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Race

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Race matters – so much does it matter to us now, that our current conceptions of it may hamper our understanding of how it mattered (or didn't matter) in the past. Tracing the history of ideas of race can make sense of what they may have meant in the past while also showing that the Atlantic dimension of this history is precisely what has shaped our current ideas of race. Indeed, racism in its present form is a specific product of Atlantic history. That is, if race is a perceived physical difference that is assumed to be inherited, is strongly associated with skin color, and is crafted to support systems of human subjugation, this idea was peculiar to the Atlantic world created by European colonization. To be sure, it had precedents in certain theories that had emerged in pre-Columbian Europe. Yet its most distinctive elements would have been alien to Europeans in the classical and medieval worlds, despite their considerable experience with exploitation, xenophobia, and imperialism. Perhaps more than any other set of ideas, race was Atlantic. The history of slavery makes especially clear that racism took strong hold in the western Atlantic, with powerful implications for the populations that mingled in the Americas, for the social structures of colonial societies, and for ideas of political rights on either side of the Atlantic. It is the continuing legacy of these implications that interests us in race and makes it necessary for us to see how it so deeply marked the modern world.

In the first part of my essay, I will survey the range of attitudes Europeans had about race before they crossed the Atlantic, and, by so doing, I will stress that for every tendency that gestured toward a modern concept of race there was an equal and opposite tendency

to undercut the potential foundations of race. I will then show how European colonization of the Americas encouraged colonizers to identify labor to exploit and to present reasons for that exploitation as grounded in physical nature; these impulses gave race its foundations, ones that had been lacking before European expansion across the Atlantic.

I will commence with a broad look at European history, then a narrower look at Iberian origins of Atlantic colonization and racism. This will make clear that the English were not at the frontier of these experiences; they came later to the Americas and their decisions reflect knowledge of existing Iberian practices toward Africans and Indians. In relation to Africans, the English were *imitators* of Iberian theory and practice, especially in their adoption of enslaved African laborers for plantation regions; in relation to American Indians, however, the English were *innovators*, establishing ideas about natives' bodily frailty that were distinctive to the British colonies.

I

Though much recent work on the English-speaking Atlantic world claims to discuss race, most of this scholarship in fact discusses questions of status, religious confession, superficial physical appearance, or cultural practice. That is, these studies fail to address the definitive and insidious feature of racism: its grounding in the human body and in lineage, which thus defines it as inescapable, a non-negotiable attribute that predicts socio-political power or lack of power. This idea has a relatively recent history. Indeed, the history of the word 'race' reveals the distance we have traveled since the pre-Columbian era. The term, which originated in several Romance languages during the middle ages, designated a race as any group of people who shared some characteristics, and it did so rather neutrally, much in the way we would describe ethnicity, nationality, language group, or even kin group. It was not until the eighteenth century that race took on a consistently judgmental connotation, indicating differences among peoples meant to describe superiority and inferiority and implying an inheritance of status that was inescapable. Even into the nineteenth century, however, race continued to carry multiple meanings, making it difficult to distinguish what we might now recognize as race from the other connotations the word carried. To find the ancestors of modern conceptions of race, we need to look at a broad set of concerns, only some of which might be congruent with modern ideas.[1]

Most ancient and medieval schemas that distinguished between human populations were concerned with civic and religious status, not bodily difference. Denigration according to skin color, it should be noted, was not a marked feature of ancient or medieval societies. The ancient Greeks (on whose thinking Europeans grounded much of their political theory) were far more concerned to define who belonged to the polity, and therefore had citizenship, than they were to distinguish among differently appearing humans. Civic status was only available to free men who owned property within the *polis*; slaves, servants, women, children, landless men, and aliens all lacked true political character. In ancient Greece and Rome, xenophobia against those with an unfamiliar appearance certainly was present, yet not of paramount interest to ancient theorists of rights or their lack.[2]

Between the fall of Rome and the eighteenth century, European commentators on humanity assented to the orthodox, Christian doctrine of monogenesis, the belief that all people were descended from the originally created parents, Adam and Eve. To a certain extent, monogenesis curbed impulses that otherwise distinguished between human groups: other humans could be only so alien and inferior before realization of their common humanity had to occur. Monsters, who might appear to be partly human, existed in a separate category, indicating God's ability to create fantastic beings yet also serving to demarcate the boundaries of humanity. Against the monstrous, humans existed in their separate and special creation, a status that unified all people as actual or potential worshipers of their true creator.[3]

