Noah Edward Hall

African History, Tuesday 4-7pm

Final Paper

History of Hostility: Traces of Truth

# Intro

Historian John Hope Franklin says that the violent manifestations of hostility towards Africans in the American north and south are not new; persisting almost from the beginning of the African presence in the new world. The corollaries of this proposition impact not only Africans in America, but the entire political, social, and economic reality of all contemporary life on the planet. Africans are one of the most populist humans on the planet, and what affects the body will eventually affect the arms, the legs, the neck, and the head.

# Pre-1492

While historian John Hope Franklin may believe that the hostilities towards Africans were ‘almost not new’, Ivan van Sertima proves they were *definitely not new* and existed long before Columbus sailed west. Empirical evidence exists that would support the thesis of Africans arriving in America long before the infamous 1492 voyage, but the hostility towards Africans manifests itself in the treatment of archeological artifacts, archeologists, and histories who seek to shed light on the adventurous Africans who came to the Americas.

This hostility can be seen via the ‘Systematic and deliberate destruction of documents in America, as stated in Ivan Van Sertima’s book. Bishop de Landa in the Yucatan, speaking to his compadres about the American documents, ‘Burn them all. They are the works of the devil’. Not only was this hostility entrenched in the psychology of the Columbian –era invaders, but even in Ivan Van Sertima’s timeframe one can see the hatred alive and well, with the likes of Bernard Ortiz De Montellano, a professor of anthropology at Wayne State University, authoring a pamphlet that was later circulated privately I many schools to spread false rumors about Ivan Van Sertima in attempts to discredit him.

Huge stone African heads, art forms, words, sowing patterns, pyramids, colors, and culture can be seen throughout the Americas. But the hostility towards Africans extend far beyond the physical, extending into the psychological, cultural, and academic spheres causing the institutions to discredit, ignore, and falsify the African contribution to the Americas and American people.

# Middle Passage & the Triangular Trade

The horrors of the Middle Passage, like those of the sub-saharan slave-trade, were terrific in its brutality, dehumanization and torment of the people who lived in balance with the earth and unable to wholefully defend themselves from the invaders. Olaudah Equiano describes his unfortunate ordeal traversing the middle passage and embarking on that fateful day across the sea to the Americas; slave, captive, prisoner to men who would continue this hostility against his people.

Equiano, in vivid detail, describes the prison-ship that carried him cross the waters to the wet as having a ‘multitude of black people of every description chained together’. Human beings chained, gagged, beaten, robbed of humanity and forced into the hulls an decks without proper food, clothing, or sanitation. Those that ‘refused to eat… tied up and flogged’. He continues the story with much angst, despair, and pain at the situation he witnessed, claiming to ‘never before in his life seen such brutality’. After Olaudah Equiano arrived in his new land, he was sold like the others, even ‘families were sold to different people’ and would never see each other again.

Olaudah Equiano’s experience in America was not the outlier, but the standard. Eric Williams, in Capitalism and Slavery, describes in great length the arduos task of survival Africans in America faced from their Caucasian-brothers. A question to be asked, is why? Well, according to Adam Smith, the ‘discovery of America and te Cape Route to India are the two greatest and most important events record in the history of mankind’. Thus Eric Williams book begins to make sense: in order for our caucasion-brothers to succeed, they required black prisoners to ‘raise the mercantile system to a splendor and glory’.

William Wood said that ‘the slave trade was the spring and parent whence the others flow’; Postlethwayt described the slave trade as ‘the first principle and foundation of all the rest, the mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion’; Eric Williams claims there would be no America, without the African prisoner, and all of this hostility manifested through the greed & economics of the British empire.

The Triangular trade, despite its name, is very circular: Negroes were purchased with British manufactures, transported to the plantations where they produced sugar, cotton, indigo, molasses and other tropical products, and the processing of these products created new industries in England, while the maintenance of the negroes and their owners on the plantations provided another market for british industry (Williams).

