow at the core of Western culture, the only way to remove it is through some more fundamental (and perhaps violent) restructuring of society.

Though I find both arguments in this debate powerful ones, I do not believe that either side has adequately considered the broader context into which North American racial slavery emerged. The basic contours of slavery in Portugal, Spain, and their American colonies are sometimes given brief treatment in these studies; however, usually only as an introduction to the “real” beginnings of racial slavery in a singular English-

¹ This approach to the problems of race and slavery is, in part, an answer to the call by David Brion Davis to broaden our fields of inquiry. See his enduring *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1966), but more particularly the recent *American Historical Review* Forum, “Crossing Slavery’s Boundaries.” Davis’ article, “Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives,” is followed by responses from Peter Kolchin, Rebecca Scott, and Stanley Engerman. *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 451-484.

speaking “America.” With only a few exceptions, these accounts conclude that there was a disjuncture between Iberian and English forms of labor and race. In short, the argument goes that England had no history of racial slavery, while Iberia and its colonies already had a long history with the institution prior to arrival in the Americas. Hence, early British North America became a laboratory for potentially new patterns of race and labor formation.

This narrow, Anglophone approach might work fine where perceptions of politics and economy remained parochial; however, all evidence suggests that by the second half of the sixteenth century, England was more than a bit player in the burgeoning Atlantic world. While we certainly must acknowledge the differences in slave systems and racial hierarchies among various nations in the Atlantic world, we must also recognize that these systems were overlapping and interconnected. When the first “Negroes” arrived in the Chesapeake around 1619, what followed was far less a historical “beginning” than a predictable continuation of a process that began as early as the fifteenth century on the Iberian Peninsula.

Iberian Beginnings and the Emergence of “European” Identity

Scholars now estimate that between 1441 and 1521 as many as 156,000 African slaves arrived in Iberia and the Atlantic islands. When combined with the more than 300,000 Africans who arrived in the Americas between 1502 and 1619, we can see that as many African slaves had already been dispersed across the Atlantic world between 1441 and 1619 as would arrive in the United States between 1619 and the abolition of the slave trade in 1808. The evolution of racial slavery, first in Europe, then in the Atlantic

islands, and finally in the Americas was a process that was always building on the experiences of the past. I do not mean to suggest a teleological inevitability in this process. Quite the contrary, Europeans made conscious decisions in constructing themselves and others during this time, decisions that often saw various European nations in conflict with one another. Nevertheless, from as early as the fifteenth century Europeans shared a common matrix of perception in their assessments of cultural and racial “others.” Although fragmentation, competition, and warfare existed between various European nations, these divisions could be measured in degrees. Catholics and Protestants fought for religious supremacy, but all European nations were Christian nations. Kings and Queens fought for sovereignty and the rights of succession, but all European nations had centralized monarchies. In southern Europe, humanism was utilized to strengthen the Catholic Church, while in northern Europe it was a tool of Protestants. Nevertheless, the scholarship and inquiry that were at the core of humanist philosophy placed new emphasis on individual rights across Europe. Thus, even as Europe was in turmoil in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these conflicts over the correct forms of Christianity, centralized government, and individual rights served to reinforce a broadly shared definition of what it meant to be “European.” This “oneness” was brought into sharp effect when Europeans encountered “new” peoples in Africa and the Americas, and it strongly impacted on their decisions to enslave.

At the end of the medieval period, slavery was not widespread in Europe. In fact, it was mostly isolated to the southern fringes of the Mediterranean, especially along the frontiers of Christendom. In those places where it existed, the physical labor of slavery was the preserve of social and religious “others.” Iberian Christians enslaved primarily

Muslims, but also Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and so on. As “infidels,” Jews and Moors were considered incapable of redemption and therefore doomed to marginal, enslaveable status. When the Atlantic slave trade began in 1441, most Africans were placed into an entirely new and different category of enslaveable peoples. On the one hand, they were considered “gentiles,” theoretically capable of conversion to Christianity and even integration into the emerging nation-state (whose subjects were defined primarily by their Christian identity). On the other hand, Africans were considered so “barbaric” that their human capacities were often called into question. Describing the first African slaves taken by the Portuguese via the Atlantic, royal chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara noted that they were “bestial” and “barbaric.”² Similarly, Hernando del Pulgar, appointed royal historian of Spain in 1482, wrote that the inhabitants of the Mina coast were “savage people, black men, who were naked and lived in huts.”³ During this early period, the cultural gulf that relegated Africans to barely-human status meant that spiritual and cultural “redemption” was a virtual impossibility. Over time, Iberians recognized that there were exceptions to African “barbarity;” however, these instances were truly exceptional. For example, in 1488 chronicler Rui de Pina described a speech delivered at the Portuguese court by Senegalese prince, Bemoim. Pina commented that Bemoim’s speech was so dignified that it “did not appear as from the mouth of a black barbarian but of a Grecian prince raised in Athens.”⁴ Clearly, Bemoim’s comportment defied the

² Gomes Eanes de Zurara, *Conquests and Discoveries of Henry the Navigator*, trans. Bernard Miall (London, 1936), 149.

³ Hernando del Pulgar, “A Castilian Account of the Discovery of Mina, c. 1472,” in John William Blake, trans. and ed., *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, 2 vols. (London, 1942), 1:205.

⁴ Rui de Pina, *Crónica de el-rei D. João II*. Coimbra: Atlantida, 1950, p. 91.

prevailing expectation of the “black barbarian.” The majority of Africans were thought to be sub-human and therefore subject to enslavement.