The lack of meaningful color prejudice and the belief in monogenesis give two cheers for the western tradition's unifying tendencies, but this is not to say that ideas of superiority and inferiority did not exist in the ancient and medieval worlds. A great deal of effort went into the differentiation of people in order to argue for specific social and political arrangements; some arguments also posited that human differences were inherited. This was the case even within otherwise unified cultural groups, in which lineage demarcated predictable social roles. Most obviously, the idea of aristocracy presented privileged position (property and authority) as the result of inherited qualities made manifest in inherited goods and power. The ancient concept of noble lineage is therefore quite possibly the remote ancestor of racial ideas. People other than aristocrats likewise inherited their abilities and position; assertions about peasants' mean nature (and low status) also stressed inheritance. In both cases, aristocrats and peasants were assumed to have physical and mental capacities appropriate for their roles. Thus the deep roots of the assumption that 'breeding will out', and that, however they might dress in each other's garb and wield each other's tools and weapons, persons of different ranks would betray their essentially different natures.[4]

These ideas were closely related to, and indeed probably modeled upon, ideas about sexual difference. Lineage depended, of course, on sexual reproduction, which itself was possible only because men and women were physically different; difference enabled reproduction and was itself reproduced naturally over the generations. Western culture was not content with these phenomena as facts of nature, but embellished them with assumptions about other physical and mental differences between male and female. These cultural embellishments ascribed hierarchical roles to men and women, usually emphasizing men's ability for public roles in war and politics along with women's private roles in childbearing and domestic work. Above all, the primary characteristic of citizens was their maleness. Women lacked political personality; cultural aliens were therefore essentially feminized, as persons external to the *polis*. The expectation that some people would be subordinate and others dominant was therefore deeply embedded in assumptions about social and gender hierarchy within European culture.[5]

These ideas were not identical to the parallel concepts that differentiated between humans who came from varied cultures. Prejudice against cultural outsiders did mark ancient and medieval thought, but people were rarely consistent in arguing that aliens were irreducibly different and inferior in the way that they argued that lineage and sex made people different. Instead, language, custom (what we would call culture), and climate created human variety across the globe. Each of these factors received lavish attention and generated complex literatures. Medical theories and travel accounts, especially, devoted a great deal of attention to the question of why the world's populations presented variety rather than conformity.

Surveys of human types were openly chauvinistic, promoting the qualities of the surveyors over those of the surveyed. Language and climate were measures of one's civility over the uncivilized nature of others. Thus the Greeks had called non-Greeks barbarians because of the way their utterances sounded (as if babbled, 'bar-bar') to the Greek ear; the Greeks and Romans maintained that written language was an essential element of true humanity, meaning legal and political culture. The Greeks had also asserted that a temperate

climate was essential for true civilization. Hot climates made people prone to sloth, luxury, and vice; cold climates made humans stoic and stupid. These prejudices survived antiquity, with European commentators insisting that written language and temperate climate were prerequisites to law and civility.[6]

For medieval and early modern Europeans, the paramount categories for humans had to do with religion, meaning Christianity or its absence. Christendom designated the part of the world that was central to Christian cosmography. Conceptualization of Christian Europe as the world's focal point developed especially in the context of the crusades against Muslims in the Near East. During these conflicts, the term 'Frank' became more common as a term to describe a Christian European, as opposed to Jews and Muslims. Religion therefore functioned in some ways as a form of ethnicity and as a foundation of nationality; if lineage and sex indicated where Europeans belonged within their own societies, religion (like climate and language) showed where they belonged in relation to the rest of the world. Religion denoted European belonging and exclusion and indicated terms for persecution and possible exploitation.[7]

Still, as was the case with language, custom, political identity, and climate, religious difference was not irreversible. Indeed, it was precisely because people could learn new languages, convert to new faiths, acquire political capacity, settle in and adapt to new climates, and adopt new customs that these variables lacked the all-important inescapability of lineage and sexual status. In some instances, acquired differences were thought to become heritable. Overall, however, these were characteristics that went under the contemporary heading of accidental: that is, they were accidents of birth (and hence reversible within a generation) rather than intrinsic to a lineage and continuing over the generations.