This circle of death, trade, and barbarianism would instill, ingrain, and inflict the brains, culture, and psychology of not only the Africans, but in the American Natives, Islanders, and Caucasion-race. The West Indian Islands would become the ‘hub of the british Empire’, according to Williams, of ‘immense importance to the grandeur and prosperity of England’. This would continue the hostility, and increase the pressure to secure more prisoners, cause more war, and kill more people.

To bring this hostility into perspective, Sir Josiah Child estimated that ‘every Englishman in the West Indies, with the ten Blacks that work with him, accounting for what they eat, use and wear, would make employment for four men in England’. Moreover, according to Davenant, Britain’s total trade at the end of the seventeenth century brought in a profit of 2 million pounds, of which the plantation itself accounted for 600 thousand!

Indeed, the imprisonment of Africans, while hostile to Coloreds, was sordidly beneficial to Caucasions: the goods in the triangular trade included wool, cotton manufacture, sugar, refining, rum distillation, pacotille and the metalulurgical industries like fetters, chains and padlocks.

The trade caused Abbe Guillaume Thomas De Raynal to say that the ‘islands were the principal cause of the rapid movement which stirs the universe’. The treatment of Africans as objects and things of history, instead of people is widespread through all of the contemporary thinking of the time. This insidious thinking can be seen through the story of James Stephen, who landed in Barbados and quickly learned of the unlawful trial of four African prisoners.

The four plantation prisoners were charged with the murder of a white doctor, even though everyone ‘strongly doubted’ the guilt of the prisoners and ‘thought the real murderer was a white man’ and that the ‘trial was a cover up’. All four would die, a painful slow death. This treatment of Africans was widespread, and touched every single corner of the American continent & Islands. For Adam Hochschild wrote that discipline was ‘draconian, for a Barbados African prisoner, running away for thirty days or more meant death’. There was neither kindness nor forgiveness; only reprisal and punishment for the African while the Caucasion was given chance to repent for their sins. For instance, an owner who killed a slave was subject ‘only to a 15 pound fine’ according to Hochschild. This freedom to kill gave way to the insanity of the caucasion-mind, who recorded the deaths of the African children on the ‘same list with those of cattle, hogs, and horses’, and included death by ‘ulcers, suddenly, a flux, shot by accident, fever, plague, debilitated, convulsed, and leprosy’. All of the circumstances facing the African, according to Hotchschild, in addition to the ‘extraordinarily low birth rate’, the caucasion was forced to further their hostility toward Africans and the African continent through their ‘dependence on the constant flow of new’ African men, women, and children.

All of this hostility towards African, forced the African into a war-like culture, and can be seen in the Foot of Vesuvius, wherein Count Mirabeau once said that the ‘whites of St. Domingue slept at the foot of Vesuvius because the colony was always under the threat of revolts’. The humble African, rising the great strengths to secure a future for his people, forced to pick up arms in righteous-defense against the Caucasian. A black man named Toussaint, and later called L’Ovuverture (the Opening) would ‘rise to lead the revolt in St. Domingue, which had the largest African population in the Caribbean’.

# Colonial American Slavery

Pauling Giddings states in the Casting of the Die, that while whites could be held in servitude for a stipulated period of time, ‘blacks would be held as slaves forever, and their children born into slavery’. O wretched Earth, who would allow such pain to engulf the African for so long? Who would allow African women to be described as ‘possessing a lascivious temper who had an inclination for white men’, would allow the African women to be ‘impaled on the cutting edges of this race/sex dialectic’, who would allow Isabell Williams to give birth to the ‘first black child born in America’ (although Van Sertima proves this untrue)?