The policies and ideas that flowed from these understandings of African inferiority only served to crystallize racial hierarchies, not only in Iberia, but across Europe. The first transnational, institutional endorsement of African slavery occurred in 1452 when Pope Nicholas V issued the bull, *Dum Diversas*, which granted King Afonso V of Portugal the right to reduce to “perpetual slavery” all “Saracens and pagans and other infidels and enemies of Christ” in West Africa. In 1454, the Pope followed up *Dum Diversas* with *Romanus Pontifex*, which granted Portugal the more specific right to conquer and enslave all peoples south of Cape Bojador.⁵ Taken together, these papal bulls did far more than grant exclusive rights to the Portuguese; they signaled to the rest of Christian Europe that the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans was acceptable and encouraged. Later conflicts over the rights of conquest and trade in Africa did nothing to change these understandings. Portuguese, Spaniards, and other Europeans contested the African trade, but these were little more than internecine economic and political squabbles. From a social, cultural, and philosophical perspective, all were Europeans, and all underscored their rights to enslave Africans on the grounds that theirs were “civilizing” missions.

By homogenizing all non-Christians south of Cape Bojador, the Catholic Church also endorsed the idea that there was a certain oneness to sub-Saharan Africa, a oneness based not only on religious difference, but also on culture and race. The conflation of

⁵ A.C. de C.M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1551* (Cambridge, 1982), 37-38. On *Romanus Pontifex*, see Valentin Y. Mudimbe, “*Romanus Pontifex* (1454) and the Expansion of Europe,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 58-65.

cultural difference and race quickly found its way into the Portuguese language. Though legally in the same category of enslaved “infidels,” Islamic Africans were distinguished from “white” Moors by the term “Negro.” The term “*mouro Negro*” implied a double “othering.” As noted earlier, Moors were enslaveable due to their religious infidelity, but race was an aggravating factor that apparently made them even more enslaveable.

By the second half of the fifteenth century, the term “Negro” was essentially synonymous with “slave” across the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, the King’s slaves were known simply as “His Majesty’s Negros.”⁶ In Portugal, slave occupations were delineated with “negro” as the operant noun, as in “*negra do pote*” [water carrier] or “*negra canastra*” [waste remover].⁷ Illicit social gatherings of blacks were known as *festas dos negros*.⁸ And slaves were buried in communal pits, known as *poços dos negros*.⁹ Portuguese scholars have noted that in the popular language of the sixteenth century, the word “prêto” emerged as the term of choice to describe dark skin color, while “Negro” literally represented a race of people.¹⁰ This “race” of people was most often associated with black Africans, and certainly, all black Africans were considered members of this inferior, enslaveable race.

Skin color was one characteristic that defined this enslaveable race, but it was not the only one. Europeans noticed that a range of skin colors fell under the broad umbrella

⁶ Alessandro Stella, *Histoires d’Esclaves dans la Péninsule Ibérique* (Paris, 2000), 86.

⁷ José Ramos Tinhorão, *Os Negros em Portugal. Uma presença silenciosa* (Lisbon, 1988), 89; Saunders, 75, 77.

⁸ Saunders, 106; James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 90.

⁹ Saunders, 110.

¹⁰ Tinhorão, 76-78.

of “Negro.” In 1494, Jerónimo Münzer commented that King João II “possess[ed] Negroes of various colors, copper colored, very black, and shaded black...Those that are from close to the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn are copper colored, and those that are from the equatorial regions are extremely black.”¹¹ Here, all “Negroes” are slaves, but there are already distinctions of color made between these various enslaveable Africans.

The understanding of “Negroes” as an enslaveable “race,” regardless of color, continued in the Americas. In the early slave communities of Brazil, “Negro” transcended Africa to include any slave, whether Native American or African. For instance, slave inventories from Bahia in the 1570s and 1580s divided slave holdings into “*negros da terra*” [Indians] and “*negros de guiné*.”¹² Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro in the 1620s, “a Negro from Angola and another from Brazil” were denounced to the Inquisition for performing acts of “sodomy” on one another.¹³ The term “*negro da terra*” disappeared in most parts of Brazil by the middle of the seventeenth century, as Africans became the dominant slave labor force, but one can clearly see by these examples that the Portuguese utilized the term “Negro” to imply slave status, regardless of skin color. In this way, Indian slaves were literally “blackened” to conform to their social status. Having said this, it is important to remember that while “Negro” had some flexibility in its application to people of enslaveable status, *all* peoples from sub-Saharan Africa were

¹¹ Jerónimo Münzer, *Itinerário*, trans. Basílio de Vasconcelos, (Coimbra, 1931), 51.

¹² See, for example, “Inventário do Engenho de Santa Anna...July 10, 1572” in *Documentos para a História de Açúcar*, vol. 3, 89-96; and “Inventário da fazenda de Vicente Monteiro...July 28, 1585,” CSJ, Maço 17, No. 49.

¹³ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Inquisição de Lisboa, Cadernos do Promotor No. 24, Livro 224, ff. 313-316.

considered “Negroes” and therefore enslaveable. Their color, accentuated by the term “Negro,” simply became a signifier for their presumed status as slaves.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, Iberians recognized that some Africans were members of centralized political systems and began to identify slaves according to their various “nations”—Wolof, Mandinga, Balanta, Kongo, etc. Nevertheless, more often than not, they continued to lump these nations together under the broad category of “Negro.” Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval, who administered to African slaves in Colombia (New Granada) in the early seventeenth century, was aware of the contradictions of European language. He wrote, “that among all of these nations that we commonly call negros, not all are of dark complexion.”¹⁴ Sandoval clearly understood that the Spanish collapsed all of the African “nations” into the racialized term “Negro.” But he also pointed to the contradiction in language: not all of these “Negroes” were really black. Sandoval was not alone in this assessment. Across the slave communities of the Spanish-speaking Americas “Negroes” were divided according to color. For instance, in seventeenth century Mexico, slaves were identified as “Negro retinto” (double dyed Negro), “Negro amulatado” (mulatto-like Negro), “Negro amembrillado” (quince-like Negro), and so on.¹⁵

These color classifications that emerged in the early colonial world were expressions of two Iberian proclivities. The first was based on the social imperative of classifying people according to “blood purity.” Inspired by orthodox attempts to cleanse

¹⁴ Alonso de Sandoval, *De Instauranda Aethiopia Salute: El Mundo de la Esclavitud Negra en America* (Bogotá, 1956), 91.