These bundles of ideas – too polyvalent and flexible to form ideologies comparable to modern racism – continued through much of the eighteenth century. Their variety and persistence demonstrate that ideas about race were not inevitable products of western culture; there were too many possibilities at work earlier. That a rather narrow idea – in which inherited bodily differences justified exploitation of some by others – would triumph over other views would not necessarily have seemed likely during the middle ages, for instance. But careful recent scholarship on attitudes toward two groups, Jews and sub-Saharan Africans, has revealed that medieval and early modern Europeans in the Mediterranean were in fact crafting much more exclusionary explanations of these two peoples that would point in a new and distinctive direction.

Anti-Semitism and anti-African xenophobia accordingly had the clearest resemblances to modern ideas of race, however regional and specialized these attitudes may have been during the middle ages themselves. Prejudice against Jews was perhaps most marked in late medieval Spain. There, religious persecution of Jews (and Muslims) fostered belief among some that even Jews who had converted to Christianity bore some mark of difference and inferiority. Concern over 'purity of blood' led officials in the Inquisition to arrest and interrogate suspect *conversos*, people who had converted from Judaism to Christianity but remained tainted in lineage, despite this cultural and religious transformation. Such suspicion also marked Mediterranean Europeans' views of sub-Saharan Africans, individuals usually brought into Europe under conditions of enslavement and therefore deeply associated with a bondage, physical durability, and cultural inferiority that would pass down to their children.[8]

The hypothesis that Jews and Africans inherited their characteristics was connected to biblical exegesis about the scattered progeny of Noah. Orthodox Christian (like Judaic) belief stressed that the peoples of the world were descended from the sons of Noah who had repopulated the world after the Deluge. Each son was interpreted as traveling to a different part of the globe; in addition, the lineage of one son, Canaan (father of Cham), was supposedly cursed. Explanations of each son's destination, and especially the eventual home of Cham, varied, but some interpretations placed Cham in Africa and described his descendants as cursed. This tracing of Noah's genealogy built upon expectations that lineage and religion designated human status. Obviously we can here detect insidious tremors of the racist earthquake yet to come in mass enslavement and genocide against Africans and Jews. Still, these were developments in the future, and beliefs that Jews and Africans belonged to cursed lineages were not yet put to systematic work in the ways they would be in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[9]

In the meantime, attitudes toward disease functioned much more to justify socio-economic exploitation of certain groups, and especially the enslavement of Africans. The experience of the Black Death in medieval Europe gave its residents a shocking reminder of their bodily weakness and an interest in determining who, if anyone, might be resistant to such physical assaults. If the idea of the curse on Cham signified a vague quest to discover who might be hewers of

wood and drawers of water, suspicion that West Africans were uniquely fit to bear physical hardship was a much more salient contribution to the pro-slavery arguments eventually based on race. African bodily durability had been a byword since the Roman era. Importation of slaves into the European Mediterranean accelerated after the Black Death and during shortages of labor in Europe. Meanwhile, the Europeans who now knew their bodily weakness in the face of plagues also noticed that they could not thrive in the tropical climates of West Africa, as might natives of this place. These experiences and assumptions about work, body, and disease may very well have reinforced each other to promote a preference for enslaved African labor in certain places. Certainly, Iberian use of African labor on the Atlantic islands they colonized and planted with sugar was a clear step in the development of racial slavery in the Atlantic, that is, a practical association between bodily type and socio-economic status in the Atlantic world, with some to be enslaved and others to be slaveholders.[10]

Before the era of European overseas expansion, therefore, everything that could possibly have been said about human difference had already been said. Some human characteristics were held to be merely accidental differences, incidental features that might change within an individual's time or over the generations, if new customs were introduced or migration to new climates occurred. Other features were inherited, sometimes indicating social status and sexual role, sometimes marking even more strongly different capacities for religious salvation or social mobility. All these ideas existed together, one or another being deployed as circumstances necessitated. That some worked against others (accidents versus lineage, especially) showed that many Europeans were not yet interested in crafting a coherent ideology of inborn differences to help consistently to exploit others. And one idea essential to modern theories of race was entirely absent, a meaningful theory about a mechanism of inheritance. This idea only emerged once Europeans began to colonize the western side of the Atlantic.