As Caucasians increase their stranglehold on the American continent, beginning gto enact laws to keep ‘blacks as slaves forever’. For example, in 1629 Virginia administrators designated ‘tithable persons’ as ‘all those that work in the ground’, and then extended the law in 1643 to include ‘all adult men and black women’. In another law, children ‘born of black women, no matter who the father was, would inherit her status’; shame on those who would allow such inhumanity. The politicians and academics continued, and by the late 17th Century, in 1691, antoher piece of legislation ‘stipulated that if a white, whether bond or free, intermarried with a negro, mulatto, or indian, bond or free, the couple would be banished from the colony forever’. Indeed, Hostility in the form of ‘physical abuse, dismemberment, and torture were common to American Slavery’.

# Reconstruction & Post-Reconstruction

The hostility extended into reconstruction, with the former African Slaves being stereotyped as ‘ignorant of public business and unfit to govern themselvds and did not know the letters of the alphabet’ writes W.E.B. Dubois. Indeed, being African was seen as being ‘lazy, dishonest, and extravagant’ and indicative of ‘bad government’. Before, during and after the slave-wars, and just as during and after reconstruction, the ‘attitude of most writers cannot conceive negroes as men in their minds the word negro connotes inferiority and stupidity’.

As Mary Meclean Bethune states in the opening to the struggle for Education: ‘The drums of Africa still beat in my heart. They will not let me rest while there is a single negro boy or girl without a chance to prove his worth’. John Hope Franklin continues in Losing the Peace, that ‘Reconstruction did not end abruptly’, but was slowly removed as restraints were ‘relaxed and stringent legislation repealed’. The hostility towards Africans was beaten for a moment, but not killed. It lived on in the psychology of the Caucasian, and would later manifest itself mightily against the African.

# 1900s

The Slave-Wars live on through racism, and the institutions that were borne out of the economics of Slavery. Indeed, Derrick Bell states that ‘Racism in America is much moer complex than either the conscious conspiracy of a power elite or the simple delusion of a few ignorant bigots’. What can be done to allieviate the pressures from Black America when Blacks in American communities have a ‘long involuntary status as secondary members of society’. The hostility that once manifested itself through chains, guns and death, has entered a new level of sophistication through mediums of oppression, miseducation, and politics.

There is no African History without the great story of King Mosiah. Mr. Garvey poetically stated ‘a real man dies but once; a coward dies a thousand times before is real death’. The hostility towards Africans, at a time forced the African to cower, but the pressure eventually made a Diamond of a man born Marcus Mosiah Garvey. Mr. gravy created the ‘Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World’. In ‘Race First’, Tony Martin says the declaration listed the main grievances of the race and demanded their resolution, which included: ‘inherent right to possess himself o Africa, capitalization of the “N” in Negro, the teaching fo black history in schools, and for an end to lynching and sundry other discriminations’. Marcus Garvey was definitely the innovator and lead thinker/academic of his time, and was hated fiercely by those playing both sides of the field. Garvey would ‘die in London in June 1940, active to the end in his efforts to emancipate a race’.

# New things you learned

In this African-American history class I learned a lot about the history of Americans. I learned about reconstruction and post-construction, about the triangular trade and the british empire. I also learned about the stone heads found in the Americas with African features. In mid-term book report I read a book about the effects of the American Revolution on the global economy and trade, and how the revolution helped put an end to the slave-wars for economic purposes.

# Things you learned about the current status quo

I learned that there is a sector of society that will refute historical and archeological fact to support their theories and beliefs. I learned that much racism stems from the academic circles that writes the books and teaches the classes, that creates the laws and implements legislation that run the businesses and institutes the churches. I learned in the African History class that African History has many facets and dimensions, and that not everyone interprets African History in the same way.

# Things you learned about the conditions affecting Africans

I learned that the conditions affecting Africans are not new, but stem from a long history of hostility towards the African people, the African continent, and the African culture. Indeed, the last one-hundred years are a but a breath in the timeframe that encapsulates African History, and to truly understand contemporary conditions you must search far back in time, before reconstruction, before America, before Columbus, before the Arabs, into the depths of history to have a holistic view of what it means to be African in today’s world.