¹⁵ Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), 41-42; Aguirre-Beltrán, “Races in 17th Century Mexico,” *Phylon* 6 (1945), 213-215.

Iberian bloodlines of Jewish or Moorish influence, Iberians had long adhered to a rigid social hierarchy based on lineage. Only those who could prove “pure,” Catholic blood were eligible for government positions, entry into religious orders, and membership in guilds. The second Iberian tendency was to recognize blackness as a visual representation of tainted blood. The fragmentation of different “Negro” colors in the Americas was the logical intersection of these two ideologies. The result was a mind-boggling array of potential racial categories. Even though these categories opened social space for “Negroes” to “whiten” themselves (or in social terms, to become more like Spaniards), the different categories of color also reinforced negative stereotypes associated with blackness and Africa. Moreover, these categories created a new visual hierarchy of race onto which social and cultural expectations could be grafted. Ultimately, the color hierarchy of the “castas” expanded the mental horizons of racial thinking.

English Adoption of Racial Ideas

Even though African slavery was well entrenched in southern Europe by the middle of the sixteenth century, the same cannot be said of northern Europe. In England, far removed from enslavable, non-European peoples, the institution of slavery was a distant historical memory. England’s geographic and social distance from the contested borderlands of Christian Europe and the “heathen” lands of Africa rendered slavery far less resonant than in Spain and Portugal. If anything, this isolation from non-Christian, “uncivilized” peoples led to heightened expectations for individual rights. Where there

were few “outsiders,” individual freedoms became the norm, a signal characteristic of English identity. As Winthrop Jordan has put it, “after about 1550...there began to develop in England that preening consciousness of the peculiar glories of English liberties.”¹⁶ These “peculiar glories” did not go unnoticed by those who were familiar with slavery elsewhere in Europe. In 1577, William Harrison wrote, “As for slaves and bondmen we have none, naie such is the privilege of our contrie by the especiall grace of God, and bountie of our princes, that if anie come hither from other realms, so soone as they set foot on land they become so free of condition as their masters, whereby all note of servile bondage is utterlie remooved from them.”¹⁷

The notion that England was without slavery was more than mere rhetoric. In 1607, a twelve-year-old slave named Diogo was making the Atlantic crossing from Lisbon to Bahia when his ship was captured near the Canary Islands by a corsair employing “a mixture of English and Moors.” Diogo was taken from his Portuguese master and sold in Algiers, where he was forced to convert to Islam. His new master employed him on a pirate ship that attacked European vessels in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. After seven years of toil on the pirate ship of his Islamic master, Diogo eventually found himself on the ship of a renegade English captain. Diogo worked on the pirate ship for four months, before the captain decided return to England and throw himself at the mercy of the Crown. The Crown granted the captain a pardon and his crew was allowed to disembark. Several months later, in testimony before the Portuguese

¹⁶ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 49.

¹⁷ William Harrison, *An Historicall Description of the Iland of Britaine....* (1577), in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 6 vols. (London, 1807-1808), I, 275, as quoted in Jordan, 49.

Inquisition, Diogo revealed that when he laid foot onto English soil, “he immediately became free, because in that Reign nobody is a slave.”¹⁸ How Diogo came to this knowledge is an intriguing question, but more intriguing for our purposes is the situation that got him there in the first place. Diogo’s status on board the English ship was clear: he was a slave. It was only his fortuitous arrival on English soil that earned him his freedom. Thus, even as metropolitan England was “free” territory, the rest of the Atlantic (and Mediterranean) world was fair game for English slavery and slave trading.¹⁹

England’s exceptional status as a non-slave nation must be understood in the broader context of nations that were slaveholding. The “privilege” of individual freedoms in England, so eloquently described by William Harrison in 1577, could only make sense in a European setting where these freedoms were not guaranteed to everyone. In other words, unlike in Spain and Portugal, in England, “even” Africans were free. This position by no means translated into a more flexible attitude toward Africans. On the contrary, the English adopted many of the same negative attitudes towards Africans that Iberians had developed much earlier. Thomas Wyndham’s description of his journey to Guinea in 1553 revealed a place where people lived in a state of nature with no religion and no government. Similarly, a description of John Lok’s journey to the Mina coast noted that the Africans were “a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe,

¹⁸ ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Processos, No. 5964.

¹⁹ Similar contradictions can be found in sixteenth and early seventeenth century Holland. As early as 1596 a Dutch captain delivered 130 Africans to the port of Middelburg, only to be told that slavery was prohibited. The town council ordered that the Africans be freed. See Johanes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge, 1990), 10. Also see Ernst van den Boogaart and Pieter C. Emmer, “The Dutch Participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1596-1650,” in Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market* (New York, 1979), 354-355.

religion, or common wealth...”²⁰ The idea of Africans as lustful, carefree, heathens quickly made its way into popular literature and theater.²¹ These negative assessments of Africans may well have arisen independently of nearly identical Iberian assessments. Nevertheless, they reveal the extent to which Europeans were unified around a singular definition of “civilization” that emphasized Christianity, centralized government, and so on. The fact that Africans were black only exaggerated these differences.

Just as was the case in Iberia, negative stereotypes about Africans quickly came to be associated with skin color. In 1578, Captain George Best commented that he had “seen an Ethiopian as black as coal brought to England, who taking a fair English woman to wife, begat a son in all respects as black as the father...whereby it seemeth this blackness proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man...”²² In similar fashion, by 1600 a commonly-used expression of futility went: “You labor in vain to wash an Ethiop white.”²³ Attempts to wash away the “natural infection” of blackness were more than mere color aversion; they were expressions of deeply embedded and widely understood associations of African inferiority. Blackness was quickly becoming a key signifier of a much broader, indelible inferiority.