II

The Americas presented Europeans with many new opportunities, including intellectual challenges that began to narrow the field of options that described different human populations. From the European perspective, America was a new world, and therefore a problem for their theories about the globe – and the cosmos. That the Americas were not described in either classical or biblical texts was a considerable conundrum. There was no easy way to determine who the peoples of this new world were and where they had originated. Discussions of this problem referred to inquiry into the different lineages of humanity (including debate over Noah's progeny), thus initiating concern in the earliest descriptions of the Americas over bloodlines as distinguishing features of human groups. The theory of monogenesis prevented open speculation that Amerindians were descended from a distinct branch of humanity (or were subhuman), but many other ideas were marshaled to emphasize their cultural and physical alienness.[11]

One idea that Europeans, especially the Spanish, debated was that Amerindians were natural slaves, an inferior category of humanity that Aristotle had postulated as lying outside civil society. Natural slaves had deficient intellectual and moral capacities that required true citizens to rule them by force. In the end, the crown and religious officials declared that Amerindians were not natural slaves but instead fully human and capable of civil and ethical improvement. In the meantime, however, the Spanish and Portuguese tendency to enslave Africans revealed an acceptance, albeit a tacit one, that this population was suited to a form of natural slavery. This assumption built upon processes already in place in the 'old' world, but the scale was different and the arguments for enslavement began to take on permanent and tragic dimensions.[12]

One reason for this acceleration of enslavement was disease. As with the Black Death in Europe earlier, the populations of the Americas (native or recently introduced) suffered differential survival rates in the face of epidemics. Native Americans had particularly high rates of sickness and mortality after their populations, which had no immediate resistance to Old World contagious diseases, came into contact with Europeans. Europeans themselves did not thrive in tropical climates, something they had already noted in Africa. Placing all these Atlantic experiences together, Iberians, then other colonizing Europeans, concluded that Amerindians were strikingly weak and Africans correspondingly tough, with Europeans located at some mid-point between these two extremes; they were more vigorous than Amerindians, yet not so insensibly durable as Africans. Such observations helped support assessments that Amerindians were inadequate as a source for large-scale labor and had little claim to American land, while Africans made ideal and transportable slaves.

These were not idle statements. Development of plantation agriculture in the Americas was the motor that ran the Atlantic slave trade. Here, the Atlantic environment meant everything to the subsequent determination of socio-economic roles, and showed a propensity on the part of Europeans to declare that such roles were grounded in nature itself. Based on these Iberian formulations, a first shift, in which the range of ways to describe others began to narrow, is apparent by the sixteenth century.[13]

III

As they turned their attention to the Americas, the English tended to argue (early and often) that unequal status in their colonies was based on natural differences. The very first English attempt to set up a colony, a 1570s fortified mining camp in the Arctic, elicited speculation about bodily differences that survived removal to new climates, a fundamental challenge to doctines of human difference as accidental. To make this point, George Best in his *True Discourse of the Three Voyages of Discoverie [of Martin Frobisher]* (1578) referred to sub-Saharan Africans' dark skin, hypothesizing that it resulted from an 'infection' carried through the bloodline. Though the colonizing venture in which Best participated failed, his speculations cast a long shadow over subsequent British actions in the Americas.[14]

English colonial policies tended to lack the metropolitan oversight that characterized Spanish colonization. This decentralized pattern gave English colonizers a much freer hand in determining how they would treat aliens. Their actions revealed an early propensity to seek labor and use it by any means possible. Unlike the Spanish, the English did enslave Amerindians freely, kidnapping them from the coast of North America as early as the mid-1500s. A brisk trade in Amerindian slaves continued, especially in regions that had the worst Anglo-Indian warfare, as in the seventeenth century Pequot and King Philip's wars in New England, the roughly contemporary Anglo-Powhatan wars and Bacon's rebellion in Virginia, and the Yamassee and Tuscarora wars in early eighteenth-century South Carolina. In parallel, English attitudes toward Africans reveal an 'unthinking imitation' of Iberian enslavement of Africans, a little-questioned tendency to lean toward enslaved African labor whenever settlers could afford it. Fundamental to this pattern was the belief that Africans were durable and capable of hard work in daunting climates, especially for sugar cultivation in tropical places. As one discussion of New World

settlement concluded, the heavy work of American colonization was best done by 'Negroes', who were 'a people strong and able'. During the eighteenth century, the assertion that West Africans were uniquely adapted to tropical and subtropical environments played an active role in their exploitation in plantation agriculture.[15]