While the English “nation” extolled the value of individual freedoms, it was precisely these freedoms, along with the certainty of African inferiority, which allowed individual Englishmen to go out into the world and engage in the business of chattel

²⁰ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*.... 12 vols., 1598 edition (Glasgow, 1903-1905), VI, 167.

²¹ See, for example, Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Charlottesville, 1971). Also see Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays in the Colonial Experience* (Oxford, 1995).

²² Hakluyt, VII, 262-263.

²³ Jones, 48.

slavery. Thus, it should not surprise us that English merchants, traders, and sailors were intimately involved in the slave trade in other parts of the world. In 1578, the Englishman, John Whithall, penned a letter to potential business partners in London, describing his interest in a sugar plantation in Santos, Brazil. When Whithall married a local girl, his father-in-law gave him “part of an Ingenio which he hath, that doeth make every yeere a thousand roves of sugar...[and] my father in law doeth intende to put into my handes the whole Ingenio with sixtie or seventie slaves, and thereof to make me factor for us both.” Whithall’s request that London merchants provide supplies for his sugar plantation indicates that he had not broken ties with his English past. On the contrary, he sought the direct involvement of English traders, who ultimately delivered Whithall’s provisions in exchange for sugar produced by African slaves.²⁴

Though only a few Englishmen profited from the direct exploitation of their African slaves prior to 1600, there was a much broader British involvement in the slave trade from Africa to the Americas. Portuguese sailors were instrumental in helping to formulate England’s earliest explorations of West Africa. In fact, it was Portuguese captain, Anthony Anes Pinteado, who “first perswaded [English] marchants to attempt the said voyages to Guinea.” Pinteado was the brains behind Thomas Wyndham’s initial journey in 1553. Because of his “cunning in sailing” and “expert” piloting, Pinteado was recruited by the voyage’s investors to captain one of the ships. Unfortunately for the factors, the “untame braine of Windam” ignored the “counsel and experience of

²⁴ Hakluyt, XI, 26-39.

Pinteado,” resulting in the deaths of nearly a hundred crewmen, including Pinteado himself. The journey was a disastrous failure.²⁵

Despite this setback, the English quickly regrouped and began their direct involvement in transporting Africans across the Atlantic. As early as 1555, John Lok returned to England with “certaine blacke slaves” who were trained in the English language and then returned to Africa.²⁶ The fact that these Africans were described as “slaves” reveals the ambiguity of English attitudes. On the one hand, Lok’s five Africans clearly arrived in England as “slaves,” just as they would leave three months later. On the other hand, England itself had no slaves, so in theory, the five Africans were free during the time they were in England.

By the 1560s, a number of English traders were dealing in African slaves, and it was from the Iberians, and later the Dutch, that they learned the contours of this trade. Evidence suggests that English involvement in the trade probably began in the form of small exchanges in Africa between English traders and Iberians. For instance, in 1566, an English trader on his way to Guinea was offered some “Negroes” by a Portuguese captain. The same English trader sold five Africans to another Portuguese vessel on his return trip to England.²⁷ Some years later, in 1606, the English captain, “Mister Liefkins,” was awarded “at least ninety slave men and women” for his part in aiding a Dutch ship that plundered a Portuguese charter in the Senegambia region. Presumably,

²⁵ Hakluyt, VI, 152, 148.

²⁶ Hakluyt, VI, 176.

²⁷ Jordan, 59.

these slaves were sold locally in Africa, although it is possible that they were carried to England or the Americas.²⁸

English merchants certainly saw the potential for large-scale trade in slaves to the Spanish Americas. John Hawkins, who led three English slaving ventures between 1562 and 1567, had already established a close relationship with Spanish merchants when he arrived in the Canary Islands in 1562. There, his Spanish partners told him “that Negros were very good merchandise in Hispaniola, and that store of Negros might easily bee had upon the coast of Guinea....”²⁹ Hawkins hired a Spanish pilot, Juan Martínez, who was familiar with the routes to West Africa and the Indies.³⁰ Guided by Martínez, Hawkins collected 300 slaves on the African coast and proceeded to Hispaniola, where he traded the Africans for a variety of goods, including hides, ginger, sugar, and pearls. On his second voyage, Hawkins arrived on the African coast, where Portuguese traders sold him slaves to fill two caravels. Several days later he attacked the town of Bymba on the advice of some “Portugals” who informed him “hee might gette an hundreth slaves.”³¹ Altogether, Hawkins collected more than 400 slaves and once again dispensed with them in the Spanish Caribbean.

Outraged that Hawkins was violating the Royal monopoly on trade and failing to pay duties and license charges on his slaves, the Spanish Crown convinced Queen Elizabeth to prohibit Hawkins’ from trading in the Spanish colonies. Undaunted,

²⁸ Pieter van den Broecke, *Pieter van den Broecke’s Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea, and Angola (1605-1612)* (London, 2000), 33-34.

²⁹ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, X, 7.

³⁰ Harry Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins: Queen Elizabeth’s Slave Trader* (New Haven, CT, 2003), 14-15.

³¹ Hawkins, X, 21-22.

Hawkins commissioned Captain John Lovell to go to Africa, and then the Indies, on his behalf. Lovell attempted to sell nearly a hundred slaves in Rio de la Hacha (modern-day Riohacha, Colombia); however, he was rebuffed by the Spanish. With his slaves sick and starving, Lovell eventually was forced to abandon them along the coast. The Spanish colonists captured the ailing slaves and requested that King Philip “deign to give these Negroes...to the people of this city.”³²

Finally, on his third voyage, Hawkins “obtained between foure and five hundred Negros,” at which time he “thought it somewhat reasonable to seeke the coast of the West Indies.” Hawkins delivered more than half of these slaves to the Spanish Caribbean before the voyage was cut short by violent storms and agents of the Spanish Crown.³³ At the Admiralty hearing investigating this voyage, another English trader, William Fowler, testified that “the best trade in [the Spanish Americas] is of Negros: the trade whereof he...hathe used and hathe sould Negros at the saide places and seen other marchantes likewise sell ther Negros there, Divers tymes.” Fowler provided great detail on the quality of slaves sought by Spanish colonists and the prices these slaves would fetch in the West Indies, Mexico, and Peru. For instance, he noted that, “if a Negro be a Bossale that is to say ignorant of the spanishe or Portugale tonge then he or she is commonlye sould for 400 and 450 pesos. But if the Negro can speake anye of the foresaide languages...(whiche is called Ladinos) then the same negro is commonlye sould for 500 and 600 pesos as the negro is of choise and yonge of yeres.” Fowler was also aware that

³² *Spanish Documents Concerning English Voyages to the Caribbean, 1527-1568: Selected from the Archives of the Indies at Seville*, ed. I.A. Wright (London, 1929; reprint, Nendeln/Liechtenstein, 1967), 109-112.

³³ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, X, 66.

those “Negros beinge caried into the Inner and farder partes of the mayne lande of Peru in the west Indias be commonlye sold there for 800 and 900 pesos...”³⁴ Fowler’s comments indicate that English traders had detailed knowledge of the slave trade in the Americas, even as early as the 1560s. Clearly, the trade in African slaves was already becoming routine, at least for some English traders.

Though English captains were intimately involved in the Spanish and Portuguese slave trades, by the 1570s, conflict in Europe precipitated a shift from furtive trade to outright piracy. English privateers were employed by Queen Elizabeth to plunder Spanish and Portuguese ships in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Americas. Slave ships were seized with some degree of regularity, again reinforcing English familiarity with African slavery and the slave trade. Perhaps the most striking English involvement in privateering and the slave trade was that of Christopher Newport. The same Christopher Newport who would later command the first voyage to Jamestown in 1607 had in 1592 captained an English corsair that “tooke a Portugall ship of Lisbone...which came from Guinie, and was bound for Cartagena, wherein were 300. Negros young and olde.”³⁵ Newport’s direct involvement in the slave trade may well be inconsequential to the later enslavement of Africans in North America, but it is difficult to imagine that the subject of labor did not arise in conversations between captain, passengers, and crew on the long four-month voyage from England to Virginia. One

³⁴ Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, 1930-35), I, 72.

³⁵ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, X, 184-185. One week after Newport took the Portuguese ship, another Englishman, William King, captured “a shippe...from Guiny, laden with two hundred and seventy Negros, which we caried with us to S. Juan de Puerto Rico.” See Hakluyt, X, 190-191.

must also wonder whether the passengers on Newport's other four crossings to Virginia between 1608 and 1611 were in any way influenced by this former slaver.

Although most of the captured Africans were sold to foreign parts, some arrived in England as freed men and women. These were the first noticeable **groups** of Africans to arrive on English soil, and they were not treated kindly. Indeed, in 1596, and again in 1601, Queen Elizabeth ordered the expulsion of all "Negars and Blackamoors" from the reign. In the 1601 edict, she wrote that she was "highly discontented to understand the great numbers of negars and Blackamoors which...are crept into this realm since the troubles between Her Highness and the King of Spain who are fostered and relieved [i.e. fed] her to the great annoyance of her own liege people, that want the relief [i.e. food], which those people consume, as also for that the most of them are infidels, having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel."³⁶ As one of the only official references to the African presence in England during this early period, Elizabeth's proclamation should be read carefully. In the Queen's rendering, it is clear that Africans were not arriving as slaves, but neither were they worthy of "insider" status. Despite the fact that English ship captains were responsible for transporting Africans to England, the Queen characterized them as "creeping" into the realm, essentially blaming the King of Spain for their presence. In short, Africans were the unwanted detritus from conflicts with Spain. Since the English could not enslave these "inferior" people, they chose to expel them. The rationale provided by the Queen was tied to concerns over competition for food and shelter between Africans and "her own liege people." The dichotomy of "Negars and Blackamoors" versus "her own liege people" is an unequivocal statement that "Negars

³⁶ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 12.

and Blackamoors” could never aspire to be English. It is also an assertion that “Negars and Blackamoors” were a separate nation, one defined by skin color, but imbued with social and cultural understandings of Africans as leeching infidels. We should also bear in mind that Africans were Spain’s chattel slaves, the political rival’s social and cultural “outsider.” In the end, Queen Elizabeth’s order to expel Africans was one of political, cultural, and racial expediency. Ironically, as blackness was conflated with notions of political and cultural inferiority, England and Spain were drawn closer together by their common whiteness and European “civilization.”

Africans in the Atlantic, c. 1619

Europeans continued to solidify a common identity vis-à-vis “Negroes” across the Atlantic world, especially by the seventeenth century. In practical terms, the English, and especially the Dutch, whittled away at Iberian supremacy on the open seas, including in the African slave trade. From an ideological perspective, northern Europeans continued to draw from the Iberian example in their perceptions of blackness. One of the clearest examples of this can be seen in the terms used to describe black people. Instead of using the term “black” to describe Africans, the English, the Dutch, and the French relied on variations of the Spanish “Negro.” There were suitable terms for “black” in all of these languages, yet northern Europeans adopted variations of “Negro” by the mid-sixteenth century. The only reasonable explanation for the adoption of the word “Negro” is that it conveyed a concept or a meaning that was absent from the languages of northern Europe. In short, there was not another word in these languages that could capture both

“blackness” and servile status. Just as was the case with the Spanish and the Portuguese, northern Europeans recognized that “Negro” was synonymous with “slave,” or at least, “enslaveable” status. At the same time, “Negroes” were distant and alien to most northern Europeans, belonging primarily to Europe’s Mediterranean frontier. The fact that “Negro” slavery was practically non-existent in northern Europe only exaggerated the Africans’ alien and marginal status. Thus, when the term, “Negro,” was applied by northern Europeans, there was a sort of double “othering” implied. On the one hand, there was the acceptance of the Iberian conflation of skin color and slave status. On the other hand, was the implicit understanding that “Negroes” (as black people AND as slaves) were usually restricted to the inferior domains of Europe—Spain and Portugal. In this way, “Negroes” were represented as the familiar “other’s” “Other.”³⁷