But during the seventeenth century, these options were still indeterminate and not yet equivalent to the rigid systems of slavery and racial status that were to come. While captive Amerindians and Africans were notable as subordinate groups, they were mixed into large populations of white indentured servants and into smaller populations of whites who were condemned to slavery for long periods (in rare cases, for life). Exploitation and inferior status were not yet racial but spread over several groups; this variegated socio-economic reality paralleled the variety of ideas about human difference that had existed in pre-Columbian Europe and then crossed the Atlantic.[16]

Uncertainty over the contradictory meanings of these options marked English literature on the Atlantic world during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In fact, two kinds of texts proliferated: one that discussed the body and climate, and another that considered the low status of non-European peoples as possibly unjust. The former literature continued to stress the accidental and reversible nature of bodily difference; this was true of natural histories of the New World, of medical literature on the colonies, and of discussions of the growth of English populations in the western Atlantic.[17] Within these writings, however, some authors embedded assertions as to the enduring differences between human bodies. Commentary on epidemics among Amerindians, and assumptions that Africans (and the English) displayed contrasting bodily strengths, steadily increased confidence that lineage was destiny. Thus Virginia's governor, Samuel Argall, wrote in 1617 of 'a great mortality among us, [though] far greater among the Indians.' Population studies were especially telling measures of English confidence, and demographic surveys of the colonies were distinctively English ways of charting their increase and Amerindians' demise, providing a running account of whose bodies thrived in the New World, and who therefore could call upon nature itself as vindication for their cultural prowess. As one account of the 1637 Pequot War in New England emphasized, the English had God-given 'facultie' 'to beget and bring forth more children than any other nation of the world.'[18]

Another and in some ways a competing group of texts lamented that some populations of the new Atlantic world suffered at the

hands of others. The first examples were directed at European mistreatment of Amerindians. The English adopted this genre, originally meant by the Spanish to prevent enslavement of and warfare on Amerindians, and used it to criticize fellow English people who (unlike the Spanish) continued these practices. One of the most enduring forms of this literature revolved around the Inkle and Yarico story, about an Englishman (Thomas Inkle) who betrays and sells into slavery his Indian lover, Yarico, and their unborn child. These writings did not necessarily dissent from the opinions in the literature that assessed bodies and climates, so in fact their criticisms of exploitation were not yet racialized. Instead, they functioned as generalized doubt over the place of slavery and violence in the Atlantic world or in empires more generally.[19]

The early period of English colonization also saw the final piece of intellectual work that needed to be done before a modern idea of race could be articulated, that is, describing a mechanism of inheritance. In the mid-1600s, natural philosopher William Harvey first indicated the material processes of reproduction that we now accept. Harvey postulated that animals (including humans) reproduced because their females produced eggs, a primordial generative material. He never saw these eggs, but improvement of microscopes toward the end of the seventeenth century confirmed the existence of male gametes and supplied evidence of tangible reproductive material for those who wished to emphasize lineage over other causes of human characteristics. The context for this new inquiry was probably not exclusively colonial; anxiety over paternity was a marked feature of English society in the second half of the seventeenth century. Likewise, these trends were at first evident only among a learned minority of Europeans because Harvey published his findings in Latin. But their rudiments and implications thereafter spread and were well developed by the eighteenth century, the era when ideas about race seemed to take on modern, permanent form. The popularized doctrine of preformation, for instance, which argued that a small, preformed human existed either in egg or sperm, revealed a conviction that human types were fully formed before birth, rather than shaped by climate and custom afterward.[20]

IV

Concern to consider human bodies as natural entities, whose characteristics could be described according to a systematic science, proceeded apace during the eighteenth century. At this point, polygenesis, the idea that different groups of humans might have been created in different times and places, was publicly discussed in a way that would have been heretical earlier. Philosophers such as Henry Home, Lord Kames, and Voltaire were among those who wrote about polygenesis; in contrast, naturalists were less likely to accept the doctrine. They instead contributed to the construction of taxonomies that placed humans in relation to the rest of the physical creation, as if their fundamental qualities were no different from those of animals. Swedish botanist Linnaeus (Carl von Linné) was the first (in the 1730s and 1740s) to present humans as part of the animal world, as a species of mammalian bodies with physical characteristics that indicated their place within nature. Linnaeus's taxonomy was followed by that of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who was first (in 1759) to use the term 'Caucasian' to indicate a lineage supposedly unique to central and western Europe, and alleged to be aesthetically superior to those of Africa, Asia, America, and other places.[21]