If Africans were widely understood to be members of an enslaveable Negro “nation,” then “Europe” must have been the normative political community against which these non-Christian, uncivilized, blacks were measured. While I would hesitate to impute conscious motive on the formation of a “European” or “white” identity during this period, it is clear that the bundle of norms associated with European “civilization” was what separated Europeans from Africans, at least in the European mind. Some might argue that these group distinctions were based on nothing more than cultural difference; however, this logic simply displaces race onto group difference. In practice, group differences between “Negroes” and “Europeans” were always marked by racial

³⁷ This double “othering” was also present in early Iberian understandings of Africans. See James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV (1997): 143-166.

differences, as social and cultural realities were literally “read” onto black and white bodies.

In his recent book, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, David Eltis also argues that the emergence of a “European” identity was instrumental in determining slave status; however, he concludes that the line between insider and outsider status in Europe “was never drawn strictly in terms of skin color or race, however defined.”³⁸ Eltis argues that by the fifteenth century, a singular European identity coalesced around notions of individual rights in an emerging market economy. Europeans could expel other Europeans from “their” nation state, as the Spanish did with Jews and Moriscos. They could also imprison or kill individuals for crimes against the state. But individual rights protected Europeans from enslavement, and Europeans of all nations tacitly respected these rights, thereby creating an imagined community of unenslaveable “Europeans.” In this way, slavery became a fate worse than death itself and was reserved only for non-Europeans. Meanwhile, in Africa, political fragmentation and the continued enslavement of ethnic/national “outsiders” provided a vibrant market for European slave traders, who simply tapped into markets where the interests of nation, clan, and kin group took precedence over individual rights. Eltis concludes that the rejection of European slavery and the embrace of African slavery were both “unthinking decisions” on the parts of Europeans.³⁹ Hence, African slavery was a function of political and economic forces rather than any conscious antipathy to race.

³⁸ David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2000), 60.

³⁹ Eltis, 72.

While Eltis' argument regarding the emergence of a collective European identity is convincing, his denial of race in this process is problematic. Indeed, it is precisely the ways that Europeans conceived the collective identities of others that point to a rigid racial hierarchy. Eltis acknowledges group differences between Europeans and Africans, at least in terms of politics and society, but he completely ignores the ways that Europeans couched these differences. In the European optic, Africans were almost always categorized as "Negroes." Eltis himself provides several examples of black "insiders" who took part on the European side of the slave trade, among them a "black" captain of an English slave ship and a "Christian Negroe" slave merchant.⁴⁰ Eltis uses these examples to illustrate the racial permeability of insider/outsider status among Europeans. Apparently, the fact that these men were involved on the European side of the trade is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they were "insiders." However, Eltis fails to note that the terms used to describe each of these men--"black" and "Negro"--were *prima facie* racialized. "Black" ship captains, "Negro" merchants, and "Negro" Christians were anomalies. That European commentators highlighted the exceptional status of these men only reified the normative idea that "Negro" was synonymous with "slave." Ultimately, Eltis fails to recognize that free "European" identity emerged in contradistinction to a racial nation of enslaved "Negroes."

Even as Northern Europeans represented "Negroes," in part, through Iberian eyes, they also shared similar understandings about African religion and culture. As noted earlier, race and religion were key components in delineating the gulf between Europeans and "Negroes." English traveler Richard Jobson highlighted the nexus of race, religion,

⁴⁰ Eltis, 61.

and European national/political identity when he described the mixed-race inhabitants of the Senegambian coast in 1620. In describing these Luso-Africans, Jobson wrote: “I must...acquainte you...of another sort of people we finde dwelling, or rather lurking, amongst these Mandingos.... And these are, as they call themselves, Portingales, and some few of them seeme the same; others of them are Molatoes...but the most part as blacke, as the naturall inhabitants.... They have amongst them, neither Church, nor Frier, nor any other religious order.... They do generally employ themselves in buying...commodities...still reserving carefully, the use of the Portingall tongue, and with a kinde of affectionate zeale, the name of Christian, taking it in a great disdain, be they never so blacke, to be called a Negro.”⁴¹

Jobson’s commentary is revealing on several levels. First, he is an Englishman in Portuguese Africa, asserting a European “insider’s” critique of Luso-Africans. Jobson’s mocking comments regarding Luso-African claims to Portugal, Christianity, and even whiteness, are clearly made from a shared position with the Portuguese, one that centers on race, but which also includes religion. Second, and perhaps even more damning than Jobson’s perspectives on shared European identity, is the extent to which Luso-Africans also embraced this paradigm. Luso-Africans tenaciously held to their Portuguese and “white” identities in order to set themselves apart from the “uncivilized” masses around them. Some might argue that this was an illustration of the fluidity of race; I would argue the exact opposite. Luso-African claims to white Portuguese identities reinforced European notions of race and nation, further marginalizing those Senegambians who were non-European, non-Christian, and black.

⁴¹ Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade* (London, 1623; reprint, New York, 1968), 28-30.

In recent years, scholars of colonial American history have gravitated toward the notion that these multi-cultural peoples were at the core of North America's "charter generation" of slaves. Ira Berlin's conceptualization of "Atlantic Creoles" has become a convenient way of explaining apparent racial and cultural fluidity in the early seventeenth-century Chesapeake and has quickly become woven into the fabric of colonial North American historical narratives. In describing the transitional experiences of the Chesapeake's first slaves, Berlin argues that: "Atlantic creoles found the settlement around Chesapeake Bay little different from those they had left along the Atlantic rim...[and] found themselves very much at home in the new environment."⁴² Though Berlin's broad, Atlantic approach is commendable, his arguments are overdrawn on several levels.

First, Berlin's assertion that the first slaves in North America arrived as "Atlantic Creoles" is simply not sustainable. His extended discussion of Luso-African traders in Senegambia, Angola, and so on, while interesting, has little bearing on the "society with slaves" that emerged in the Chesapeake. Berlin emphasizes the social, cultural, and racial ambiguity of these Luso-Africans, but he never establishes that any of them arrived in the Americas as slaves. As he points out, their numbers were relatively small along the African coast. More importantly, we must remember that they were TRADERS in slaves; not slaves themselves. Indeed, their skills as "middle (wo)men"⁴³ were crucial for Europeans and Africans desiring to engage in trade. To that end, Luso-Africans were

⁴² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 40.

⁴³ Many of these mixed-race traders were women, another crucial element that works against Berlin's argument. The vast majority of slaves taken to the Americas, especially prior to the eighteenth century, were men.

indispensable for both parties. This is not to say that there were not isolated incidences where “Atlantic Creoles” were enslaved and carried to the Americas; however, the vast majority of slaves came from African societies whose exposure to European culture was limited, at best.

As for the handfuls of acculturated Africans who *were* enslaved, Berlin argues that large sugar planters in the Americas rejected them because their familiarity with European languages and cultures “might be subversive to the good order of the plantation.” As such, these “refuse” slaves were sent on to “marginal” societies like mainland North America.⁴⁴ Once again, the evidence does not square with Berlin’s claims. In fact, it seems that the large-scale slave societies of the Americas *desired* acculturated slaves in the early colonial period. As already noted above in William Fowler’s testimony at the Hawkins inquest, Spanish colonists were willing to pay a 20%-25% premium for slaves who could speak the “spanishe or Portugale tonge.” Likewise, in the sugar-growing region of Bahia, *ladinos* [acculturated Africans] routinely fetched 25% more than newly arrived Africans in the slave market.⁴⁵ The reasons for this are clear enough. Acculturated Africans not only spoke European languages; they were familiar with European labor regimes and often possessed skills desired by the colonists. Perhaps most importantly, *ladinos* were already “seasoned” against the many diseases that so often struck down their African brethren on the sugar plantations. In short,

⁴⁴ Berlin, 24-25.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, the series of returns from 1704-1716 on Engenho Sergipe. Over this period, the average price of a male *ladino* was 130 mil-réis, while the price of a newly-arrived African was 90 mil-réis. *Ladinos* represented around 15% of all slave purchases. ANTT, Cartório dos Jesuítas, Maço 17, Nos. 28 and 29.

despite whatever fears planters may have had about the “subversiveness” of acculturated Africans, they still perceived them as stronger, more intelligent workers.

Berlin’s substantive evidence on the North American side is also largely unconvincing. For instance, he claims that “Atlantic Creoles...numbered large among the “twenty Negars” a Dutch Man-o’-war sold to John Rolfe at Jamestown in 1619.”⁴⁶ However, Engel Sluiter has established that these twenty slaves were not Creoles at all; rather, they were Angolans taken from a Portuguese slave ship on its way from Luanda to Vera Cruz. The Dutch privateers who captured the Portuguese vessel transferred the Angolans directly to Virginia, via the Caribbean.⁴⁷ John Thornton has expanded on Sluiter’s findings, suggesting that the twenty Angolans were probably from the Kingdom of Ndongo, spoke Kikongo and/or Kimbundu, and likely had only a brief introduction to Catholicism.⁴⁸

Berlin relies heavily on the names given to these so-called “Atlantic Creoles,” names like Anthony Longo, Francisco a Negro, etc. He argues that these names were indicative of acculturation in the broader Atlantic world, either in Europe or the Americas. However, across the Americas, names like António Loango and Francisco Negro were commonly given to first-generation African slaves, sometimes even before their departure from Africa. Indeed, baptism of slaves along the African coast was not at all uncommon, but the mechanics of these one-off ceremonies often did not lend

⁴⁶ Berlin, 29.

⁴⁷ Engel Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20 and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV (1997): 396-398. Berlin cites Sluiter’s article in his book; however, he fails to acknowledge his argument.

⁴⁸ John K. Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20 and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” *William and Mary Quarterly* LV (1998): 421-434.

themselves to anything more than superficial knowledge of European culture and Christianity. For example, baptismal ceremonies in early seventeenth-century Angola entailed a simple three-part process. One day before departure for the Americas, several hundred slaves were gathered in the plaza of the city of Luanda. Without any catechism or teaching about God, they were given Christian names, written down on a piece of paper by the priest so the slaves would not “forget.” They were then administered salt on their tongues. Finally, water was cast on their heads, often in a collective fashion. This was the essence of their “Atlantic creolization.”⁴⁹

When these Africans arrived in the Americas, they attempted to explain their understanding of the baptismal ceremony. In the early seventeenth century, Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval recorded testimony from slaves arriving into Cartagena, Colombia (New Granada), testimonies that were delivered in Kikongo or Kimbundu. The majority interpreted their Angolan baptisms as a form of witchcraft. Some believed that the water was to prepare them to be eaten; others thought they were going to be turned into gunpowder; and still others believed that the baptismal ceremony was to prevent them from rising against the whites on board the slave ship. None understood baptism as a washing away of sin.⁵⁰

Even after several years in the Americas, many Africans still had only a fragmented understanding of European culture. Jesuit priests in northeast Brazil commented on the difficulties of proselytizing African slaves. A 1617 missionary report from Bahia noted that:

⁴⁹ Sandoval, 348.

⁵⁰ Sandoval, 349, 363-64.