These developments must be placed within the socio-economic context of the greater Atlantic world, which mattered extraordinarily to the implications of theories about human superiority and inferiority. The eighteenth century was, above all, the heyday of the Atlantic slave trade. Burgeoning markets for sugar and other tropical and semi-tropical commodities encouraged investment in their production, including investment in slaves and elaboration of rationales for their debasement. In parallel, the different European powers expanded claims to American territories, accelerating dispossession of Native American populations and inflating rhetoric that justified this land grab. At this point, English arguments for the bodily fitness of Africans to labor in hot climates, and complementary assertions that Amerindians were unlikely to survive in and utilize American lands, took on the qualities of conclusions; conviction that Africans and Amerindians must passively inherit these fates justified imperial ambitions.[22]

Such prejudices deeply informed the political constitution of colonial societies. Laws regulating slaves and prohibiting Amerindians and free blacks from equal access to legal and political action became standard in colonial societies, with no intervention from metropolitan authorities. In fact, settlers' insistence that race dictated political identity crossed the Atlantic eastward, making English law itself complicitous with colonial policy.[23] Belief that

some humans had bodies and belonged to lineages that gave them subordinate social roles was clearly shaping the worlds that bordered the Atlantic Ocean during the eighteenth century – long before Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and popular conceptions of the 'survival of the fittest'. While racism may have been most visible and virulent in regions heavily invested in slavery or engaged in warfare against Amerindians, racial attitudes and racially defined captives were present throughout the English-speaking world, from Grenada to Glasgow.[24]

At some points, however, whites in British America played a tellingly creative role in defining bodily differences as heritable. This was particularly true for residents of regions with economies dependent on plantation agriculture and slavery. Edward Long, in *History of Jamaica* (1774), his account of his native island, paid elaborate attention to questions of blood and lineage. He provided charts for lines of descent from white and black ancestors and praised 'the genuine English breed, untainted with these heterogeneous mixtures.' Long lamented colonists' use of 'Negro' wet-nurses, whose 'blood may be corrupted' with venereal diseases; he hoped that, in contrast to what he perceived as the amalgamated nature of residents of Spanish America, English settlers would raise 'in honourable wedlock a race of unadulterated beings.'[25] Physician William Wells, who was a native of South Carolina, was first to theorize in writing that skin color was inherited rather than the result of climate – a fundamental challenge to continuing belief that sub-Saharan Africans gained their dark complexion from a burning sun. Wells hypothesized, in a paper presented to the Royal Society in London in 1813 (and published five years later), that African skin color was due to a physical adaptation to disease that was then passed down through the generations – a remarkable restatement of George Best's suppositions two and a half centuries earlier. These manifestly racist opinions contrast with New Englander Samuel Stanhope Smith's emphasis, in his *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787), on monogenesis and on the power of climate and custom to mark superficially the human body. Smith concluded that efforts to classify human races according to physical characteristics were 'a useless labor', so similar were humans to each other.[26]

Smith's lack of racism notwithstanding, body and lineage had come to have overwhelming significance for assignment of rank and role in the English plantations. In the end, it may have mattered little

that the English lacked a full-blown racial ideology such as would flourish in the nineteenth century. Inconsistency and contradiction about the body and lineage cost the English nothing; formation of an even partial and incoherent idea of race may have cost a great many Amerindians and Africans everything.

V

The power and function of these arguments about the different populations in the Atlantic world reveal possible differences from other regions that the English colonized. The English never used arguments about disease and population to justify colonization of Ireland, for instance, never stigmatizing the Irish on bodily grounds in as extreme a fashion as they did Amerindians and Africans. In fact, the English perceived Ireland (and Scotland) as overpopulated, to the point that one late seventeenth-century pioneer of political economy, William Petty, proposed that parts of Ireland and Scotland have their populations removed in order to facilitate cattle ranching. This was imperialism, but not one with the same racialized discourse on population, land, and labor that dominated the worlds across the Atlantic.[27]

India presented yet another set of imperial possibilities. Certainly, British colonizers asserted that the peoples of the subcontinent, like those of Asia proper, had languages, religions, customs, and appearance alien to Europe. Further, assertions of a racial difference would eventually mark nearly all British attitudes toward India. But theorizing about India's differences also took a less naturalized route, beginning at least as early as Sir William Jones's examination of Sanskrit. Jones's early 1800s taxonomy of languages postulated ancient connections between India and Europe and suggested a common 'Aryan' ancestry for their languages. This created a genealogy that ignored the human body and physical lineage in favor of cultural factors, and above all it was a genealogy that linked rather than separated Europe and Asia. (It also presents a painful irony in the history of race, given that National Socialism under Hitler would reidentify Aryan as a racial rather than a linguistic category.) That this was a non-racial description of India shows how naturalized descriptions clung more tightly to the Atlantic than to other parts of the British empire; English examination of Native American and African languages was never so painstaking and never reached a comparable conclusion.[28]

If non-Atlantic portions of the British empire emphasize the distinctiveness of colonization in the New World, it is also possible to trace some similarities having to do with race throughout the colonized portions of the Americas. It has long been thought that sexual activity across the 'races' was more characteristic of Iberian and French colonies than of English ones. But the 'lack' of mestizos in Anglo-America now seems suspect. Such people indeed existed, but it has taken determined reinterrogation of the historical record to discover them. Their existence shows that, in British America, mixed-race people were not absent – official recognition of them was. Whereas the state in Spanish America and in New France was alert to the sexual behaviors of Christians, and to the engendering of people of part-Christian parentage, political and religious officials in the anglophone colonies took no such interest. Such behaviors were private, albeit illegitimate, and the children who resulted were likewise regarded as illegitimate and beneath public notice. As with so much of British colonization, the state stood aside and gave local authorities in the colonies vast leeway to dictate social and legal realities and in essence to regard mestizos as invisible. These new discoveries indicate that, however much English-speaking people insisted that Africans and Amerindians had bodies different from their own, this was not a significant curb on either sexual predation or on willingness to make permanent relationships with members of other 'races' despite social disapprobation. A complicated dynamic was therefore in place throughout the Americas, a wish to distinguish between Europeans and others that was both reinforced and undercut by desire to connect their bodies in the most intimate way.[29]

VI

One final question will help tease out the implications of race for Atlantic history: who wasn't racist? That is, who lived along the shores of the Atlantic and confronted the fully modern definition of race – as heritable difference that was hierarchically meaningful – and declared it invalid, intellectually or morally? If race is Atlantic, is anti-racism the product of the same historical context?

A good guess is that those who were the objects of racism were suspicious of its intellectual foundations. We know little, however, about Amerindian and African beliefs that might have resembled European notions of race or that contradicted them. Certainly, West African forms of slavery were rarely heritable or lineal – in strong

contrast to European practice. Some Amerindian cultures focused on body and lineage, even emphasizing separate creations of 'red' and 'white' peoples, but it is not clear whether these views preceded extensive contact with Europeans and the experience of war and enslavement at their hands.[30]

Historians have more systematically traced a questioning of racism among populations of European descent. Some Europeans and some white Creoles in North America fiercely contemplated the inequities on the western side of the Atlantic. This was most famously present in the emerging anti-slavery movement, first to abolish the Atlantic slave trade, then to do away with the institution of chattel slavery altogether. It is true, of course, that many critics of slavery were racist; some abolitionists preferred that freed blacks be removed to Africa, lest their perceived physical and cultural inferiority taint metropolitan populations or Creole peoples in America. But sentiments critical of European colonization were also present in a broader rethinking of empires and of political systems during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and some advocates of radical reform did question ideas of race and stressed that liberty belonged to all humans who might seek it. William Gordon thus baited his anti-revolutionary opponents with the statement that 'a black, tawny or reddish skin is not so unfavorable an hue to the genuine son of liberty, as a tory complection.'[31]

Many of the objections to slavery had a religious basis. Such arguments followed the old Christian logic of monogenesis: all humans descended from one lineage, were of one blood, and must be allowed to find their way to the true God, a process that slavery (with its violent impositions on body and mind) might impede. Missionaries in the Americas had long been insisting on these precepts; the first doubts about Amerindian dispossession and African enslavement continued and critics began to argue against assertions, like polygenesis or scientific taxonomies, that humans belonged to distinct lineages with distinct fates.[32]