“The people from Angola who come to these parts of Brazil are mostly unenlightened in the doctrine and the things that pertain to their salvation.... There are no priests who know their language who can teach them and administer the sacraments of matrimony, confession, and communion...they are lacking everything necessary for their salvation. And even if they were baptized in Angola...rarely or never does one find that [the slave] knows what he received in the baptism and to what he is obligated to God, and they are totally ignorant of everything that pertains to the substance of the mysteries of Our Holy Faith; and thus with this blindness they persevere after coming from Angola among the Christians, and in the face of the Church for a space of many years, after being 4, 5, and 6 years in the house of their masters, without knowing what is necessary for their salvation.”⁵¹

From the perspective of the Atlantic world, it is clear that the vast majority of slaves who arrived in the Americas were “unacculturated” Africans. For those few who were exposed to European life ways, there is little evidence to indicate that they became “creolized” to the extent that some scholars are now suggesting. Nevertheless, those who *were* conversant in European languages and patterns of work were sought after; not rejected by most slaveholders. Hence, the likelihood that North America’s first slaves were “Atlantic Creoles” is very slim indeed.

A far more plausible explanation for the apparent racial/cultural fluidity of seventeenth century Chesapeake lies in the isolation and atomization of these first slaves.

⁵¹ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Brasilia (I); Vatican Film Library, Roll 159, ff. 250-51

For the handfuls of slaves who arrived in the Chesapeake before 1640, there were few options in attempting to reconstruct the social fabric of their African pasts. In these “societies with slaves,” there was not an African “community” to speak of. As such, slaves were integrated into a world where they were forced to adapt to the master’s language, culture, and social understandings. Thus, we should understand someone like Anthony Johnson not as an “Atlantic Creole,” but rather as an African (probably Angolan) who adapted to the social expectations of the Chesapeake during his twelve-year tenure as a slave.

When viewed from the larger context of the Atlantic world, it seems that many scholars have telescoped the experiences of early Chesapeake slaves--both geographically and chronologically--obscuring the reality of a slave society *in formation*. The Chesapeake, circa 1620s, was witnessing the birth of yet another node in the Atlantic system of racial slavery. In this regard, it was no different than São Tomé in 1500, Mexico in the 1530s, or Bahia in the 1540s. All of these had become full-blown “slave societies” prior to the 1620s, but in their infancy they were not unlike the Chesapeake, with handfuls of isolated Africans in a sea of Europeans and/or indigenous peoples. While it is true that economic forces propelled the formation of large-scale slave societies in all of these places, this still does not answer the questions of “why slavery” and “why Africa.” Nor does it explain why African slavery was the preferred labor solution for all manner of Europeans in the Atlantic world across time. The only plausible explanation is that Africans were consistently understood as inferiors subject to enslavement.

Just as was the case in the broader Atlantic, differences of nation, religion, and race were at the forefront of early North American understandings of Africans. John

Rolfe's cryptic comment on the first large group of Africans was revealing, even in 1619: "About the last of August came in a dutch man of warre that sold us twenty Negars."

The simplicity of this statement almost obscures the obvious. The "Dutch" man of warre was familiar and European, while the "Negars" were unfamiliar and undifferentiated.

The fact that they were "Negars" was enough to signify their collective status as chattel.

The juxtaposition of "English" or "European" with "Negroes" continued in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake. In 1629, commanders in the Virginia colony were ordered to "take a general muster of all the inhabitants men woemen and Children as well as Englishe as Negroes."⁵² Here, we see English national identity posed in opposition to "Negro" identity, suggesting that blacks were both racial and national/political outsiders. These ideas were further tied to religion. In 1639, a Maryland statute stated that "all Inhabitants of the Province being Christians (Slaves excepted) Shall have and enjoy all such rights liberties immunities priveledges and free customs within this Province as any naturall born subject of England."⁵³ Again, black slaves were set apart from "subjects of England," who "naturally" enjoy certain privileges and liberties. These natural rights were explicitly tied to Christian beliefs. Since black slaves were not Christians, they were not entitled to the same rights and privileges as English subjects. Finally, in 1681, a Maryland statute explained that interracial relationships between white women and black men were "always to the Satisfaccion of their Lascivious and Lustfull desires, and to the disgrace not only of the English butt also of many other Christian Nations."⁵⁴ Though the

⁵² Jordan, 73-74.

⁵³ Jordan, 74-75.

⁵⁴ Jordan, 79-80.

reference to interracial relationships is indicative of some individual racial fluidity, the wording of the law demonstrates a transcendent “European” identity centered on whiteness and Christianity, an identity to be protected from the impurities of “Negroes.” That black men would sleep with white women was an offense to all of white, European Christendom.

Conclusion

The early English experience with race and slavery was closely bound to that of Spain, Portugal, and the rest of Europe. As early as the fifteenth century (and before) Iberians created a well-articulated language of racial inferiority and applied it to non-Christians and non-whites. By the sixteenth century, ideas about centralized monarchy, governance, humanism, and Christianity were intrinsic to a much broader European identity and were utilized as tools for measuring humankind on other parts of the globe. When Europeans encountered Africans, they often found them lacking European-style religion, government, and respect for individual rights. Moreover, these “uncivilized” Africans were marked by their blackness. The racial nation of “Negroes” that emerged from these cultural and phenotypical differences was a direct contrast to a European “nation” that shared a common “civilization” and a common “whiteness.”

In the specific case of England, its embrace of racial slavery was ambivalent, but also extraordinarily predictable, in light of its place in the expanding Atlantic world. On the one hand, sixteenth-century England was a “free” country, where slavery was viewed as an anachronism. On the other hand, Africans represented a relatively unfamiliar and alien people, a people who were the chattel slaves of England’s Spanish rivals. When

English merchants, traders, and later colonists encountered Africans in the Atlantic, they had no qualms about enslaving them and profiting from their trade. As the evidence suggests, these Englishmen learned a great deal about the contours of this trade from the Spanish and the Portuguese. Moreover, they rationalized the enslavement of Africans in many of the same terms that Iberians did. Ultimately, racial slavery in English North America was the predictable outcome of a broadly shared national, religious, and cultural identity. In the burgeoning Atlantic, “Europeans” were forged white, free, Christians, while “Negroes” were forged as black, enslaved, heathens.