This does not mean, however, that critics of racism were critics of science in its efforts to describe the material world. Nor do I mean that religion and science necessarily teased out substantially different attitudes toward humanity. Some well-known naturalists belonged to radical Protestant sects; they were certainly not anti-scientific, but took instead a different approach to nature, regarding empirical inquiry into it as a form of devotion to God, the omnipotent creator. It is therefore possible that those who insisted on a 'one

blood' vision of humans were critical of versions of science that argued otherwise, but did not reject science out of hand. Conversely, descriptions of human inequality, and justifications of New World chattel slavery, continued to rely on scriptural exegeses, particularly emphasis on Noachic lineages. And there are certainly secular philosophical roots for anti-slavery, particularly political and legal theo rization about the rights of man that emphasized all of humanity's intrinsic right to be free.[33]

The politics of the era stimulated this questioning of hierarchies, including those built at least in part on race. The American and French revolutions, and the wars of independence in the Caribbean and Latin America, all tested the logic of the rights of man. These tests were trans-Atlantic, as historians have long argued; the revolutions reverberated on either side of the ocean and fundamentally challenged western conceptions of order, authority, and power. They were deeply implicated in concerns over race as well, and this is an Atlantic dimension that has been less celebrated because it raises such serious questions about the power of racism to curb radical social change and to survive – and thrive – into our day.

In some ways, American patriots in what would become the United States sought to loosen racial categorization in order to connect arguments for political independence from Britain to discourse on a hypothetical 'American' physical environment and concomitant bodily type. This argument for a naturalized national character appropriated Amerindian identities while never seriously considering Amerindians as potential fellow citizens. Brief public recognition of mestizo peoples, and valorization of those mestizos who supported the revolution, were white patriots' opportunistic identification with some people of native descent.[34] But the revolution's only provisional promises to African Americans and its exclusion of Native Americans from statements of universal equality among citizens demonstrate how the history of race in the modern Atlantic laid a heavy hand on the history of the west. Additionally, the anti-slavery revolt in the French colony of St Domingue, and the consequent revolutionary creation of the republic of Haiti, revealed the joining together of revolutionary politics and anti-racist claims among people of color. Yet most whites in America and Britain rejected this second American revolution and second Atlantic republic. Anti-racism made sense to those who had suffered from racism but looked like an invitation to disorder even to whites who held otherwise radical opinions.[35]

The best case in point in this regard is perhaps Thomas Jefferson – ardent friend of liberty yet apologist for racial slavery. That his thinking was fully racialized helps explain why he could maintain both positions: liberty and slavery were, as far as he was concerned, based on natural characteristics of different humans. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Jefferson stated straightforwardly that 'the difference [between whites and blacks] is fixed in nature.' He meant that skin color, race's most immediate marker, was a natural fact, yet 'there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race', including that Africans had less facial hair, secreted more via skin pores than by the kidneys, had differences in their 'pulmonary apparatus', and 'require less sleep', a restatement of the long-standing opinion that blacks were indefatigable workers. Jefferson's racism in regard to Amerindians was more subtle, relying as it did on the idea, again a long-standing one, that their population was doomed to decline, even to the point of extinction: stresses to their populations had made it impossible that sexual 'generation' would make up for their losses. Jefferson's racism was not atypical, and its consequences are still evident in American culture today.[36]

These battles over racism, and their continued resonance within our own politics, should encourage us to consider carefully race's contested meanings in the past and its legacy for our time. We do not yet have a post-racial comprehension of humanity, and continuing debates over race show its deep roots in Atlantic history. The nations of the Americas and of Europe by and large show unwillingness to regard people whose ancestry is not dominantly European as full and equal citizens. And that the Americas, the portion of the modern world that contained most of the first modern revolutions, remain deeply racist is perhaps the ultimate paradox of the modern Atlantic world.

This is a problem even for historians who study that Atlantic world. Some scholarship has recently emerged that describes the early republic of the United States as a 'post-colonial' society. Such an identification deeply misrepresents the racial politics of the past and the present. Post-colonial is a term, originally applied to India after independence, that indicates how colonial populations and regimes have passed away. While the imperial regime of Britain passed away in part of North America after 1776, the colonizing population did not; it, and its descendants, continue to colonize the United States and Canada, to monopolize and control North America's resources and polities. Understanding this is to understand

how theories of race managed to make Native American populations in the United States invisible and to make the subordination of African-American peoples on both sides of the Atlantic seem to be a natural state of affairs. Neither Britain nor the United States (nor Canada) is a post-colonial nation – sadly, we are still too much a product of the Atlantic history of race for this to be a reality.

Chapter 8: Race

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